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Factors Associated with School Counselors' Use of a Family Systems Perspective

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Factors Associated With School Counselors' Use of a Family Systems Perspective

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Counselor Education

by

Dottie Marie Martin

B.S., Our Lady of Holy Cross College, 2005
M.A., Our Lady of Holy Cross College, 2007

May 2013

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my heart and soul, my children. Without your love, encouragement, support and understanding I would not have accomplish all that I have. My days have been better and brighter watching you three grow into amazing individuals. Through you, I have learned to be a better counselor, friend, person and mom.

To my handsome son, Beau Louis, you have taught me unconditional love, pride, patience and admiration. To my amazing daughter Ally, your uniqueness, strength, generosity and ability to make me laugh everyday has carried me through this process. To my baby girl, Caity, your perseverance, love, never ending energy and willingness to always help has taught me to be strong and push forward. You three have inspired me everyday to be better, achieve more and never give up. I will always love you with all that I have and all that I am.

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ABSTRACT

Six hundred fifty-seven (657) members of the American School Counseling Association responded to the researcher-developed survey, the *School Counselors Perceptions of Family Systems Perspectives Questionnaire* (SCP-FSPQ). The instrument assessed school counselors' perceptions of preparedness, competency, importance and frequency of use of family systems perspectives when working with youth in the school setting. The purposes of this quantitative study were to understand school counselors' perceptions of their educational preparation in family systems perspectives; whether school counselors are using family systems strategies and, if so, how often; and how important school counselors believe those strategies are when implemented. This study also explores the barriers school counselors may face when working with a family systems perspective. Items from the SCP-FSPQ were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, *t*-test, Pearson correlation and principal component analysis. When exploring the relationships between school counselors' type of degree, methods of learning, frequency of usage, beliefs about preparedness, competence and importance of family systems perspective, significant relationships were identified among all the variables. The results of this study supported the need for required family systems education that prepares school counselors to work with students and their families in the school setting. Findings resulted in training and education recommendations for school counselors, counselor educators, counselor education programs and the school counseling accreditation bodies.

Key words: family systems, school counselor, preparedness, competency, importance, frequency

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the background of family systems in the schools is discussed. The problem is described in perspective and the purpose of the study is explained. Included in this chapter are the conceptual framework, an overview of the methodology, and the significance of the study. Also addressed in this chapter are limitations and delimitations of the study, assumptions of the study, and terminology.

Background

It is vital that school counselors understand that school children belong to a much larger social system that encompasses both the family and the school (Amatea & Sherrard, 1991; Bodenhorn, 2005; Caffery, Cook & Erdman, 2000; Davis, 2001; Fine & Carlson, 1992; Hinkle & Wells, 1995; Stone & Peeks, 1986; Terry, 2002). Caffery et al. (2002) reported that the relationship between the school system, the student, and the student's family could be considered just as important as the child's academic and behavioral adjustment. Bronfenbrenner (1997) stated that interconnections among the various systems (school, family, and community) that influence a child's development are as decisive for a child's growth as the actual interaction the child has within each system. The capacity of these systems to function effectively as a framework for the development of the child depends on the existence and nature of the relationship between them. School counselors are ideally positioned within the school to act as change agents and collaborative leaders to create relationships with families to benefit the children (Stinchfield & Zyromski, 2010). Coordination of family and school systems is an integral part of the role of school counselors and is a function that is necessary for the school Counselor to be effective in negotiating the interests of the child, family, and the school (Christenson, 2004).

According to Keys and Lockart (1999), many of the problems presented by children in the school today are much too complex and multidimensional to be solved by interventions that target the individual child. Problems that the child experiences at home can be reflected at school, and the origins of the child's difficulties are often rooted in the dynamic interactions of family members (Whiteside, 1993). Thus, school counselors often face the fundamental choice of whether to counsel students from an individual counseling perspective, or to involve the parents through a family system perspective (Stone & Peeks, 1986). Using a systems perspective, the school counselor can work with the family and the student to provide them the support they need to change behavior and increase academic success in the school setting (Lambi & Rokutani, 2002). Family counseling by school counselors can resolve many school problems before they escalate (Hinkle, 2001); thus, for school counselors, a family systems perspective is often a more effective treatment modality than individual therapy (Velsor, 2000; Whiteside, 1993). School counselors who use interventions based on a systems perspective can offer powerful solutions for helping parents promote effective ways of managing students successfully in the school and in the home (Nelson, 2006). In light of the concept that most children develop their beliefs about self and others as well as their typical patterns of behavior within their family system, some authors have asserted that the family's influence on its individual members cannot be underestimated (Edwards & Mullis, 2001). In addition, families who struggle with providing support for their children need the help, direction, and cooperation that a school counselor can provide (Bodenhorn, 2005). School counselors using a family systems perspective are better prepared to help the child and the family work through problematic situations and are able to offer interventions and solutions to manage problems in the home as well as the school (Nelson, 2006). Thus, it is vital that school counselors understand a family systems perspective and this

perspective should be included in the school counseling curriculum (Paylo, 2001).

The Problem in Perspective

As school counselors' roles transform from individual-based interventions to a comprehensive school counseling approach, school counselors adopt facilitator and coordinator roles for which they may not be completely prepared (Green & Keys, 2001; Hobbs & Collison, 1995; Stinchfield & Zyromski, 2010). Generally speaking, school counselors traditionally have been trained in individual models and they often lack the training in a family systems perspective that is necessary to provide a comprehensive school counseling program (Keys, 1997; Nicoll, 1992; Velsor, 2000; Woody & Woody, 1994). In addition, despite the increased attention in the literature supporting family counseling and interventions in the school setting, to date the literature does not offer direction for how to prepare graduate students in school counseling programs to use a family systems perspective (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Terry, 2002).

Only limited research exists on the topic of perceptions of competency, preparedness, and importance of school counselors' implementation of family therapy. Terry (2002) asserted that pursuit of empirical evidence for the impact of training as well as the impact of family counseling in the schools is essential. In June 2004, the American School Counseling Association recognized the need for family therapy in the schools and modified its code of ethics to incorporate the relevance of family work for the school counselor. Yet, the code reminds school counselors to "function within the boundaries of individual professional competence" (ASCA Code of Ethics, Section E.1.a., 2004). As cited in Bodenhorn (2005), collaboration with families, although necessary to best meet the needs of children, may create a dilemma of competence if the school counselor is not versed in family counseling and a systems perspective. Thus, to function in an ethical manner, school counselors working directly with families should

seek out additional training in family counseling if this training was not part of their educational background, or should work collaboratively with someone who has this background (Bodenhorn, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if family systems strategies are being used by school counselors, and if so, which factors contribute to how frequently a family systems perspective is used in the school setting. An additional purpose was to determine if school counselors' type of degree is related to their perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competence and perceived level of importance to employ a family systems perspective in the school setting. A third aim was to explore whether the methods of learning a family systems perspective is related to school counselors' perceptions of their preparedness and competency to use a family systems perspective. Finally, this study explored whether the frequency of usage of a family systems perspective is related to school counselors' perceptions of the importance of using a family systems perspective and what barriers, if any; school counselors believe prevent them from using family systems strategies.

Support exists in the literature for the contention that the family's influence on its individual members cannot be underestimated, and that most children develop their beliefs about self and others and their typical patterns of behavior within their family systems (Edwards & Mullis, 2001). Family counseling by school counselors can ameliorate the impact of many school problems before they escalate (Hinkle, 2001). Despite an increased attention to family counseling and interventions in schools, there has been limited discourse regarding how to train school counselors to use a family systems approach (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). In this study, data were collected to examine how frequently school counselors use a family systems perspective in

their work with youth in the school setting, as well as the methods by which they learned a family systems perspective. The intent was to determine whether a significant relationship exists between frequency of usage and methods of learning a family systems perspective, perceived levels of preparedness and perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective as well as the perceived level of importance they ascribe to a systems perspective. The intent was also to determine whether a significant relationship exists between school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and the building level in which they work. Finally, school counselors' perceptions of barriers to usage of a family systems perspective were identified.

Significance of the Study

Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2004) were among the first researchers to empirically study school counselors' perceptions of the importance of utilizing a family systems perspective when working with the child and the family in the school. The present study further explored the extent to which school counselors perceive family counseling to be important in the school setting, and also determined the extent to which school counselors feel prepared and competent to use a family systems perspective. Additionally, this study helped to fill a gap in the research literature by identifying the methods by which school counselors learn a family systems perspective, and what they perceive as the barriers that prevent them from using family systems approaches in the school setting. Findings supported a need for counselor educators to provide school counselor trainees with a basic foundation in a family systems perspective. It is hoped that findings from this study will encourage accreditation bodies (e.g., CACREP) to consider requiring family systems courses in school counseling curriculums.

Conceptual Framework

To develop a conceptual framework within which to understand the significance of adequate preparedness, competency, and importance of a family systems perspective of school counselors in training, it is essential to explore the following (1) family systems theory, (2) the *ASCA National Model* and (3) Council for Accreditation in Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) school counselor preparation standards. The aforementioned topics interrelate to conceptually frame the importance of this study.

Family Systems Theory

The primary concept of family systems theory is the notion that a system (the family) is made up of interconnected and interdependent parts (the individual) and that each part influences the other parts in a pattern of recurring transactional cycles (Cox & Van Belsor, 2000). The central premise of family systems theory is that family systems organize themselves to carry out the daily challenges and tasks of life, as well as adjust to the developmental needs of their members (Cearley, 1999). Gladding (2007) defined a system as “a set of elements standing in interaction. Each element in the system is affected by whatever happens to any other element. Thus, the system is only as strong as its weakest part. Likewise, the system is greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 455). Nichols and Schwartz (2001) stated that, according to family systems theory, “the essential properties of an organism, or living system, are properties of the whole, which none of the parts have. They arise from the relationship among the parts. These properties are destroyed when the system is reduced, either physically or theoretically, to isolate elements. The whole is always greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 60). Systems theory attempts to understand the human condition in an interrelated manner within a social context (Davis, 2001). Changing the family changes the life of each of its individual members (Nichols

& Swartz, 2001). Thus, family systems counselors believe that treating the individual in isolation addresses only one component of the system and can miss the overall extent of the problem (Keys & Lockhart, 1999). Family systems counselors focus on eliminating problem behavior (symptoms) by changing the structure of the family rather than by trying to change the problem behavior directly (Haley, 1987).

ASCA National Model

The role of the school counselor has been defined by ethical and professional standards established by (ASCA) and the *ASCA National Model* (2005).

ASCA (2009) defined the role of the professional school counselor as

Certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, personal/social and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success.

Professional school counselors are employed in elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools; in district supervisory positions; and in counselor education positions

(<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=240>).

[oolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=240](http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=240)).

The *ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (2012) addresses current education reform efforts and was written to reflect a comprehensive approach to program foundation, delivery, management, and accountability that school counseling teams could use to design, coordinate, implement, manage, and evaluate their programs for students' success. The model was designed to serve several purposes

First, to help move school counseling from a responsive service provided for some students to a program for every student while reinforcing the idea that school counselors help every student improve academic achievement, navigate personal and social development and plan for successful careers after graduation, second to provide uniformity to standardized school counseling programs across the country; although it provides the flexibility for school counselors to address the individual needs of the students it also provides a framework of components that all school counseling programs should exhibit, lastly to help re-establish school counseling as a crucial educational function that is integral to academic achievement and overall student success; in other words the objective of school counseling is to help students overcome barriers to learning (ASCA *National Model*, 2012 p. 5).

ASCA (2012) further clarifies that school counselors are to participate as members of the educational team and are to use the skills of leadership, advocacy, and collaboration to promote systemic change. The framework for the comprehensive school counseling program consists of four components and in an effort to clarify the scope of the *ASCA National Model* (2012), the four elements of the model, which are foundation, delivery, management and accountability, are summarized below.

Foundation

Professional school counselors identify a philosophy based on school counseling theory and research/evidence based practice that recognizes the need for all students to benefit from the school counseling program. The purpose of this component is to establish the focus of the comprehensive school counseling program based on the academic, career,

and personal/social needs of the students in the school. Elements of the foundation include program focus, student competencies, and professional competencies (p. 21).

Delivery

The delivery component focuses on the method of implementing the school counseling program to students. This component describes services and strategies school counselors provide to students and interactions they have with others as they work to promote student achievement, equity, and access for all students. The delivery components consist of direct and indirect services provided for students. Direct services are in-person interactions between school counselors and students. Through the direct services components of school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services, school counselors help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills identified from school counseling core curriculum. Indirect services are provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors' interactions with others. Through these services, school counselors provide leadership, advocacy, and collaboration, which enhance student achievement and promote systemic change related to equity and access (p. 83).

Management

To effectively deliver the school counseling curriculum and address the development needs of every student, the school counseling program must be effectively and efficiently managed. This component provides organizational assessments and tools designed to manage a school counseling program. The assessments and tools help school counselors develop, implement, and evaluate their school counseling program based on clearly defined priorities reflecting student needs (p. 41).

Accountability

Professional school counselors develop and implement data driven standards based on research to support programs. The purpose of this component is to analyze the data that have been collected and make program decisions based on analysis. The three activities in which school counselors engage are data analysis, program results, and evaluation and improvement (p. 99).

ASCA (2012) implies that schools are systems in the same way that a family is a system. When there is a change in an individual member of the family or part of the system there will be an effect or change in other parts of the family or system (ASCA, 2012; Keys & Lockhart, 1999). ASCA (2012) further states that “comprehensive school counseling programs are an important part of the school’s system, and through careful, data-driven implementation, an ASCA *National Model* program can have a positive impact on many other parts of the school’s system that lead to student achievement and overall success” (p. 8).

CACREP Standards for School Counselor Preparation

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP, 2009) standards are written to guarantee that students develop a professional counselor identity and master the knowledge and skills needed to practice successfully. Furthermore, graduates of CACREP-accredited programs are prepared in their field of study (e.g., mental health and human service agencies; educational institutions; private practice; and government, business, and industrial settings). CACREP (2009) states that “students who are preparing to work as school counselors will demonstrate the professional knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to promote the academic, career, and personal/social development of all K–12 students and programs must provide evidence that student learning has occurred in the following domains” (p.

40). The collaboration and consultation and leadership components of the CACREP standards are briefly discussed below in reference to family systems perspective in the school counselors' training standards. The CACREP school counseling standards are not listed in their entirety.

Collaboration and Consultation

Knowledge

School counselors (1) know the ways in which student development, well-being, and learning are enhanced by family-school-community collaboration; (2) understand strategies to provide effective teamwork within the school and community; (3) build effective working teams of school staff, parents, and community members; (4) understand systems theories and consultation in school settings; (5) know strategies and methods for working with parents, guardians, families, and communities; (6) implement peer programming interventions and coordination; and (7) know school and community collaboration models for crisis/disaster preparedness and response.

Skills and Practices

School counselors (1) work with parents, guardians, and families to act on behalf of their children to address problems that affect student success in school; (2) locate resources in the community that can be used in the school; (3) consult with teachers, staff, and community-based organizations; (4) use peer helping strategies; and (5) use referral procedures with helping agents in the community to secure assistance for students and their families.

Leadership

Knowledge

School counselors know (1) the qualities, principles, skills, and styles of effective leadership; (2) strategies of leadership; (3) how to design, implement, manage, and evaluate a

comprehensive school counseling program; (4) the role of the school counselor as a system change agent; and (5) the school counselor's role in student assistance programs, school leadership, curriculum, and advisory meetings.

Skills and Practices

School counselors (1) participate in the design, implementation, management, and evaluation of a comprehensive developmental school counseling program, and (2) plan and present school-counseling-related educational programs for use with parents and teachers (e.g., parent education programs, materials used in classroom guidance and advisor/advisee programs for teachers).

These three components – family systems theory, the ASCA *National Model*, and CACREP school counselor preparation standards - were used to conceptually frame this research study. Family systems theory provides the basis to understand the human condition in an interrelated manner within a social context with the contention that school children belong to many systems (e.g., family, school, community, cultural), all of which combine and interrelate to form a series of subsystems within one huge system (Davis, 2001). The ASCA *National Model* puts forth a comprehensive approach to providing academic, personal/social, and career development for students' success through a set of established ethical and professional standards. Lastly, CACREP standards conceptually frame professional counselor identity, knowledge, and skills needed to practice successfully as a school counselor (CACREP, 2009).

Method

The members of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) were the population of interest. Currently, ASCA membership is 29,000 individuals (S. Wicks, personal communication, January 15, 2013). The membership directory is available on the ASCA website

and can be accessed only by members of ASCA. A national random sample of 9,500 professional school counselors was obtained from the ASCA membership directory. The purposes of this quantitative study were to investigate school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective, the methods by which they learn a family systems perspective, and their perceptions of preparedness, competency and importance of providing a family systems perspective in the school setting. A qualitative method was chosen to gain an understanding of the barriers that school counselors believe prevent them from using a family systems perspective in the school setting.

No previous studies have examined whether the frequency of usage of a family systems perspective is related to school counselors' method of learning a family systems perspective, perceptions of preparedness, perceptions of competency, and importance of providing a family systems perspective in the school setting; therefore, no appropriate instrument existed. The *School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspectives Questionnaire* (SCP-FSPQ) was created by me specifically for this study with the purpose of determining if there is a relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective and : (a) their perceived level of preparedness to provide family systems perspective, (b) their perceived level of competency using family systems perspective, (c) their perceptions of the importance of employing family systems perspective, (d) frequency of use of a family systems perspective in the school setting, (e) methods of learning a family systems perspective, (f) whether or not school counselors believe a family system course should be a requirement and (g) perceived barriers, if any, which prevent school counselors from using a family systems perspective in the school setting.

An expert panel screened survey items for content validity, as well as for ease of understanding of the SCP-FSPQ. This expert panel consisted of ten counselor educators who have expertise in marriage and family therapy. All panelists were excluded as potential respondents to the proposed research. The expert panel screened actual survey items entered into Qualtrics™ software for ease of administration and were asked to identify unclear or ambiguous elements of the items (Heppner et al.). The style, formatting, and time allotment of the survey were taken into consideration as determined by panel recommendations. Each member of the expert panel offered valuable insight into the flow of the survey and recommended formatting changes to allow for easier administration. Based on the expert panelists' feedback, changes in wording were made to enhance clarity.

Research Questions

The study sought to understand the extent to which family systems strategies are being used by school counselors and which variables contribute to how frequently a family systems perspective is used in the school setting. School counselors' frequency of usage, level of preparedness, level of competence and level of importance were the dependent variables, whereas the independent variables were methods of learning a family systems perspective, type of degree program, and building level. The specific research questions were:

1. Are there significant group differences between school counselors' type of degree program and their frequency of usage of a family systems perspective?
2. Are there significant group differences between school counselors' type of degree program and their perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective?

3. Is there a significant relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective (MFT course, internship experiences, post-degree supervision received from systems-oriented supervisor, workshop/seminar, research/reading, consultation) and their perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective?
4. Are there significant group differences between school counselors' type of degree program and their perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective?
5. Is there a significant relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective (MFT course, internship experiences, post-degree supervision received from systems-oriented supervisor, workshop/seminar, research/reading, consultation) and their perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective?
6. Are there significant group differences in school counselors' type of degree program and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective?
7. Is there a significant relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective (MFT course, internship experiences, post-degree supervision received from systems-oriented supervisor, workshop/seminar, research/reading, consultation) and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective?
8. Are there significant group differences in school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and their building level (i.e., elementary, middle or junior high school, high school, K-12)?

9. What is the relationship between school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and the independent variables of perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competency, perceived level of importance, and method of learning?
10. What are school counselors' perceived barriers to usage of a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting?

Limitations of the Study

Confidence in the results of the study are based in the assumption that the SCP-FSPQ is valid and accurately measured school counselors' perceptions of the preparedness, competency, importance and frequency of usage of a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. After I initially designed the SCP-FSPQ, an expert panel reviewed the instrument for content validity. Despite this precaution, the SCP-FSPQ may have lacked validity in reporting school counselors' beliefs.

Three main limitations of this study were related to data collection and sampling error (Siah, 2005). The SCP-FSPQ was distributed via e-mail; a link to the SCP-FSPQ through the online website Qualtrics™ was included in the email to participants. Use of an online survey might have resulted in a reduction of responses and selection bias (Granello, 2007). A limitation associated with this electronic method of data collection is that e-mail addresses for participants may have been incorrect or may have been inaccurately included in the list provided by ASCA (Granello, 2007; Siah, 2005).

Additionally, internet research is completed by participants who have knowledge about technology and potential participants must have access to the internet (Lyons, Cude, Lawrence, & Gutter, 2005). Lack of interest in use of a family systems perspective may have resulted in

participants discontinuing the survey or failing to initiate response altogether. These limitations could have limited the generalizability of the study (Siah, 2005). Also, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not participants were focusing solely on the survey or partaking in distracting events such as watching television or engaging in conversation.

Finally, an area of concern regarding survey research on the internet is subject fraud in which participants do not tell the truth on the demographic information, and this could result in inaccurate generalizations (Siah, 2005). I assumed that all participants submitting surveys were honest in their responses to the survey items and that these respondents were representative of all ASCA members. To reduce the likelihood that participants would provide dishonest responses, I included a detailed introductory letter to participants. Finally, I controlled for multiple submissions through choosing an option in the Qualtrics™ software to prevent ballot stuffing.

Delimitations of the Study

A delimiting factor is that the survey will be distributed only to members of ASCA, therefore, the findings will be generalizable only to this membership population and not to all school counselors. In addition, the study was delimited to school counselors who are currently practicing in a school setting. Consequently, the study may have excluded a considerable portion of school counselors in the national population, creating what is known as coverage error (Siah, 2005)

Assumptions of the Study

I assumed that the SCP-FSPQ was valid and accurately measured school counselors' perceptions of preparedness, competency, importance and frequency of usage of a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. Additionally, I assumed that all participants were honest in their responses to the survey items and that the responses were

based on their own experiences. Finally, I assumed that the responses were representative of all ASCA members.

Definition of Terms

ASCA- American School Counseling Association identifies and prioritizes the specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of participating in a school counseling program (ASCA, 2004).

Building Level- the classification of schools where the school counselor is primarily employed by the range of grades/ages of children served (i.e., elementary, middle/junior high school, k-12)

CACREP-Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, the accrediting body for Counselor Education Programs

Competence- the extent to which school counselors believe they are able to understand, recognize, and utilize a family system perspective when working with youth in a school setting. The goal of competency is to evaluate the effective application of knowledge and skill in a practice setting. Additionally, trainees are expected to learn the core information of their field in order to have competence.

Family Systems Perspective- a comprehensive and substantive understanding and foundation of family dynamics, systemic thinking, interactional theories, traditional and contemporary marriage and family therapy theories, and the cultural context in which they are embedded (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy III-B).

Frequency of Use- usage of a family systems perspective is when school counselors take into consideration that school children belong to many different social systems (including the family, classroom, school, and community) that are interconnected and influence each other in a reciprocal fashion.

Importance- in this study is defined as the level of importance that school counselors ascribe to using a family systems perspective when working with youth in a school setting.

Preparedness- in this study is defined as the extent to which school counselors believe they are prepared to employ and facilitate a family systems perspective when working with youth in a school setting.

School Type- the type of school where the school counselor is primarily employed (i.e., public-non-charter, public-charter, private, parochial).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, the research and literature related to school counseling and a family system perspective are examined. This chapter is organized into sections that build a framework for examining the linkage of school counseling, family systems perspective, and the preparation of school counselors. Each section includes subsections that further examine each topic. The first section focuses on school counseling and includes an overview of the history of school counseling, the professional identity of the school counselor, and the role and duties of the school counselor. The second section presents literature on general family systems, family system perspectives in the school setting, and information on the incorporation of systems through school-family-community partnerships, including how those partnerships are stimulating the need for a systems perspective in the school counselor's repertoire. The third section analyzes the importance of systemic training for school counselors, and how it relates to accreditation standards and ethical considerations for school counselors using a family system perspective. A summary concludes this chapter.

School Counseling

Overview of History of School Counseling

Since the introduction of school counselors into the educational system, guidance and counseling services have grown and changed to meet the demands of a changing student population (Kraus, 1998). School counselors have had to adapt and change their professional identity with the ever-evolving roles they perform. There have been several shifts in roles and duties that school counselors perform that reflect the profession's attempt to respond to social, economic, political and psychological issues facing schools, communities, families, children, and

adolescents (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). The school counselor's initial role, shaped by the social reform movement in the late 19th century, focused on vocational guidance, assessment, and academic placement (Fitch, Newby, Ballesterro & Marshall, 2001). During the middle of the century, personal and social counseling services promoting students' holistic development were incorporated, and then toward the end of the century special education services, consultation, coordination, and accountability duties were integrated (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Professional school counselors (PSCs), the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), and the Counselor for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) have worked diligently to reconfigure the professional identity and role definition of the school counselor from its historical guidance epistemology to a comprehensive developmental model (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

School Counselor Professional Identity

Professional identity has been defined as self-labeling as a professional, integration of skills and attitudes as a professional, and a perception of context in a professional community (Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss, 2010). One's professional identity is a self-conceptualization or framework in which one carries out a professional role, makes significant professional decisions, and develops into a competent professional (Brott & Myers, 1999). According to Remley and Herlihy (2010), "Individuals who have a clear sense of their professional identity can easily explain the philosophy that underlies the activities of their professional group, describe the services their profession renders to the public, describe the training programs that prepare them to practice their profession, explain their qualifications and the credentials they possess, and articulate the similarities and differences between members of their own profession and other similar groups" (p. 24). Essentially, counselor professional identity can be described as the

integration of professional training with personal attributes in the context of a professional community (Nugent & Jones, 2009).

Brott and Myers (1999) described professional identity as a process rather than an outcome, and as a process that begins in training and continues throughout the school counselor's career. The authors interviewed ten elementary and middle school counselors in the United States and the Caribbean regarding factors that influence their professional identity as a school counselor. Results indicated that school counselors' professional identity was developed through multiple experiences such as their graduate training, work experience, the number of service providers available in their setting, and the needs of the particular school. In other words, school counselors' professional identity continued to evolve from their first class taken during their training program and throughout their internship experiences, and it persisted through their work experience as a professional school counselor. Although school counselors' professional identity is an ongoing development process, the graduate training program provides the essential foundation in which their identity evolves.

Furthermore, the expectations of the school administrator, teachers, staff, other helping professionals, and community constituents influence the roles and functions that school counselors carry out on a daily basis. Consequently, the role and duties that school counselors learn during their training program may differ from the reality of duties performed in their actual positions. Additionally, how school counselors perceive their professional identity may affect what services they actually provide as well as how those services are provided to students and the school (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2010). Thus, it is vital that school counselors have a clear sense of the expectations of their roles and duties (Brott & Myers, 1999). In light of the role confusion and conflicts between the actual and perceived roles and duties of school counselors

that still exist today (Burnham & Jackson, 2002; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2010), professional associations (e.g., ASCA), accrediting bodies (e.g., CACREP), and training programs have created standards and competencies to help define the profession of school counseling (ASCA, 2004; 2010; 2012; Brott & Myers, 1999; CACREP, 2009; Hutchinson, Barrick, & Groves, 1986; Partin, 1993; Peer, 1985; Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, & Williams, 1989).

Role of the School Counselor

ASCA (2009) defines the role of the professional school counselor as

Certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, personal/social and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success.

Professional school counselors are employed in elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools; in district supervisory positions; and in counselor education positions.

In response to the ever changing roles school counselors play in the school, ASCA published the *National Standards for School Counseling Programs* (2004) which recognized the need for school counselors to address the personal and social, academic, and career needs of students. Likewise, the Education Trust and MetLife Foundation established the *National Center for Transforming School Counseling* (2003) to ensure that school counselors are trained and prepared to aid all students in reaching high academic standards (edtrust.org). In a collaborative effort, ASCA and the National Center for Transforming School Counseling embraced a new vision for school counselors that focused on closing the achievement gap through supporting and creating pathways for all students, regardless of race and SES, to achieve school success (edtrust.org). Additionally, the ASCA National standards (2004), the Transforming School

Counseling Initiative (2004), and the ASCA *National Model* (2012) provide school counselors with a road map to follow in their journey of forging a new vision for the future of school counseling. This new vision encourages professional school counselors to change from the traditional, remedial focus on services for students to preventive, program-centered services and encourages incorporating the families and the community (Erford, 2011).

ASCA (2012) suggests that school counselors collaborate with many different stakeholders to ensure a quality school counseling program; through this alliance, school counseling programs can become a fundamental part of the entire school mission. The ASCA *National Model* (2012) provides school counselors with guidelines for implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, which consists of four components: foundation, delivery services, management systems, and accountability. Integrated into each of the four components are the roles of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). The delivery services component of the model includes information on the roles and function schools counselors serve in the school. The four components of the delivery services school counselors utilize are guidance curriculum (e.g., guidance lessons, parent workshops), individual student planning, responsive services (e.g., individual and group counseling, consultation, referrals), and systems support (e.g., professional development, consultation/collaboration) (Erford, 2011). For delivery services to be effective in a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors must possess the knowledge and skills needed to implement both direct (e.g. individual counseling, small-group counseling, classroom guidance) and indirect services (e.g. consultation, team building, leadership) of each program component. ASCA (2012) recommends that school counselors spend 80 percent of their time in direct student services and indirect services, with the remaining 20% of the time spent on

program management and support services. However, many school counselors are assigned inappropriate tasks (e.g., coordinating paperwork, data entry, performing disciplinary actions, teaching classes, keeping clerical records) by the school administrators that hinder their ability to meet the suggested percentage of time spent engaging in direct and indirect services (ASCA, 2012; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2008,2010).

Perera-Diltz and Mason (2008) conducted a nationwide survey of school counselors ($n = 1704$) to determine if the duties they performed were aligned with the duties prescribed by the school counseling profession since the inception of the *ASCA National Model* in 2003. The authors utilized a survey instrument to gather the nationwide data and found that school counselors at all building levels engaged in both professionally endorsed and non-endorsed duties, with some variation existing among building levels. Endorsed duties were those indicated by the *ASCA National Model* (2012), including guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. ASCA non-endorsed duties included scheduling; bus, front door, cross walk, recess, breakfast and lunch room duties; test administration; individualized education plans; hall monitoring; performing new student intakes; substituting; aiding classroom teachers; testing related activities, including driving students to tests; coaching for various sports; and performing principal duties. The authors specifically found that, whereas most activities in the guidance curriculum were endorsed by all counselors, parent workshops and instruction received a significantly lower endorsement across all building levels. Perera-Diltz and Mason (2008) contended that the National Education Goals (2000) challenge every school to promote partnerships and increase parent participation to promote the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. Therefore, it is important that school counselors support and facilitate parent workshops so that their children can succeed in school

(Ritchie & Partin, 1994). Perera-Diltz and Mason (2008) further concluded that great variations in duties still exist among school counselors across building levels, and suggested that the profession may need to educate and demonstrate the usefulness of the ASCA National Model delivery system components to school counselors.

As a result of an increasing incongruence between the actual and perceived duties that school counselors are performing, school administrators tend to have disparate views of the role of the school counselor (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2010). Amatea and Clark (2005) conducted a qualitative study to assess administrators' perceptions regarding the role of the school counselor. Participants were 26 public school administrators employed at various building levels. The researchers examined the value administrators placed on various duties that school counselors performed in their schools. Results indicated that school administrators believed school counselors played four distinct roles: school leader, collaborative case consultant, responsive direct services provider, and administrative team player. An interesting finding from this study was that, although the ASCA National Model (2012) highlights the role of the school counselor as school leader, these school administrators believed this role was the least important. Furthermore, the collaborative case consultation role seemed to be a higher priority for elementary school administrators as compared to middle and high school administrators; conversely, the responsive direct service provider role was endorsed more frequently by high school administrators as compared to middle and elementary school administrators. Finally, the administrative team player role was endorsed much more frequently in the responses of middle school administrators than in the responses of elementary and high school administrators. Lambie and Williamson (2004) suggested that educating principals and reassigning inappropriate duties would be instrumental in changing

outdated views of the roles of school counselors. Amatea and Clark (2005) concurred with these researchers and suggested that, at the current time, administrator preparation programs do not routinely provide knowledge about the potential skills that counselors can bring to schools and that most administrators learn about the counselor role solely through firsthand experience.

Perera-Diltz and Mason (2010) surveyed 61 pre-service administrators officially enrolled (i.e., degree seeking) in a master's-level educational administration program at an urban Midwestern state university. The study was conducted to determine if these pre-service administrators held well-formed opinions about appropriate duties for school counselors before they become school principals. The researchers concluded that, although some school administrators recommended duties that were sanctioned by ASCA (2005), many also endorsed counselors' duties that were inappropriate.

Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2007) suggested that school counselors must provide strong advocacy for the time and resources needed to implement collaborative roles; they asserted that this advocacy would decrease the likelihood of school counselors being burdened with responsibilities outside of their role perception. In addition, it would be beneficial for colleges of education to initiate courses, seminars, and field experiences in which graduate students in counseling, educational leadership, and teaching are enrolled together so that they can learn what each has to offer and how to work as a team (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2010). To promote educational equity and success for all children in today's schools, and to assist the coming generation of school counselors in acquiring the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to collaborate with teachers, administrators, families, and community resources networks (Stone & Dahir, 2006), it is important to include training in family counseling and interventions in the educational process of school counselors (Caffery, Erdman, & Cook, 2000;

Doerries & Foster, 2001; Fine & Carlson, 1992; Terry, 2002).

Family Systems Perspective

The primary concept of family systems theory is the notion that a system (the family) is made up of interconnected and interdependent parts (the individual) and that each part influences and in turn is influenced by other parts in a pattern of recurring transactional sequences (Cox & Van Belsor, 2000). In other words, understanding one part of a system enables the individual to understand something about another part of the subsystem and all of the elements of the system affect each other. Family systems theory has two general approaches: the cross-sectional approach which is the interaction between two systems, and the developmental approach which is change in a system over time (Walonick, 1993). The central premise of family systems theory is that family systems organize themselves to carry out the daily challenges and tasks of life, as well as adjust to the developmental needs of their members (Cearley, 1999). Critical to this premise are the principles or tenets of the family systems approach.

Tenets and Assumptions

The first and perhaps the most influential model of how families operate is cybernetics, which is the study of feedback mechanisms in self-regulating systems (Nicholas & Schwartz, 2007). A non-systems approach would look at the individual members separately. From a cybernetics viewpoint, the actions are related through a series of recurring or repeated cycles. Cybernetics brings in aspects of science, biology, and philosophy to the systems perspective (Haley, 1987). Using circular causality, theorists assume mechanisms do not simply move in one direction; rather, each event is caused by the previous event and each is influencing and being influenced by the other (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1994). Simply stated, each element has an effect on the next: while A affects B, B in turn affects C, which then turns back to effect A, and

so forth. All behavior is communication and purposeful and makes sense in the context in which it is observed. The focus of cybernetics is on how systems function and use feedback information to become accustomed to or alter the path of the structure.

Feedback loops are used in family system theory to describe patterns of interactions and communication that facilitates movement toward change. They are used to characterize all interpersonal relationships. The feedback loops are channeled in two different types. Feedback loops are the return of a portion of the output of a system, especially when used to maintain the output within predetermined limits (negative feedback) or to signal a need to modify the system (positive feedback) (Nicholas & Schwartz, 2007). According to Nicholas and Schwartz (2007), negative feedback loops indicate how far off the mark a system is straying and the correction needed to get it back on course. Positive feedback loops are the information that confirms and reinforces the direction a system is taking (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000). Whereas feedback loops are described as negative and positive, systems theorists do not characterize the communication as good or bad. Family systems theorists assume systems require both positive feedback loops to accommodate new information and change conditions and negative feedback loops to maintain the status quo (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000). The family systems theorist views the problem behavior of the individual as a symptom of the whole family and not as an isolated issue. Both negative and positive feedback loops exist to bring the family back to homeostasis.

Homeostasis is the self-regulation that allows systems to maintain themselves in a state of dynamic balance (Nicholas & Schwartz, 2007). Homeostasis is the family's balance or equilibrium in the system, or a tendency toward achieving and maintaining a state of balance in an effort to ensure a stable environment (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000). As cited in

Walonick (1993), Kuhn (1974) stated that all systems strive toward equilibrium, and that a prerequisite for the continuance of a system is its ability to maintain a steady state or steadily oscillating state.

Goals and Intervention Strategies

The main goal of systemic therapy is based on the premise that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and the purpose is to identify and treat family problems that cause dysfunction. Systemic goals can be identified through the use of many different concepts used by a family therapist in order to elicit change. Three concepts used throughout the majority of family systems theories are reframing, boundaries, and hierarchical structure.

Reframing is used in family system theory as a change agent to flip or reinterpret a family situation to make problems more open to solutions (Nicholas & Schwartz, 2007). The goal is to take problems and look at them in a more constructive and acceptable perspective to change the family's perceptions of the presenting problem (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000). The family comes to therapy with its own set of beliefs and reality. The therapist, through observation and gaining an understanding of the family's familiar ruts, can begin to identify and create a plan of action for change. Therapy starts, therefore, with the clash between two framings of reality: the family's framing is relevant for the continuity of its reality, and the therapeutic reframing is related to the goal of moving the family toward a more competent way of dealing with its dysfunction (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

Boundaries are invisible lines of demarcation that separate the family from the outside non-family environment; they circumscribe and protect the integrity of the system and thus determine who is regarded as inside and who remains outside (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1994). Boundaries help define the individual autonomy of the family's separate members, as

well as help differentiate subsystems from one another (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000).

Minuchin and Fishman (1974) contended that such divisions must be sufficiently well defined to allow subsystem members to carry out their tasks without undo interference, while at the same time open enough to permit contact between members of the subsystem and others. If boundaries are too blurred or too rigid, they invite confusion or inflexibility, increasing the family's risk of instability and ultimately dysfunction (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1994). The therapist uses boundary making techniques to regulate the permeability of boundaries separating members of the family (Minuchin & Fishman, 1974).

Hierarchical structure is the invisible or covert set of functional demands or codes that organize the way family members interact with one another (Minuchin & Fishman, 1974). The premise is based on the family functioning on clear generational boundaries with the parents maintaining control and authority. An imbalance is created when any deviation from established rules goes too far, too quickly, creating resistance as the family seeks to reestablish equilibrium (Goldberg & Goldberg, 2000). The goal, according to Goldberg & Goldberg (2000), is to help the family transition itself in ways that meet new circumstances, while at the same time taking care not to lose the continuity that provides a frame of reference for its members. According to Haley (1987), it is crucial that a therapist not confuse the existence of an unjust hierarchy with a strategy for changing it. Haley further stated that the therapist identifies the power struggle within the family, observes the sequences in organization, and draws parallels between levels of communication and levels of hierarchy to elicit change.

Family Systems Perspective in the School Setting

Recognition of the need for school counselors to provide family counseling services has largely been influenced through an understanding that school children belong to a much larger

social system that includes an interfacing of both family and school (Amatea, 1991; Bodenhorn, 2005; Caffery, et. al., 2000; Davis, 2001; Fine & Carlson, 1992; Hindle & Wells, 1995; Stone & Peeks, 1986; Terry, 2002). As purported by Cox and Belsor (2000) family systems perspective in the school setting incorporates the notion that a system (e.g., the family, the classroom) is comprised of interconnected and interdependent parts (individual) and that each part influences and in turn is influenced by other parts in a pattern of recurring transactional sequences (Cox & Belsor, 2000). In other words, family members' behaviors are not independent; rather, they are interdependent, and when a member of a family attempts to change, that change will affect all the other members of the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). These tenets suggest that change in one part of the student's system can cause a ripple effect that can cause a change in another part of the student's system (Keys & Lockhart, 1999).

According to the systems perspective, treating only the individual addresses just one component of the system and can miss the overall extent of the problem (Lambie & Rokutani, 2002). Davis (2001) contended that systems theory attempts to understand the human condition in an interrelated manner within a social context. Davis further contended that school children belong to many systems (e.g., family, school, community, cultural), all of which combine and interrelate to form a series of subsystems within one huge system. Furthermore, the same is true for the entire family, who also belong to many other interrelated systems. When considering problem behavior in school children, a family systems perspective purports that problem behaviors may result from problematic family interactions and hierarchical relationships rather than from individual psychopathology in the child (Conoley, 1987; Hinkle & Wells, 1995; Widerman & Widerman, 1995). Using a family systems approach to investigate the issues that affect the family and the dynamics within the student-family relationship helps school counselors

to better understand the students they counsel (Mullis & Edwards, 2001).

Perhaps of equal importance to the child's academic and behavioral adjustment is the relationship between the school system and the child's family (Caffery, 2002). Often, families with young children do not have the means to access private practitioners for resources when their children have difficulties in school (Nelson, 2006). Nelson (2006) suggested that involving parents in brief, therapeutic interventions in the school setting when the child exhibits problematic behaviors can be effective in helping the student get back on track for learning. Caffery et al. (2000) purported that the complexity of the problems encountered in schools today, as well as the problems that many families face (e.g., high divorce rates, blended families, financial burdens) demand more innovative and effective counseling approaches than many schools currently sustain. Caffery and colleagues further stated that one response to this demand for innovation has been an increase in approaches that involve parents in their children's school experience and also incorporate a family systems component in the school setting.

Spoth, Randall, and Shin (2008) conducted a longitudinal randomized study in which sixth-grade parents from 33 rural schools in the Midwest were recruited in order to test family competency training intervention and the effects of family related factors on academic success. Specifically, the researchers hypothesized that increasing parenting competencies would decrease student substance-related risk and increase student school engagement. Over the course of seven sessions conducted weekly, parents and children were given specific intervention skills training activities. The indicators measured were rules, parental involvement, parental anger management, and communication. The parents and the children practiced skills they learned together in family sessions. The results indicated that parental intervention increased parenting competencies and reduced students' at risk behavior in the sixth grade and was directly and

positively associated with increased academic performance, through positive effects on school engagement. Spoth and colleagues contended that strengthening a student's engagement with school prior to the developmental transitions typically experienced between middle and high school seems to produce a positive impact on later academic success (Spoth et al., 2008).

Despite empirical data supporting the significant role the family plays in the dynamics of behavioral problems and academic success in students, schools typically do not pay sufficient attention to this area in assessing a student's difficulties (Nicole, 1992). However, school and educational responses have reflected a shift in the view of children's problems from a focus on the individual student to a view in which problems are at least partially located in social relationships, such as the family and other social institutions (Adelman, 1996; Freisen & Osher, 1996; Terry, 2003). School counselors are in an ideal position to facilitate the continuation of this shift by establishing school-family partnerships to help children succeed academically (Downing, 1993; Nelson, 2006).

School-Family-Community Partnerships

During the past two decades, there has been a growing shift in the focus of school counseling from the individual to social networks and systems (Hinkle, 1992; Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Peeks, 1993). Coleman (1987) argued that the loss of quality interactions between the student and adult is a primary reason for children being unprepared for school tasks and that parental time constraints lead to a decline in school performance. Christenson (2004) argued that a growing number of parents have not had the benefit of a positive personal school experience or are unfamiliar with school policies and practices and may possibly view the purpose of education quite differently from the expectations of the school personnel. This creates a growing challenge

to find a way to incorporate parental involvement and participation in students' learning experiences in the school system (Christenson, 2004).

In 1997, the importance of parental involvement and partnerships became apparent when federal legislation included them in the revised list of National Education Goals (www.nces.ed.gov). In Goal 8 of the National Education Goals, schools are encouraged to promote partnerships with families and community groups in an effort to increase parental involvement and participation (www.nces.ed.gov). School-family-community (SFC) partnerships are one such collaborative initiative that actively involves school personnel, parents, families, and community organizations in the process of planning, coordinating, and implementing programs and activities at home, at school, and in the community to help increase the academic, emotional, and social success of students (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Christenson, 2004). Equally important to identifying effective home support for learning strategies is supporting families to sustain their engagement with their children's learning; building school-family partnerships can aid in making education a salient focus in many homes (Christenson, 2004). Christenson and Sheridan (2001) described seven broad actions to enhance family-school connections for children's learning: (a) garnering administrative support, (b) acting as a systems advocate, (c) implementing family-school teams, (d) increasing problem solving across home and school, (e) identifying and managing conflict, (f) supporting families, and (g) helping teachers improve communication and relationships with families. These partnership programs, in which teachers, administrators, school counselors, parents, and community partners collaborate, help schools to involve more families, assist more students, and prevent or reduce the problems that school counselors, presently, try to solve alone (Epstein, 2010). Colbert et al. (2006) contended that school counselors' expertise in understanding individual and environmental influences that place

children at risk must be communicated to the larger planning structures and that SFC partnerships are an effective and systematic process that school counselors can use to coordinate student achievement and parental involvement.

Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2004) conducted an extensive search of the literature and found limited research that examined the impact of perceptions and roles or involvement of school counselors in SFC partnerships. They investigated school counselors' perceptions of their involvement in nine school-family-community partnership programs and the barriers to their involvement in these partnerships. Participants in the study were a random selection of 72 school counselors in South Carolina public schools. The researchers concluded that school counselors perceived their involvement in SFC partnerships as very important regardless of school level and that they play major roles in such partnerships. Elementary school counselors perceived their roles in SFC partnerships and partnership programs to be more important in their schools than did high school counselors. School counselors perceived their roles in mentoring and parent education programs to be of the highest importance regardless of building level. Significant relationships were found between school counselors' perceptions of the importance of their involvement in partnerships and barriers to that involvement. Results revealed that high school counselors perceived a higher level of barriers than middle or elementary school counselors, although school counselors across all school levels reported that too many counselor responsibilities and lack of time frequently hindered their involvement in SFC partnerships. Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2004) concluded that, to increase school counselor involvement in SFC partnerships, school counselor education programs will need to devise strategies to overcome barriers and train counselors to be proactive in defining their own roles in school systems so that they are able to advocate for their collaboration in SFC partnerships.

Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2007) further examined what factors were related to school counselor perceived involvement in school-family-community partnership roles. A random sample of 235 members of ASCA participated in the study. Using survey design, the researchers measured school counselors' perceived involvement in 18 partnership roles (e.g., helping parents, family, and community members organize support programs; providing parent education workshops and seminars; conducting home visits to families) and the factors related to perceived involvement in these roles. In support of previous findings, Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy found that, overall, school counselors perceived their involvement in SFC partnerships to be important. Specifically, a collaborative school climate was significantly positively related to school counselors' perceived involvement in school-family partnerships. In addition, school counselors' role perceptions, confidence in their ability to build partnerships, and attitudes about partnerships were significantly related to their perceived involvement in partnerships. Results also indicated that school counselors' confidence in their ability to collaborate was consistently positively related to their perceived involvement in partnerships. The researchers concluded that, to promote and increase school counselor involvement in SFC partnerships, school counselors will need to be trained to develop effective partnerships (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Bryan and Griffin (2010) conducted a multidimensional study to further explore factors related to the impact of school counselor partnership involvement. A multidimensional perspective was used in this study, considering multiple factors to capture the complexity of the real world in which school counselors deliver services. The researchers examined the dimensions of school counselor involvement in SFC partnerships, as well as the factors related to school counselor involvement in partnerships. They analyzed a national sample of 217 school counselors using hierarchical regression analysis to evaluate school counselors' overall

involvement in collaborative school climate, school principal expectations, school counselor self-efficacy about partnerships, role expectations, time constraints, and hours of partnership-related training. They found that school counselor involvement in SFC partnerships was comprised of three types: school-home partnership (e.g. workshops for families, helping families to access services), school-community collaboration (e.g. volunteers, mentoring), and collaborative teams (e.g. parents, professionals, community members). School collaboration climate played an important role in whether school counselors became involved in school-home partnerships; however, the school collaboration climate was not a factor in whether school counselors were involved in school-community collaboration. Consistent with the findings of Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2007), these results indicated that school counselors perceived it important to collaborate with school, family, and community members. Second, principal expectations were a significant predictor of school counselors' involvement in school-home partnerships as well as in school-community collaboration. Third, a relationship was found between school counselors' self-efficacy and their involvement in school-home partnerships, school community collaboration, and their overall partnership involvement. These findings corroborated previous research that indicated school counselors' confidence in their ability to build partnerships is directly related to their overall involvement in partnerships (Bryan, 2003; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). School counselors' role perceptions and professional identity are influenced by their professional training (Amatea & Clark, 2005) and their self-efficacy is enhanced by intentional training experiences (Hall, 2003). Therefore, counselor educators should consider integrating content about partnerships into curricula to provide trainees with the knowledge and strategies for impacting school climate and influencing principal expectations to increase school counselor involvement in SFC partnerships (Bryan & Griffin, 2010).

School-family-community partnerships help to ensure that all involved participants are working together for a common outcome of student success. School counselors are encouraged to be education leaders, student advocates, and social change agents in their schools in addition to providing direct guidance and counseling services to students and their families (ASCA, 2012; Stone & Clark, 2001). Schools, families, and communities must engage in collaborative problem solving to achieve broad-based systemic change (Keys & Lockhart, 1999) and school counselors who maintain a family systems perspective can better understand the student's role in these social contexts (Edwards & Mullis, 2001). School counselors play important roles in helping elementary, middle, and high schools establish and sustain effective programs of SFC involvement that contribute to this holistic approach to wrap-around services for student achievement in schools (Epstien, 2010). Given that school-family-community partnerships have increased the academic success of students (ASCA, 2010) and school counselors consider their involvement in SFC partnerships to be important (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004, 2007), school counselors should have knowledge of systems theory to use as a framework for analysis, while utilizing a systemic view to foster full understanding of how and why people function the way they do in a school system (Cobia & Henderson, 2007).

Role of the Systems School Counselor

Pledge (2004) reported that after the family, the school system becomes the next most influential force in a child's development and may be the only contact for counseling assistance the child may encounter. Edwards and Mullis (2001) reported that the family's influence on its individual members cannot be underestimated, and that most children develop their beliefs about self and others and their typical patterns of behavior within their family system. Because youth are mainly dependent on their parents for their psychological, physical, and social well-being, the

problems that children experience at home are frequently reflected at school (Whiteside, 1993). Families who struggle with providing support for their children need the help, direction, and cooperation that a school counselor can provide (Bodenhorn, 2005). Much like a family counselor, school counselors can use a systems perspective to work with their student clients in the context of the school system (Velsor, 2000). School counselors, acting as family advocates, can include all family members as equal partners in a problem solving process (Keys & Lockhart, 1999). Professional school counselors who understand the systemic perspective are poised to assist families who are struggling with children who are having problems with issues such as not following rules, not accepting consequences, and non-compliance (Nelson, 2006).

The coordination of family and school systems in most cases falls within the role of school counselors, making it necessary for the school counselor to negotiate the interests of the child, family and the school (Christenson, 2004). In addition, Keys and Lockart (1999) contended that many of the problems presented by students in today's schools are much too complex and multidimensional to be solved by interventions that target solely the individual. Effective problem solving in many of these situations requires a systemic perspective that defines problems by the multiple contexts in which students grow and develop and derives solutions from systemic perspectives for interventions (Collins & Collins, 1994; Lerner, 1995).

Systemic school counselors advocate for systems change, implement systemic interventions, and remove systemic barriers for students, thereby helping to create a more collaborative school climate (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). When school counselors engage the family and school, they add enormously to the therapeutic options and treatment plans available to the students (Nelson, 2006; Sherman, Shumsky & Rountree, 1994).

Additionally, by using a systemic approach, school counselors can apply family counseling to

solve a child's problem and assist the family in finding solutions to problems within a social context (Edwards & Mullis, 2001). School counselors can develop a plan for change, reframe the problem behavior, and assign homework tasks using a directive systemic approach (Kraus, 1998). Furthermore, through parent consultation and psycho-educational programs for parents, normal developmental issues facing children and families can be addressed (Rotter & Beveja, 1999). Investigating the issues that affect the family and the dynamics within the family not only helps school counselors assist parents, but also helps school counselors better understand the students with whom they work (Edwards & Mullis, 2001). Using a systems perspective, school counselors work with the family and the student to provide the support they need to not only change behaviors at school but also help change the family's current homeostasis in the home (Lambie & Rokutani, 2002,). Hinkle (2001) reported that family counseling by school counselors can resolve many school problems before they escalate. Therefore, a family systems perspective is often a more appropriate treatment modality than individual therapy for youth in school settings (Velsor, 2000; Whiteside, 1993) and school counselors who use interventions based on a systems perspective can offer powerful solutions for helping parents promote effective ways of managing children in school settings and family homes (Nelson, 2006). As suggested by Paylo (2011), the school counselor's understanding of a family systems perspective is vital; therefore, a systems perspective should be included in the school counseling curriculum.

School Counselor Training

Despite an increase in the literature supporting family counseling and interventions in schools, there has been limited research regarding the need for school counselors to be trained to use a family systems perspective (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2007) argued that, for professional school counselors to be leaders in helping to shape a collaborative

school climate and organizational change; they must possess strong collaboration skills as well as skills in assessing the school's climate and culture. Traditionally, counseling programs have emphasized change for the individual as a result of individually focused interventions; however, teachers, parents, and administrators frequently look to the school counselor to effect change in a student's behavior, attitude, or affect through the direct application of group counseling techniques (Keys & Lockhart, 1999; Kraus, 1998; Nelson, 2006). School counselors are often trained in individual models but lack training in family systems perspectives (Keys, 1997; Magnuson & Norem, 1998; Nicoll, 1992; Velsor, 2000; Woody & Woody, 1994). Thus, counselor educators are encouraged to provide school counseling students with rich experiences and curricula that are synchronized with school-family-community collaboration and that empower school counselors to think and act systemically (Bodenhorn, 2005). Such curricula and experiences can help to ensure that school counselors are active participants in teaming and a collaborative process with families and community agencies, and are leaders in the development and implementation of a family-centered approach within the school community (Ho, 2001). Considering the literature that encourages school counselors to be education leaders, student advocates, and social change agents in their schools in addition to providing direct guidance and counseling services to students and their families (ASCA, 2012; Stone & Clark, 2001), school counselors must be prepared to function in a variety of roles to support the academic, career, and personal/social development of students (ASCA, 2012).

Accreditation Standards

ASCA (2010) has called upon professional school counselors to work with students, their families, and community members as a part of their comprehensive school counseling programs, which address the following: become knowledgeable about community resources and actively

pursue collaboration with family members and community stakeholders; remove barriers to the successful implementation of school-family-community partnerships; and serve as an advocate, leader, facilitator, initiator, evaluator, and collaborator to create, enrich, and evaluate the effect of these partnerships on student success.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (2009) provides a vision, mission, and values to ensure that counseling students develop a professional identity as well as the knowledge and skills needed to practice effectively. CACREP describes its purpose as providing a means to promote professional training and competence, while aiming to enhance the counseling profession. Within the school counseling specialization, students must demonstrate knowledge and skill in the following four areas: (1) foundations of school counseling; (2) contextual dimensions: school counseling; (3) knowledge and skills for the practice of school counseling (program development, implementation and evaluation, counseling and guidance, consultation); and (4) clinical instruction.

School Counselor Preparation

Perusse, Goodnough, and Noel (2001) argued that, although CACREP delineates mandatory knowledge and skills for school counselors, the accrediting body does not suggest how curricular experiences are to be structured. These researchers conducted a national study to investigate how school counselor educators prepared entry-level school counseling students to meet future job requirements. The participants were provided with a list of course content areas and asked to complete responses regarding what course content was required for school counseling students. Findings were that over 90 percent of programs offered a core set of courses for all counseling students. The core courses were identified as career and lifestyle development, theories of counseling, testing, group counseling, helping relationships, research

methods, development across the lifespan, and multicultural counseling. The results indicated that over half (51.9%) of school counselors were not required to take a course in family counseling or a systems perspective, and only nine percent of programs required a couple and family counseling course that was designed specifically for school counseling students. Perusse and colleagues further found that only one percent of school counseling programs offered specialized school counseling content in parent education.

Perusse and Goodnough (2005) conducted a study to determine school counselors' perceptions of the importance of graduate-level training in specific content course areas included in graduate preparation. A national random sample of 568 professional school counselors was obtained through the ASCA membership directory. Respondents were asked to rate each course content area on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not important to 5 being very important. The findings showed that both elementary and secondary school counselors perceived consultation with parents and teachers to be important. This is an interesting finding, considering that the findings of a previous study conducted by Perusse et al. (2001) indicated that only one percent of school counseling programs offer training in collaboration with parents. On the other hand, in the Perusse and Goodnough study (2005), both elementary and secondary school counselors rated couple and family counseling as having limited importance, which is consistent with Perusse et al. (2001) who reported that only nine percent of school counseling programs required couple and family counseling. Perusse and Goodnough (2005) concluded that school counselors recognize the need to collaborate with families. They further noted that school counselors placed coordination between parents and community members high on the rank order, suggesting that school counselors recognize the importance of a family systems perspective when working with children in the schools. These results suggest that counselor educators should at least

incorporate a broad teaching of a systems approach in school counseling programs (Paylo, 2011; Perusse & Goodnough, 2005).

In order to integrate a family systems perspective in the school counseling curriculum, accreditation standards should also be considered (Paylo, 2011). In the CACREP (2009) standards Section II. G. 2. d. states that programs should integrate “individual, couple, family, group, and community strategies for working with and advocating for diverse populations.” Section II. G. 3 a. further states there should be an integration of theories of individual and family development and transition across life-span” while Section II. G. 5 e. states that a “systems perspective that provides an understanding of family and other systems theories and major models of family and related interventions” should be required in the training program in order to provide an understanding in a multi-cultural society (p. 11).

A decade ago, Terry (2002) argued that literature is lacking that offers guidance on how to prepare graduate students to work at the school-family interface and that pursuit of empirical evidence for the impact of family-school interface training in school counselors’ curriculum was essential. Several authors have advocated for the need for family intervention strategies in professional school counseling curricula (Holcomb-McCoy, 1998; Kraus, 1998, Magnuson & Norem, 1998; Paisley & Borders, 1995; Paylo, 2011; Perusse & Goodnough, 2005). Ho (2001) offered a reminder that school counselors are well qualified to participate in and to take leadership roles in the restructuring of school and community services, from the categorical approaches to more integrated, family-centered environment. Numerous writers have urged that the family or systems perspectives should be included in the education of school counselors and that school counseling students should be prepared to collaborate with families and community agencies that support child development (Bodenhorn, 2005; Paylo, 2011 ; Velsor, 2000).

Competency

The goal of competency is to evaluate the effective application of knowledge and skill in a practice setting; trainees are expected to learn the core information of their field to establish proficiency in their area of study (Hinkle, 1993; Miller, Todahl & Platt, 2004). Miller et al. (2004) described five training steps towards competency that emerged through a review of the literature. First, trainees are expected to learn the core information of the field; second, evaluations or tests are used to gauge the trainee's absorption of this material and to assess for overall retention; third, trainees apply academic knowledge in the professional field; fourth and concurrent with the third step, a period of mentorship and supervision provides a source of direct observation, evaluation and feedback; lastly, a final opportunity is provided for trainers to evaluate and provide feedback about the competence of the trainee.

These steps are found almost universally across disciplines and are organized around competencies that have been defined by the discipline's professional organization (Miller et al, 2004). Nelson and Smock (2005) suggested that competency in counseling is a collaboration of basic knowledge of the history of the field, foundations of philosophy of science and systems thinking, and basic understanding of the variety of approaches, perspectives, models, and modalities for conducting therapy as well as skills. Remley and Herlihy (2010) noted that, although competency in counseling is hard to define, it involves a combination of (1) knowledge of the core areas of study required to practice counseling; (2) skills, including basic interviewing skills and a range of therapeutic interventions; and (3) diligence, or a consistent attentiveness to the client's needs.

Competency is an ethical issue. According to the American Counselor Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2005), "counselors should practice only in the boundaries of their

competence, based on education, training, supervised experience, state and national professional credentials, and appropriate experience” (C.2.a.). Additionally, “counselors practice in specialty areas new to them only after appropriate education, training, and supervised experience. While developing skills in new specialty areas, counselors take steps to ensure the competence of their work and to protect others from possible harm” (C.2.b). Whereas the standards in the ACA code apply to all counselors, ASCA has promulgated ethical guidelines specifically for school counselors. In 2004, ASCA reinforced the importance of family therapy in the schools and modified its code of ethics to incorporate the relevance of family work for school counselors (Bodenhorn, 2005). According to the ASCA (2004) Code of Ethics, professional school counselors

Respect the rights and responsibilities of parents/guardians for their children and endeavor to establish, as appropriate, a collaborative relationship with parents/ guardians to facilitate students’ maximum development (B.1.a), Adhere to laws, local guidelines and ethical standards of practice when assisting parents/guardians experiencing family difficulties interfering with the students effectiveness and welfare (B.1.b.), work to establish, as appropriate, collaborative relationships with parents/guardians to best serve student (B.1.f), and recognize that working with minors in a school setting requires school counselors to collaborate with students’ parents/guardians to the extent possible (B.2.b).

Furthermore, the ASCA (2012) *National Model* school counselor competencies state that school counselors should articulate and demonstrate an understanding of

Collaborations with stakeholders such as parents and guardians, teachers, administrators and community leaders to create learning environments that promote educational equity

and success for every student (I-A-6), collaborates with parents, teachers, administrators, community leaders and other stakeholders to promote and support student success (I-B-4), acts as a systems change agent to create an environment promoting and supporting student success (I-B-5), defines and understands system change and its role in comprehensive school counseling programs (I-B-5a) and school counselors believe effective school counseling is a collaborative process involving school counselors, students, parents, teachers, community stakeholders and other stakeholders (I-C-5) (p. 149-150).

Bodenhorn (2005) asserted that establishing a positive collaboration with families requires skills and knowledge of the family system and that most school counselors are trained in a school based program and have limited mental health experience and little to no family therapy experience. A literature search revealed only limited research into perceptions of the competency of school counselors to conduct family therapy. Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2004) reported that their study was the first attempt to provide empirical data to address questions regarding the perspectives and practices of school counselors regarding school-family-community partnerships. The results of their study revealed that school counselors, regardless of school level, consider it very important that they be involved in school-family-community partnerships and that they play major roles in such partnerships. It has been suggested that a family or systems perspective should be included in the education of school counselors and school counseling students should be prepared to collaborate with families and community agencies that support child development (Bodenhorn, 2005). Thus, to function in an ethical manner, school counselors working directly with families should seek out additional training in family counseling if this was not included in their education background, or should work

collaboratively with someone who has this background (Bodenhorn, 2005). Nelson and Smock (2005) contended that, without a deep understanding of family therapy constructs, it seems that informed integration of theory and competent practice would elude even the most gifted counselor.

Summary

The family's influence on its individual members cannot be underestimated, and most children develop their beliefs about self and others and typical patterns of behavior within their family system (Edwards & Mullis, 2001). Families who struggle with providing support for their children need the help, direction, and cooperation that professional school counselors can provide (Bodenhorn, 2005). School counselors, when trained appropriately in a family systems perspective, are equipped with the skills to evaluate family dynamics and assist with problem resolution within the framework of a child's holistic social context (Paylo, 2011; Velsor, 2000). Terry (2002) suggested that future research offers guidance on how to prepare graduate students to work at the school-family interface. Terry also argued that the pursuit of empirical evidence for the impact of training in school counselors' curriculum is essential. The purpose of my study was to contribute to this empirical evidence base, which ultimately may assist in equipping school counselors to collaborate with families and community agencies to enhance the support of every child in school settings (Bodenhorn, 2005).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter contains a description of the research design and methodology that were used in this study. The chapter includes subsections that elaborate on the purpose of the study, participants, instrument development including procedures to ensure reliability and content validity, methods for data collection and data analysis, and research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this quantitative study were to determine if family systems strategies are being used by school counselors, and if so, which factors contribute to how frequently a family systems perspective is used in the school setting. Another purpose was to determine if school counselors' method of learning a family systems perspective affects the frequency of usage of that perspective in the school settings. A third aim was to explore whether the method of learning a family systems perspective is related to school counselors' perceptions of their preparedness and competency to use a family systems perspective. Finally, this study explored whether the frequency of usage of a family systems perspective is related to school counselors' perceptions of the importance of using a family systems perspective and what barriers, if any; school counselors believe prevent them from using family systems strategies.

A researcher-developed survey titled *School Counselors Perceptions of Family Systems Perspectives Questionnaire* (SCP-FSPQ) was used to gather data for the study. The SCP-FSPQ was distributed electronically via mass email to a random sample of ASCA members.

Participants

The sample for this research was drawn from members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). ASCA membership is approximately 29,000 members (S. Wicks, personal communication, January 25, 2013). ASCA member email addresses are listed in the membership directory which is available on the ASCA website and can be accessed only by members of ASCA. Of the approximately 29,000 ASCA members, 23,586 had made their email addresses available to ASCA. To obtain the sample for this study, the email addresses were entered by the researcher into a generic electronic mailing list titled *School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspectives Questionnaire (SCP-FSPQ)*. A national random sample of 9,500 professional school counselors was selected from the 23,586 email addresses by choosing the random option on Qualtrics™. Participants were contacted directly and solely through email via a mass email message.

Of the 9,500 email addresses that were randomly selected, 60 were returned as undeliverable. Of the 1227 participants who consented to participate, 435 reported they were not working as a school counselor and, thus, were not eligible for my research. Due to incomplete or unusable responses, listwise deletions were used to reduce the sample; the final sample included 657 participants. This represented a response rate of 6.92% of the original ASCA population, and 53.1% of those who consented to participate.

Descriptive information was gathered to identify characteristics of the sample. Participants indicated their sex, age, and race (see Table 1). A large majority of respondents were female (84.4%) as compared to male participants (15.5%). The ages of the participants were 18-24 years old (2%), 25-34 years old (34.7%), 35-44 years of age (28%), 45-55 years of age (22.5%), 55-65 years of age (11.9%), and 66 years of age and up (9%). Most participants

self-identified as White (81.9%), and smaller percentages self-identified as Black or African American (8.4%), Hispanic (4.6%), Island Pacific or Asian (2%), Other (1.5%), Native American (.9%), or Biracial (.8%).

Table 1
Participant Demographics by Frequency (n=657)

| Variable | n | % |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Sex | | |
| Female | 555 | 84.5 |
| Male | 102 | 15.5 |
| Total | 657 | 100.0 |
| Age | | |
| 18-24 | 13 | 2.0 |
| 25-34 | 228 | 34.7 |
| 35-44 | 184 | 28.0 |
| 45-55 | 148 | 22.5 |
| 56-65 | 78 | 11.9 |
| 66&Up | 6 | 0.9 |
| Race | | |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 6 | 0.9 |
| Biracial | 5 | 0.8 |
| Black or African American | 55 | 8.4 |
| Hispanic | 30 | 4.6 |
| Island Pacific or Asian | 13 | 2.0 |
| White | 538 | 81.9 |
| Other | 10 | 1.5 |

Participants reported on their professional characteristics by indicating their credentials and number of years as a professional school counselor (see Table 2). The majority of participants had six or fewer years of experience as a school counselor: Concerning experience as a counselor, 32 % of respondents reported 0-2 years of experience, and 24.4% reported 3-6 years of experience. A smaller percentage reported more years of experience: 7-12 years of

experience (19.9%), 13-19 years of experience (15.5%), or 20 or more years of experience (7.9%).

Respondents were asked to indicate all currently-held professional licenses and/or certifications (see Table 2). As it is common for members of the counseling profession to hold multiple certifications, totals for frequencies of responses exceeded the total number of respondents. The school counselor certification/license had the highest representation among the respondents (76.9%). The National Certified Counselor (NCC) credential had the second highest representation among the respondents (17.4%), and National Certified School Counselors (NCSC) represented a smaller percentage (5.8%). Twelve percent (12 %) of the participants were licensed professional counselors (LPC), whereas licensed marriage and family therapists comprised only .6%. Other credentials held included licensed clinical social worker (1.2%), registered play therapist (1.1%), and licensed psychologist (.5%). Approximately nine percent (9.3%) of respondents indicated that they held other licenses and/or certifications. The remaining 9.4% of participants reported holding “none.”

Table 2*Participants' Professional Characteristics by Frequency (n=657)*

| Variable | n | % |
|---|-----|------|
| Number of Years as a School Counselor | | |
| 0-2 | 212 | 32.3 |
| 3-6 | 160 | 24.4 |
| 7-12 | 131 | 19.9 |
| 13-19 | 102 | 15.2 |
| 20 or More | 52 | 7.9 |
| Current Credentials* | | |
| Licensed Professional Counselor | 79 | 12.0 |
| Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist | 4 | 0.6 |
| Licensed Clinical Social Worker | 8 | 1.2 |
| School Counseling Certification/License | 505 | 76.9 |
| Licensed Psychologist | 3 | 0.5 |
| National Certified Counselor | 114 | 17.4 |
| National Certified School Counselor | 38 | 5.8 |
| Registered Play Therapist | 7 | 1.1 |
| Other | 61 | 9.3 |
| None | 62 | 9.4 |

*Participants were asked to choose all that applied to them; therefore, resulting frequencies are greater than the number of participants

Participants reported on their professional education by highest education level, type of degree program, and program accreditation (see Table 3). The vast majority of participants held master's degrees (88.4%); respondents holding doctoral degrees comprised only 5.6%. Less than 1% (0.9%) of the sample consisted of individuals whose highest earned degree was the bachelor's degree. A small percentage (5%) reported holding other degrees.

With respect to the type of degree program from which the participants graduated, a large majority (88.6%) reported graduating from a school counseling degree program. A total of 3.7% of participants reported graduating from a clinical mental health degree program, 2% of participants graduated from a social work degree program, 0.9% of participants reported marriage and family therapy degree program, and the remaining 4.9% of respondents chose

other. Because the majority of the sample reported holding a school counseling degree, the degree items were collapsed into two categories for analysis: school counseling degree, and other degree.

Last, respondents indicated the type of accreditation their graduate program held. The majority of participants were affiliated with CACREP programs (65.9%), followed by unsure of accreditation (23.1%), other (9.9%), CSWE (2%), CORE (0.9%) and COAMFTE (0.6%).

Table 3

Participants' Professional Education by Frequency (n=657)

| Variable | n | % |
|-----------------------------|-----|------|
| Education Level | | |
| B.S.,B.A. | 6 | 0.9 |
| M.A.,M.S.,M.Ed. | 567 | 86.3 |
| Ph.D.,Ed.D.,PsyD | 37 | 5.6 |
| MSW | 14 | 2.1 |
| Other | 33 | 5.0 |
| Type of Degree | | |
| Clinical Mental Health | 24 | 3.7 |
| Marriage and Family Therapy | 6 | 0.9 |
| School Counseling | 582 | 88.6 |
| Social Work | 13 | 2.0 |
| Other | 32 | 4.9 |
| Program Accreditation | | |
| CACREP | 433 | 65.9 |
| COAMFTE | 4 | 0.6 |
| CORE | 6 | 0.9 |
| CSWE | 13 | 2.0 |
| Other | 61 | 9.3 |
| Unsure | 62 | 9.4 |

Survey Research

The survey method is used to gather data to describe characteristics of certain populations and to collect large amounts of information from specifically defined small populations

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Internet-based survey research was chosen for its several advantages including reduced cost, quicker submission of responses, and ease of data input for analysis; however, limitations such as risk of compromised security, possible issues with access to technology, and sample selection bias were also considered (Granello, 2007). Finally, survey research is often employed to learn about people's attitudes, beliefs, values, demographics, behaviors, opinions, desires, and habits, with the goal of understanding the relationships among these variables (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Because the purpose of this study was to investigate school counselors' perceptions of their preparedness, competency, importance, and frequency of usage of a family systems perspective in the school setting, survey research was chosen as the methodological approach.

Instrument Development

No previous studies have examined whether the methods of learning a family systems perspective impact school counselors' perceived level of preparedness, competency, importance, and frequency of usage of a family systems perspective in school settings; therefore, no appropriate instrument existed. Thus, a researcher-developed instrument was utilized in this study.

The *School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspectives Questionnaire (SCP-FSPQ)* was created specifically for this study in order to examine school counselors': (a) perceived level of preparedness to provide family therapy, (b) perceived level of competency in using family therapy, (c) perceived level of importance of a family systems perspective, (d) frequency of usage of a family systems perspective in the school setting, (e) the methods of learning a family systems perspective, (f) whether school counselors believe a family systems course should be a requirement for the master's degree, and (g) what barriers, if any, school

counselors perceive prevent them from using a family system perspective in the school setting.

Step One: Conducting the Literature Review

A search of the relevant professional literature was conducted to gain knowledge of the variables to guide the item generation (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). The instrument was developed following best practices for item development consistent with guidelines offered by Czaja and Blair (2005) and Fowler and Cosenza (2009). These guidelines included using simplicity in language and defining key terms, and incorporating reliable item structure for future data analysis, such as using Likert scales to optimize variability in responses (Betz, 1996; Cohen & Swerdlik, 2002; Fowler & Cosenza, 2009).

The items included in the survey were generated from the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) *Accreditation Standards Manual*, American School Counseling Association (ASCA) *Code of Ethics*, American Counseling Association (ACA) *Code of Ethics*, Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP) *Accreditation Standards and Procedures Manual*, and AAMFT *Marriage and Family Therapy Core Competencies*, as well as professional literature related to school counselors and family counseling. A listing of the literature that supports inclusion of each item is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Instrument Development: The School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspective Questionnaire (SCP-FSPQ)

| Item Number | Guidelines and Published Literature Reference | |
|-------------|--|-------------|
| 1-16 | Participant demographic information | |
| 17.1-17.13 | Johnson & Nelson (1999); AAMFT (2004) <i>Core Competencies</i> ; AAMFT (2005) <i>Accreditation Standards</i> ; Perosa & Perosa (2010); CACREP <i>Accreditation Standards and Procedures Manual</i> (2009); AAMFT <i>Code of Ethics</i> (2012); ASCA <i>Code of Ethics</i> (2010) | Preparation |
| 18.1-18.14 | Johnson & Nelson (1999); Perosa & Perosa (2010); AAMFT (2004); Alexander, Chenail, Crane, Johnson, Nelson and Schwallie (2007); CACREP <i>Accreditation Standards and Procedures Manual</i> (2009); AAMFT (2004) <i>Core Competencies</i> ; Bodenhorn (2005); The ASCA <i>National Model</i> (2005); ASCA <i>Code of Ethics</i> (2010); AAMFT <i>Code of Ethics</i> (2012); ACA <i>Code of Ethics</i> (2005) | Competency |
| 19.1-19.12 | Johnson & Nelson (1999); AAMFT <i>Accreditation Standards</i> (2005); CACREP <i>Accreditation Standards and Procedures Manual</i> (2009); Remley & Herlihy (2010) | Importance |
| 20 | Free form field for examples of perceived barriers | Barriers |

Step Two: Generating Items and Determining Response Format

The SCP-FSPQ is a 56-item survey divided into three sections (see Appendix F) as described below.

Section I: Demographics

In Section I, participants are asked to provide demographic information, including race, sex, age, number of years as a school counselor, degree, graduate program accreditation, graduate training program, professional licensure and certification, building level, school setting, and theoretical orientation.

In the “Other information” subsection, participants are asked to include their methods of learning a family systems perspective and how often they use a family systems perspective.

Section II: Training

In section II, 17.1 to 17.13, *School Counselors Perceived Level of Preparedness*, participants are asked to evaluate the extent to which they believe they are prepared to employ a family system perspective when working with youth in a school setting. This section is designed to capture perceptions regarding their knowledge of family concepts and their ability to employ family system techniques. To acquire data regarding school counselors’ perceptions of preparedness, a 5-point Likert scale with anchored responses at each point is used. The possible responses for perceptions of preparedness include 1 - *Strongly Agree*, 2 - *Agree*, 3 - *Unsure*, 4 - *Disagree*, 5 - *Strongly Disagree*.

In section II, 18.1 to 18.14, *School Counselors’ Perceived Level of Competence*, participants are asked to evaluate to what extent they believe they are able to understand a family system perspective when working with youth in school settings. This section is designed to capture school counselors’ perceptions regarding their knowledge of family systems, and their utilization of a family systems perspective. To acquire data regarding school counselors’ perceptions of competency, a 5-point Likert scale with anchored responses at each point is used. The possible responses for perceptions of competence related to their ability to use family systems perspective include 1 - *Strongly Agree*, 2 - *Agree*, 3 - *Unsure*, 4 - *Disagree*, 5 - *Strongly Disagree*.

In section III, 19.1 to 19.12, *School Counselors’ Perceived Level of Importance*, participants are asked to rate the level of perceived importance of using a family system perspective when working with youth in school settings. This section is designed to capture

perceptions regarding the importance of using a family systems perspective. To acquire data regarding school counselors' experiences related to perceptions of importance, a 5-point Likert scale with anchored responses at each point is used. The possible responses for the extent to which participants rate the importance of using a family system perspective include 1 - *Strongly Agree*, 2 - *Agree*, 3 - *Unsure*, 4 - *Disagree*, 5 - *Strongly Disagree*.

Section III: Barriers

Section III, *School Counselors' Perceived Obstacles or Barriers* is an open ended item that asks participants to comment on obstacles or barriers they have experienced in implementing or trying to implement a family system perspective when working with youth in school settings.

Content Validation

Validity is the level at which a survey instrument measures what it is designed to measure and the accuracy or the extent that an instrument measures what it purports to measure (Evans, Burnett, Kendric, & Macrina, 2009; Huck, 2009). It is important that the items on the survey measure the content they are intended to measure or the results could be considered invalid. Items on the survey were developed based on the current published literature regarding the content domains of interest: school counselor preparedness, competency, and importance of a family system perspective.

Content validity is often determined by having experts form a subjective opinion (Huck, 2009). Experts can provide an accessible source of information that can be quickly harnessed to gain an opinion, and they often provide insight into topics that have not been published (Baker, Lovell, & Harris, 2006). Utilizing expert panels can be of great influence in a study to determine the face validity and content validity of a survey (Belafsky, Mouadeb, Rees, Pryor, Postma,

Allen, & Leonard, 2008; Nakazawa, Miyashita, Morita, Morita, Umeda, Oyagi, & Ogasawara, 2009).

Expert Panel

Researchers should consult with domain experts and should pilot items to identify potential problems with wording to enhance the construct validity of a survey (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). A panel screened survey items for content validity, as well as for ease of understanding of the SCP-FSPQ. This expert panel consisted of ten counselor educators who have expertise in marriage and family therapy. All panelists were excluded as potential respondents to the research study.

The expert panel screened actual survey items entered into Qualtrics™ software for ease of administration and were asked to identify unclear or ambiguous elements of the items (Heppner et al.). The style, formatting, and time allotment of the survey were taken into consideration as determined by panel recommendations. Each member of the expert panel offered valuable insight into the flow of the survey and recommended formatting changes to allow for easier administration.

Panelists were contacted individually by email and requested to participate. A link was included in the email to the survey instrument. The researcher's email address and phone number were provided if panelists elected to pursue further discussion regarding the instrument. Based on the expert panelists' feedback, changes in wording were made to enhance clarity.

Procedures

The University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research at the University of New Orleans approved the research and procedures for this study on January 24,

2013 (see Appendix A). After receiving approval, data were collected from school counselors listed in the ASCA online membership directory.

Data were collected anonymously via Qualtrics™ (www.Qualtrics.com), which is an on-line survey and data collection service. The *School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspectives Questionnaire* (SCP-FSPQ) was developed for use as an on-line survey through Qualtrics™.com. The creation tools and secure electronic link were created for respondents to access the survey. Although the total population of participants was identified via a membership directory before data collection, the SCP-FSPQ did not contain questions that could reveal the identity of individual respondents. Furthermore, the data collection tool, Qualtrics™, did not provide any possibility for identifying participants.

As was more fully explained in the section on participants, 9500 randomly selected members of ASCA were sent the SCP-FSPQ via email. The request for participation contained informed consent for participation in the study, a short description of the research purpose, a statement about consent to voluntarily participate, anonymity of response, and an anonymous link to the survey. When potential respondents followed the anonymous link to the survey, the statement of informed consent to participate was presented and participants indicated consent to participate before proceeding to the survey items.

Those who did not remove themselves from the mailing list and had not begun the survey (see Appendix C) received a reminder two weeks after the initial invitation. A second reminder was sent at four weeks after the initial invitation to those who did not remove themselves from the mailing list and had not begun the survey (see Appendix D). At the end of the data collection period, all ASCA members in the random sample received an electronic communication thanking them for their participation and providing the option to receive results after data

collection (see Appendix E). As an incentive to increase response rate, there were two random drawings, each for a \$50 gift certificate to amazon.com, after the research was completed. To be included in the random drawing, participants had to click the link that directed them to a separate page in which they provided their email addresses. The two winners were notified via email and provided with the gift certificate code after data collection was complete.

All data were housed securely on-line through a password-protected account with Qualtrics™ software (Qualtrics™ Lab Inc., 2010). Once data collection was complete, data extraction occurred via converting the Qualtrics™ data into a *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS-20; 2011) file for use in analyses. In accordance with APA regulations, data will be kept secure and confidential for at least three years after the study is complete.

Research Questions and Data Analysis

To identify variables that can influence the extent to which family systems strategies are being used by school counselors and contribute to how frequently a family systems perspective is used in the school setting, data analysis included descriptive statistics, ANOVA, *t*-test, Pearson correlation, and content and thematic analysis. School counselors' frequency of usage, level of preparedness, level of competence, and level of importance were the dependent variables, whereas the independent variables were methods of learning a family systems perspective, type of degree program, and building level.

Due to a large number of comparisons in all the analyses, a conservative alpha level of $p < .01$ was employed to control for the possibility of a Type 1 error (Huck, 2009). A confirmatory reliability estimate was made after data collection was completed, using Cronbach's alpha in a post hoc analysis. For Section II, preparedness, items 17.1 -17.13, internal consistency was high (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.91$); section II, competency, items 18.1-18.14, internal consistency was high

(Cronbach's $a=0.92$); and section II, importance, items 19.1-19.12, internal consistency was high (Cronbach's $a=0.90$). Cronbach's alpha indicated a high level of internal reliability on all survey items. The research questions and corresponding methods of data analysis are presented below.

Research Question 1

Are there significant group differences between school counselors' type of degree program and their frequency of usage of a family systems perspective?

Data Analysis: t-test was used to compare survey items (# 7 and # 12).

Research Question 2

Are there significant group differences between school counselors' type of degree program and their perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective?

Data Analysis: t-test was used to compare survey items (# 7 and # 17.1-17.13).

Research Question 3

Is there a significant relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective (MFT course, internship experiences, post-degree supervision received from systems-oriented supervisor, workshop/seminar, research/reading, consultation) and their perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective?

Data Analysis: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to compare survey items (# 13 and # 17.1-17.13).

Research Question 4

Are there significant group differences between school counselors' type of degree program and their perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective?

Data Analysis: t-test was used to compare survey items (# 7 and # 18.1-18.14).

Research Question 5

Is there a significant relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective (MFT course, internship experiences, post-degree supervision received from systems-oriented supervisor, workshop/seminar, research/reading, consultation) and their perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective?

Data Analysis: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to compare survey items (# 13 and # 18.1-18.14).

Research Question 6

Are there significant group differences in school counselors' type of degree program and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective?

Data Analysis: t-test was used to compare survey items (# 7 and # 19.1-19.12).

Research Question 7

Is there a significant relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective (MFT course, internship experiences, post-degree supervision received from systems-oriented supervisor, workshop/seminar, research/reading, consultation) and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective?

Data Analysis: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to compare survey items (# 13 and # 19.1-19.12).

Research Question 8

Are there significant group differences in school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and their building level (i.e., elementary, middle or junior high school, high school, K-12)?

Data Analysis: ANOVA was used to determine the relationship between school counselors' frequency of usage of a family system perspective and their building level items (# 13 and # 10).

Research Question 9

What is the relationship between school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and the independent variables of perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competency, perceived level of importance, and method of learning?

Data Analysis: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine survey items (# 12 and # 17.1-17.13, #18.1-18.14, #19.1-19.12, and #13).

Research Question 10

What are the perceived barriers to school counselors' use of a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting?

Data Analysis: A post hoc procedure was employed to analyze the qualitative data collected from the free form field included on the survey (item # 20), and was analyzed using content and thematic analysis according to procedures suggested by Creswell (2009).

Summary

This chapter contained a description of the methodology that was used in this study, including subsections that detailed the purpose of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, participants, instrumentation and instrument development, data collection, and data analysis. The methodology for this study was designed to examine the relationship between school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and their methods of learning a family systems perspective, their perceptions of preparedness, their perceptions of competency, and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using family systems perspectives.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter contains two primary sections. In the first section, the educational preparation in a family systems perspective and work settings of the participants are described. The second section includes a summary of the data analysis, procedures, and results. The data are organized by research questions. The purposes of this study were to understand the extent to which family systems strategies are being used by school counselors and which variables contribute to how frequently a family systems perspective is used in the school setting. School counselors' frequency of usage, perceived level of preparedness, level of competence, and level of importance were the dependent variables, whereas the independent variables were methods of learning a family systems perspective, type of degree program, and building level. The study further sought to explore school counselors' perceived barriers to implementing a family systems perspective in the school setting. In this chapter, results of the data analysis are reported.

Data were collected using the *School Counselors' Perspectives of Family Systems Perspectives Questionnaire* (SCP-FSPQ), a 56-item instrument developed from a review of the *AAMFT Accreditation Standards Manual*, *ASCA Code of Ethics*, *ACA Code of Ethics*, *CACREP Accreditation Standards and Procedures Manual*, and *AAMFT Core Competencies*, as well as professional literature related to school counselors and family counseling. The SCP-FSPQ was used to examine the following: (a) the relationship between school counselors' type of degree program and their frequency of usage of a family systems perspective, (b) the relationship between school counselors' type of degree program and their perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective, (c) the relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective and their perceived level of preparedness to

use a family systems perspective, (d) the relationship between school counselors' type of degree program and their perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective, (e) the relationship between school counselors' type of degree program and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to a family systems perspective, (f) the relationship between school counselors' methods of learning and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to a family systems perspective, (g) the relationship between school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and their building level, (h) the relationship between the frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and the perceived level of preparedness, competency, and importance, and (i) what barriers, if any, school counselors perceive prevent them from using a family system perspective in the school setting.

Descriptive Data of Sample

Participants reported on the building level where they are primarily employed, type of school setting, how frequently they use a family systems perspective, the methods by which they learned a family systems perspective, and the family systems perspective they use most frequently when working with youth in the school setting. Participants also reported whether a family systems course was a requirement in their training as well as whether they believe a family systems course should be a requirement in the school counseling track.

Respondents were asked to report their current employment by building level in which they are primarily employed. The response options were elementary, middle or junior high school, high school, K-12, and other (see Table 5). Over one-third of the respondents reported working at the high school level (37.1%), whereas 28.5% reported working at the elementary level, and 25.6% stated that they worked in a middle or junior high school. Only 5.6% reported working in a K-12 school setting, and 3.2% selected other as their current work setting.

Table 5*Participants' Building Level by Frequency (n=657) and Percentage*

| Variable | n | % |
|------------------------------|-----|------|
| Building Level | | |
| Elementary | 187 | 28.5 |
| Middle or Junior High School | 168 | 25.6 |
| High School | 244 | 37.1 |
| K-12 | 37 | 5.6 |
| Other | 21 | 3.2 |

Another characteristic of current work setting which participants were asked to report was type of school system (see Table 6). The response choices were public (non-charter), public (charter), private, parochial, and other. The overwhelming majority of respondents (84.3%) were from public (non-charter) school systems. Participants who worked in public (charter) schools comprised 6.1% of the sample. The respondents from private and parochial schools comprised less than 10% of the sample, with 5.5% reporting private and 2.7% reporting parochial setting. Approximately 1.5% of the sample selected the category “other” as the type of school in which they were primarily employed.

Table 6*Type of School Setting by Frequency (n=657) and Percentage*

| Variable | n | % |
|----------------------|-----|------|
| School Setting | | |
| Public (Non-Charter) | 554 | 84.3 |
| Public (Charter) | 40 | 6.1 |
| Private | 36 | 5.5 |
| Parochial | 18 | 2.7 |
| Other | 9 | 1.4 |

Participants were asked to report on their practice patterns in their school counseling work related to a family systems perspective. Participants reported on how frequently they used a

family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting (see Table 7). Nearly one-third (31.5%) of the respondents reported using a family systems perspective daily, and a similar percentage (30.9%) reported using a family systems perspective several times a week. By comparison, smaller percentages reported using a family perspective with less frequency: 7.8% reported using a family systems perspective once a week, 7.3% reported using a family systems perspective less than once a week, 5% reported using this perspective once a month, 1.2% reported that they used a family systems perspective once in a 9-week period, 1.5% reported once a semester, and .5% reported once a year. Less than 15 % (14.3%) of the participants reported they do not use a family systems perspective.

Table 7

Participants' Usage of a Family Systems Perspective by Frequency (n=657)and Percentage

| Variable | n | % |
|--|-----|------|
| Frequency of Use | | |
| Daily | 207 | 31.5 |
| Several Times a Week | 203 | 30.9 |
| Once a Week | 51 | 7.8 |
| Less Than Once a Week | 48 | 7.3 |
| Once a Month | 33 | 5.0 |
| Once in a 9-week Period | 8 | 1.2 |
| Once a Semester (i.e., two 9-week periods) | 10 | 1.5 |
| Once a Year | 3 | 5.0 |
| I do not Use a Family Systems Perspective | 94 | 14.3 |

Respondents were asked to report on their method of learning a family systems perspective (see Table 8). Participants were asked to check all that applied to the method of learning a family systems perspective. Almost half (46.3%) reported they learned about a family systems perspective through taking a family systems course. Nearly one in four participants (39.7%) indicated that they learned about a family systems perspective in their

practicum/internship experience. Only 5.9% of the sample reported learning during supervision with a systems-oriented supervisor. Fifteen percent (15 %) reported learning through consultation. Research/reading was a method of learning selected by more than one-third (36.4%) of the participants; whereas conferences (21.5%) and workshops/ seminars (18.1%) were selected less frequently. Approximately 13% of the population reported “other” as the method of learning a family systems perspective, and 13% of respondents reported not learning a family systems perspective at all.

Table 8
Participants’ Method of Learning a Family Systems Perspective by Frequency (n=657) and Percentage

| Variable | n | % |
|---|-----|------|
| Method of Learning * | | |
| Family System Course | 304 | 43.6 |
| Workshop/Seminar | 119 | 18.1 |
| Practicum/Internship Experience | 261 | 39.7 |
| Post-Degree Supervision received from Systems-Oriented Supervisor | 39 | 5.9 |
| Research/Reading | 239 | 36.4 |
| Conferences | 141 | 21.5 |
| Consultation | 99 | 15.1 |
| Other | 87 | 13.2 |
| I have not learned about Family Systems Perspectives | 89 | 13.5 |

*Participants were asked to choose all that applied to them; therefore, resulting frequencies are greater than the number of participants

Participants were asked to report what family systems perspective they use most frequently when working with youth in the school setting (see Table 9). Over half (53.1%) of participants reported using solution focused brief therapy. Other perspectives were reported less frequently, including cognitive-behavior family therapy (14.6%), general systems theory (5.8%), “other” (4%), Bowen (2.6%), narrative (2.1%), structural (1.4%), strategic (0.9%), and

experiential family therapy (0.8%). Approximately 14% of respondents reported they do not use a family systems perspective.

Table 9

Family Systems Perspective Used Most by Frequency (n=657) and Percentage

| Variable | n | % |
|---|-----|------|
| Family Systems Perspective | | |
| Bowen | 17 | 2.6 |
| Cognitive-Behavior Family Therapy | 96 | 14.6 |
| Experiential Family Therapy | 5 | 0.8 |
| General Systems Theory | 38 | 5.8 |
| Narrative | 14 | 2.1 |
| Psychoanalytic Family Therapy | 2 | 0.3 |
| Solution Focused Brief Therapy | 349 | 53.1 |
| Strategic | 6 | 0.9 |
| Structural | 9 | 1.4 |
| Symbolic Experiential | 2 | 0.3 |
| Other | 26 | 4.0 |
| I do not use a family systems Perspective | 93 | 14.2 |

The final characteristics of their learning experience about which participants were asked to respond was whether a family systems course was a requirement in their school counseling program (see Table 10) and whether participants believed a family systems course should be a requirement in the school counseling track (see Table 11).

Table 10

Family Systems Course a Requirement by Frequency (n=657) and Percentage

| Variable | n | % |
|---------------------------------|-----|------|
| Yes | 261 | 39.7 |
| No | 373 | 56.8 |
| Degree not in School Counseling | 23 | 3.5 |

Slightly more than half of respondents (56.8%) indicated that a family systems course was not a requirement in their school counseling program, while 39.7% indicated a family

systems course was a requirement in their school counseling program. The remaining 3.5% indicated that their degree was not in school counseling.

Table 11

Family Systems Course should be a Requirement by Frequency (n=657) and Percentage

| Variable | n | % |
|----------|-----|------|
| Yes | 572 | 87.1 |
| No | 85 | 12.9 |

A strong majority of participants (87.1%) reported they think a family systems course should be a requirement for the school counseling track, while 12.9% reported they did not believe a family systems course should be a requirement.

Analysis of Research Questions

Descriptive statistics were computed to describe school counselors' perceived level of preparedness, competence, importance, methods of learning, and frequency of usage of a family systems perspective (see Table 12). School counselors' perceptions of preparedness were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with anchored responses at each point. The possible responses for perceptions of preparedness include 1 - *Strongly Agree*, 2 - *Agree*, 3 - *Unsure*, 4 - *Disagree*, 5 - *Strongly Disagree*. A lower mean score indicates that school counselors felt better prepared. A higher mean score indicates that school counselors felt less prepared. School counselors' perceptions of competence were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with anchored responses at each point. The possible responses for perceptions of competence include 1 - *Strongly Agree*, 2 - *Agree*, 3 - *Unsure*, 4 - *Disagree*, 5 - *Strongly Disagree*. A lower mean score indicates that school counselors felt more competence. A higher mean score indicates that school counselors felt less competence. School counselors' perceptions of importance were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with anchored responses at each point. The possible responses for

perceptions of importance include 1 - *Strongly Agree*, 2 - *Agree*, 3 - *Unsure*, 4 - *Disagree*, 5 - *Strongly Disagree*. A lower mean score indicates that school counselors ascribe more importance. A higher mean score indicates that school counselors ascribe less importance. Methods of learning were coded 1-7. The possible responses were tallied; therefore, scores ranged from 1 method of learning to 7 methods of learning. Frequency of use was coded 1-9. A lower mean score indicates that school counselors use a family systems perspective more frequently. A higher mean score indicates that school counselors use a family systems perspective less frequently.

Pearson product moment correlations for continuous variables, *t*-test for dichotomous variables, and a one-way ANOVA for multiple group comparisons were performed among the independent and dependent variables. Ten research questions were constructed to examine these relationships, as well as the relationship between frequency of usage and school setting, type of degree and school counselors' perceived barriers to usage of a family systems perspective. Results of the analyses of these research questions are presented in the following section.

Table 12
Descriptive Statistics of Groups

| Variable | n | Minimum | Maximum | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---------------------|-----|---------|---------|----------|-----------|
| Preparedness | 657 | 13.00 | 65.00 | 30.73 | 8.28 |
| Competence | 657 | 14.00 | 70.00 | 28.34 | 7.94 |
| Importance | 657 | 12.00 | 52.00 | 24.03 | 6.61 |
| Methods of Learning | 657 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 2.10 | 1.41 |
| Frequency of Use | 657 | 1.00 | 9.00 | 3.21 | 2.73 |

Research Question 1

Research question 1 examined the group differences between school counselors' type of degree program and their frequency of usage of a family systems perspective. A *t*-test was used

to analyze research question 1. Survey item 7 asked participants to report the type of degree program from which they graduated. Response choices were: clinical mental health, marriage and family therapy, school counseling, social work, and other. Because the majority of the sample reported holding a school counseling degree, the degree items were collapsed into two categories of school counseling degree (n=582) and other degree (n=75) for analysis. Survey item 12 asked respondents to report how often they use a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting by selecting one of the following options: daily, several times a week, once a week, less than once a week, once a month, once in a 9 week period, once in a semester, once a year, and do not use a family system perspective.

Findings. A significant difference was found, $t(655) = 3.04, p = .003$, two-tailed, between participants with a school counseling degree and participants with other degrees. It is important to note frequency of usage scores are reverse coded. Therefore, a greater mean score indicates less frequency of usage of a family systems perspective. The results indicate that participants with a school counseling degree used the family systems perspective significantly less frequently ($M = 3.30; SD = 2.79$) than those who held other degrees ($M = 2.51; SD = 2.04$).

Research Question 2

Research question 2 examined the group differences between school counselors' type of degree program and their perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective.

A *t*-test was used to analyze research question 2. Survey item 7 asked participants to report the type of degree program from which they graduated by selecting: clinical mental health, marriage and family therapy, school counseling, social work, or other. Because the majority of the sample reported holding a school counseling degree, the degree items were collapsed into two categories of school counseling degree (n=582) and other degree (n=75) for analysis. Item

17.1-17.13 asked participants to assess their perceived level of preparedness to employ a family systems perspective by selecting one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Findings. A significant difference was found: $t(655) 3.35, p = .001$, two-tailed, between participants with a school counseling degree and participants with other degrees. It is important to note that level of preparedness scores are reverse coded. Therefore, a greater mean score indicates a lower perceived level of preparedness. The results indicate that participants with a school counseling degree felt less prepared ($M = 31.13; SD = 8.35$) compared to those with other degrees ($M = 27.73; SD = 7.15$).

Research Question 3

Research question 3 examined the relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective and their perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze research question 3. Survey item 13 asked participants to report how they learned about a family systems perspective by selecting all that apply of the following options: family systems course, workshop/seminar, practicum/internship experience, post-degree supervision experience received from systems-oriented supervisor, research/reading, conferences, consultation, other, and have not learned about family systems perspective. Item 17.1-17.13 asked respondents to assess their perceived level of preparedness to employ the family systems perspective by selecting one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Findings. A significant relationship was found: $r(n=657) = .279, p < .000$, two-tailed, between participants' methods of learning and perceived level of preparedness. It is important to note that level of preparedness scores are reverse coded. The results indicate that the more

methods of learning counselors had employed, the more they felt prepared to use a family systems perspective.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 examined group differences between school counselors' type of degree program and their perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective.

A *t*-test was used to analyze research question 4. Survey item 7 asked participants to report what type of degree program they graduated from by selecting: clinical mental health, marriage and family therapy, school counseling, social work, and other. Because the majority of the sample reported holding a school counseling degree, the degree items were collapsed into two categories of school counseling degree ($n=582$) and other degree ($n=75$) for analysis. Item 18.1-18.14 asked participants to assess their perceived level of competency to use the family systems perspective by selecting one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Findings. A significant difference was found, $t(655) = 3.23, p = .001$, two-tailed, between participants with a school counseling degree and participants with other degrees. It is important to note that level of competency scores are reverse coded. Therefore, a greater mean score indicates a lower perceived level of competency. The results indicate that participants with a school counseling degree felt less competent ($M = 28.69; SD = 8.01$) compared to those with other degrees ($M = 25.57; SD = 6.82$).

Research Question 5

Research question 5 examined the relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective and their perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze

research question 5. Survey item 7 asked participants to report how they learned about a family systems perspective by selecting all that apply of the following options: family systems course, workshop/seminar, practicum/internship experience, post-degree supervision experience received from systems-oriented supervisor, research/reading, conferences, consultation, other, and have not learned about family systems perspective. Item 18.1-18.14 asked respondents to assess their perceived level of competence to use the family systems perspective by selecting one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Findings. A significant relationship was found, $r(n=657) = 2.64, p < .000$, two-tailed, between participants' methods of learning and perceived level of competence. It is important to note that level of competence scores are reverse coded. The results indicate that the more methods of learning counselors had employed, the more they felt competent to use a family systems perspective.

Research Question 6

Research question 6 examined the relationship between school counselors' type of degree program and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective. A *t*-test was used to analyze research question 6. Survey item 7 asked participants to report what type of degree program they graduated from by selecting: clinical mental health, marriage and family therapy, school counseling, social work, and other. Because the majority of the sample reported holding a school counseling degree, the degree items were collapsed into two categories of school counseling degree ($n=582$) and other degree ($n=75$) for analysis. Item 19.1-19.14 asked participants to assess the perceived level of importance they ascribe to use the

family systems perspective by selecting one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Findings. A significant difference was found, $t(655) = 3.04, p = .002$, two-tailed, between participants with a school counseling degree and participants with other degrees. It is important to note that level of importance scores are reverse coded. Therefore, a greater mean score indicates a lower perceived level of importance. The results indicate that participants with a school counseling degree perceived a family systems perspective as less important ($M = 24.31; SD = 6.67$) compared to those with other degrees ($M = 21.85; SD = 5.67$).

Research Question 7

Research question 7 examined the relationship between school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze research question 7. Survey item 13 asked participants to report how they learned about a family systems perspective by selecting all that apply of the following options: family systems course, workshop/seminar, practicum/internship experience, post-degree supervision experience received from systems-oriented supervisor, research/reading, conferences, consultation, other, and have not learned about family systems perspective. Item 19.1-19.12 asked respondents to assess the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using the family systems perspective by selecting one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Findings. A significant relationship was found, $r(n=657) = .238, p = < .000$, two-tailed, between participants' methods of learning and perceived level of importance. It is important to note that level of importance scores are reverse coded. The results indicate that the more methods

of learning counselors had employed, the higher level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective.

Research Question 8

Research question 8 examined the relationship between school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and their building level. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to analyze the research question 8. Survey item 12 asked respondents to report how often they use a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting by selecting one of the following options: daily, several times a week, once a week, less than once a week, once a month, once in a 9 week period, once in a semester, once a year, and do not use a family system perspective. Item 10 asked respondents to report in what building level they are primarily employed by selecting one of the following options: elementary, middle or junior high school, high school, K-12, or other.

Findings. No significant difference was found in the means between the building levels, $F(4, 652) = 2.157, p = .07$. Thus, there were no differences among building levels in their scores on frequency of use. Counselors were similar in their frequency of usage of a family systems perspective regardless of whether they worked in an elementary, middle, or high school setting.

Research Question 9

Research question 9 examined the relationship between school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and their perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competency, perceived level of importance, and method of learning a family systems perspective.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze research question 9. Survey item 12 asked respondents to report how often they use a family systems perspective

when working with youth in the school setting by selecting one of the following options: daily, several times a week, once a week, less than once a week, once a month, once in a 9 week period, once in a semester, once a year, and do not use a family system perspective. Item 17.1-17.13 asked participants to assess their perceived level of preparedness to employ a family systems perspective by selecting one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree. Item 18.1-18.14 asked respondents to assess their perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective by selecting one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree. Item 19.1-19.12 asked respondents to assess the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective by selecting one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree. Survey item 13 asked participants to report how they learned about a family systems perspective by selecting all that apply of the following options: family systems course, workshop/seminar, practicum/internship experience, post-degree supervision experience received from systems-oriented supervisor, research/reading, conferences, consultation, other, and have not learned about family systems perspective.

Findings. A significant relationship was found, $r(n=657) = .29, p < .000$, two-tailed, between participants' frequency of use and perceived level of preparedness. The results indicate the higher the perceived level of preparedness, the more frequently these school counselors used a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. A significant relationship was found, $r(657) = .30, p < .000$, two-tailed, between participants' frequency of use and perceived level of competence. The results indicate the higher the perceived level of competence, the more frequently the participants used a family systems perspective. A significant relationship was found, $r(n=657) = .26, p < .000$, two-tailed, between participants'

frequency of use and perceived level of importance. This indicates the higher the perceived level of importance school counselors ascribed to a family systems perspective, the more frequently they used a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. A significant negative relationship was found, $r(n=657) = -.31, p < .000$, two-tailed, between participants' frequency of use and number of methods of learning. The results indicate the more frequency of use, the less engagement in various methods of learning a family systems perspective.

Results of Responses to the Open Ended Comment Question

At the conclusion of the survey, in a free response item, participants were asked, "What are the perceived barriers to school counselors' use of a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting?" The qualitative data collected from the free form field were analyzed using content and thematic analyses according to procedures suggest by Creswell (2009). Statements were divided into themes and perspectives, and then were coded using *in vivo* and open codes. Codes were then grouped into thematic categories, and linked to survey items as a method of providing more insight into the quantitative data. Of the 657 respondents who chose to complete the survey and return the SCP-FSPQ, 79% chose to respond to the open ended question. The responses were analyzed resulting in the identification of six themes.

One of the most prominent themes to emerge from this item involved lack of family systems training. Of the 519 counselors who chose to answer this item, 23% ($n = 120$) stated that school counselors have a lack of knowledge in a family systems perspective and are not able to engage the family in counseling. A similar theme emerged regarding lack of participation; 18% of respondents ($n = 96$) reported a lack of parental involvement in the counseling process. Other noteworthy themes included 13% ($n = 70$) reporting lack of support from administration for

using a family systems perspective, 18% (n = 94) of participants reporting time constraints in providing family systems counseling, and 3% (n = 16) identifying confidentiality issues as obstacles. Also of interest was that 12% (n = 60) of counselors reported cultural issues as barriers to implementing family counseling. Finally, 2% (n = 10) reported having no barriers to implementation of a family systems perspective in the school setting, and 1% (n = 5) participants stated they would not use a family systems perspective at all. The six themes and supporting quotes are listed in Table 13.

Table 13
Themes of Open-Ended Question

| Theme | n | Selected Supporting Quotes |
|---|--------------|--|
| Lack of knowledge in family systems perspective | 120 (23%) | <p><i>"Lack of training and inability to communicate with families."</i></p> <p><i>"Lack of knowledge of the family systems perspective as it should be used."</i></p> <p><i>"I do not know what family systems perspective is."</i></p> <p><i>"I have not been exposed to the family systems perspective in any of my training as a school counselor."</i></p> <p><i>"Not trained to any extent. I would not know where to start."</i></p> <p><i>"Most school counselors are not trained as family therapist and do not have the necessary skills unless they have undertaken additional, outside training or certification."</i></p> |

Themes of Open-Ended Question (Continued)

| Theme | n | Selected Supporting Quotes |
|------------------------------|-------------|--|
| Lack of parental involvement | 96 (18%) | <p><i>"Families who are not readily available to meet with or communicate over the phone. We have a lot of families who do not want to partake in any type of counseling."</i></p> <p><i>"It is often difficult to get "buy in" from families. The secondary student is often isolated from a family approach because their parents will not participate. Students with the highest risks are playing out what is going on in the family and the families don't want their "stuff" uncovered."</i></p> <p><i>"Getting the family involved....a lot of our parents can't miss work."</i></p> <p><i>"Having parents who are willing to make changes to the family system for the benefit of their child."</i></p> <p><i>"Limited reach to families due to the setting (very limited home visits) so getting whole family involved is difficult."</i></p> <p><i>"Unwilling parents. Sometimes the families are not "on board". Sometimes the family dynamic encourages a "don't share" attitude with their children."</i></p> |

Themes of Open-Ended Question (Continued)

| Theme | n | Selected Supporting Quotes |
|--------------------------------|-------------|--|
| Lack of administrative support | 70 (13%) | <p><i>“Most high school counselors are registrars and office assistants. They do very little counseling. If I do counseling it would be unacceptable for me to involve certain parents. School systems support the community cultures which support the school system academics.”</i></p> <p><i>“I rarely hold family counseling session in a therapeutic manner. I met with families regularly but it is academic based or more like a parent teach conference. School counselors in general are often pulled to do so many other things that families interested in family sessions often have to be referred to an outside agency.”</i></p> <p><i>“Lack of administration backing in support of counseling.”</i></p> <p><i>“I do not provide intensive or regular counseling support to my students. Caseload is too high and my responsibilities too many to be able to provide quality individual counseling let alone family counseling.”</i></p> <p><i>“Our states comprehensive school counseling model calls for me to refer students and families to outside agencies for ongoing therapy.”</i></p> <p><i>“State and administrative philosophy is that students come to school to learn and that home issues should remain at home.”</i></p> |

Themes of Open-Ended Question (Continued)

| Theme | n | Selected Supporting Quotes |
|------------------------------------|-------------|--|
| Time constraints in implementation | 94 (18%) | <p><i>“The biggest obstacle that I have faced has to be time. My caseload is comprised of over 500 students; I do not have the time to do more than SFBT overtimes before referring out.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very often, there is not enough time to do this work and a school setting is not a therapeutic environment.”</i></p> <p><i>“Time to meet with students and family can be the most difficult problem as a counselor. Difficulty for students to miss class and parents to miss work during school hours.”</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t have a lot of time with students so I feel like I can’t always implement exactly what I want. I tend to think about things in a systemic way and use that to structure what I am doing but I don’t always have enough time with kids to do exactly what I want.”</i></p> <p><i>“I typically do not have as much time to spend with students as I would if I were in a private practice setting, this makes it very difficult to include the family members when I feel it would be beneficial.”</i></p> <p><i>“The issue of time available for school counselors is critical. In our new emphasis on data-driven programs, the time available for family interactions is diminished in favor of data-driven activities involving goals, programming and planning. Add to this is the difficulty in finding a mutually available time with more than the student when she is in school. The counselor is left with the knowledge and desire to use family systems in helping the student, but having to strategize using individual interactions with the student and parent as data for interventions and planning with to help her.”</i></p> |

Themes of Open-Ended Question (Continued)

| Theme | n | Selected Supporting Quotes |
|------------------------|------------|---|
| Confidentiality Issues | 16 (3%) | <p><i>“FERPA”</i></p> <p><i>“School counselors are not family therapist and we often times have blurred lines of confidentiality.”</i></p> <p><i>“Difficulty getting releases to engage families in therapy.”</i></p> <p><i>“Parents desire to keep family matters private and not known to the school community.”</i></p> <p><i>“Confidentiality issues with teachers and administrators.”</i></p> <p><i>“Confidentiality between family members and student.”</i></p> |

Themes of Open-Ended Question (Continued)

| Theme | n | Selected Supporting Quotes |
|-----------------|-------------|---|
| Cultural Issues | 60 (12%) | <p data-bbox="667 317 1406 422"><i>“Cultural differences and language barriers. Schools are not “family friendly” in an obvious way. It is not part of the built in culture of many schools. “</i></p> <p data-bbox="667 495 1406 600"><i>“Cultural differences in families. Working in international schools creates significant challenges for school counselors. We work with so many families from so many places.”</i></p> <p data-bbox="667 674 1406 863"><i>“The vast majority of our families have one or both parents working full-time in manual/agricultural labor, and while they will attend school conferences or conferences regarding dire needs or circumstances, they lose pay any time they are not at work.”</i></p> <p data-bbox="667 894 1406 999"><i>“I work in a poor rural area, and it is often difficult to get the parents/families to participate in important discussions about their child.”</i></p> <p data-bbox="667 1073 1406 1262"><i>“Language barriers, cultural barriers all the time. Parents at my school have not made good decisions in their lives, and they encourage the same behavior from their children. Education takes a back seat to everything else in most of my student’s homes.”</i></p> <p data-bbox="667 1335 1406 1482"><i>“I am working in a school district in a high poverty area. It is very difficult to involve parents, because I have a hard time reaching them by phone. When I mail letters, I most often do not get a response to them.”</i></p> |

Summary of Findings

In summary, data analysis yielded the following results. Group differences were examined between school counselors' type of degree program and their perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competence, perceived level of importance, and frequency of usage of a family systems perspective. Because the majority of the sample reported holding a school counseling degree, the degree items were collapsed into two categories of school counseling degree (n=582) and other degree (n=75) for analysis.

A significant difference was found, $t(655) = 3.35, p = .001$, between participants with a school counseling degree and participants with other degrees in regards to perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective. The results indicated that participants with a school counseling degree felt less prepared to use a family systems perspective than those who held other degrees (e.g., marriage and family therapy, mental health).

A significant difference was found, $t(655) = 3.23, p = .001$, between participants with a school counseling degree and participants with other degrees in regards to perceived level of competence to use a family systems perspective. This result indicated that participants with a school counseling degree felt less competent to use a family systems perspective than participants with other degrees (clinical mental health, marriage and family therapy, social work).

A significant relationship was found, $t(655) = 3.04, p = .002$, between participants with a school counseling degree and participants with other degrees in regards to perceived level of importance they ascribe to a family systems perspective. The results indicated that participants with a school counseling degree perceived a family systems perspective as less important

compared to participants with other degrees (clinical mental health, marriage and family therapy, social work).

Lastly, a significant relationship was found, $t(655) = 3.04, p = .003$, between participants with a school counseling degree and participants with other degrees in regards to frequency of usage of a family systems perspective. The results indicated that participants with a school counseling degree used the family systems perspective significantly less frequently than those who held other degrees (clinical mental health, marriage and family therapy, social work).

Next, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective and their perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competence, perceived level of importance, and frequency of usage of a family systems perspective. A positive correlation was found, $r(n=657) = .279, p < .000$, between the participants' methods of learning and their perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective. This indicates that the more methods of learning school counselors had employed, the more they felt prepared to use a family systems perspective. A positive correlation was found, $r(n=657) = 2.64, p < .000$, between the participants' methods of learning and their perceived level of competence to use a family systems perspective. This indicates that the more methods of learning school counselors had employed, the more they felt competent to use a family systems perspective. Furthermore, a positive correlation was found, $r(n=657) = .238, p < .000$, between the participants' methods of learning and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective. The findings revealed the more methods of learning school counselors had employed, the more importance they ascribe to usage of a family systems perspective. Lastly, a negative correlation was found, $r(n=657) = -.31, p < .000$, between participants' methods of learning and their frequency of usage of a family systems

perspective. The results indicated that the more frequently school counselors used a family systems perspective the fewer methods of learning they had employed.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was also used to analyze school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and their perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competence, and perceived level of importance they ascribe to a family systems perspective. A positive correlation was found, $r(n=657) = .29, p < .000$, between the participants' frequency of usage and their perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective. This indicates the higher the participants' level of preparedness, the more frequently they used a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. A positive correlation was found, $r(n=657) = .30, p < .000$, between the participants' frequency of usage and their perceived level of competency to use a family systems perspective. This indicates the higher the participants' level of competence, the more frequently they used a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. A positive correlation was found, $r(n=657) = .26, p < .000$, between the participants' frequency of usage and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective. The findings indicate the higher the participants' perceived level of importance ascribed to a family systems perspective, the more frequently they used a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to analyze school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and the building level in which they are primarily employed. No significant difference was found in the means between the building levels, $F(4, 652) = 2.16, p = .07$. This indicated there were no differences among building levels

(elementary, middle or junior high school, high school, K-12, other) on school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective.

The qualitative item in the survey provided information about perceived barriers to school counselors' use of a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. Statements were divided into themes and perspectives, and then were coded. Codes were then grouped into thematic categories, and linked to survey items as a method of providing more insight into the quantitative data. Of the 657 respondents who chose to complete the survey and return the SCP-FSPQ, 79% chose to respond to the open ended question. The responses were analyzed, resulting in the identification of six themes. Most commonly, school counselors indicated that lack of knowledge of a family systems perspective, lack of parental involvement, and lack of administrative support were significant obstacles faced in the school setting. Furthermore, time constraints in implementation, confidentiality issues, and cultural issues were reported as barriers to use of a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In Chapter 5, the results of this study are discussed. The purpose of the study and methodology, as well as results from the data analysis, are reviewed. Additionally, statistical results are discussed in relation to the literature on factors associated with school counselors and a family systems perspective. Limitations of the study are examined. Implications are suggested for school counselors, counselor education programs, and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Finally, suggestions for future research in the field of school counseling are offered.

Overview of the Study

Impacting the development of a child are two influential support systems: the family and the school. When these systems function together, the social, emotional and academic growth of the child are enhanced. Professional school counselors using a family systems perspective can serve as the liaison between the family, the school, and the child. When school counselors engage the family and school, they add significantly to the therapeutic options and treatment plans available to students (Nelson, 2006; Sherman, Shumsky & Rountree, 1994). Therefore, it is imperative for school counselors to be prepared and competent to navigate between these systems.

The purposes of this quantitative study were to determine the extent to which family systems strategies are being used by school counselors and which factors contribute to how frequently a family systems perspective is used in the school setting. Thus, I explored the extent to which school counselors' perceived family counseling to be important in the school setting, and explored the extent to which school counselors feel prepared and competent to use a family

systems perspective. Additionally, the methods by which school counselors learn a family systems perspective were identified as well as what they perceive as barriers that prevent them from using family systems approaches in the school setting.

Despite increased attention to family counseling and interventions in schools, there has been limited discourse regarding how to train school counselors to use a family systems approach (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). Terry (2002) has stated that future empirical research on how to prepare graduate students to work at the school-family interface and the impact of family systems training in school counselors' curriculum is essential. It was anticipated that the results of this study might contribute to the research base and support the need for counselor educators to provide school counselor trainees with a basic foundation in a family systems perspective. It was hoped that findings from this study would encourage accreditation bodies (e.g., CACREP) to consider requiring family systems courses in school counseling curriculums.

The sample for this research study was drawn from members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). ASCA membership is approximately 29,000 members (S. Wicks, personal communication, January 25, 2013). Of the approximately 29,000 ASCA members, 23,586 had made their email addresses available to ASCA. From the 23,586 email addresses, a national random sample of 9,500 professional school counselors was invited to participate in the study. Of the 9,500 email addresses that were randomly selected, 60 were returned as undeliverable. Of the 1227 participants who consented to participate, 435 reported they were not working as a school counselor and, thus, were not eligible to participate in this research study. Due to incomplete or unusable responses, listwise deletions were used to reduce the sample; the final sample included 657 participants. This represented a response rate of 6.92% of the original ASCA population, and 53.1% of those who consented to participate.

A survey, *School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspectives Questionnaire* (SCP-FSPQ) was created by me based on relevant professional literature, and an expert panel was used to screen items for content validity. The SCP-FSPQ was used to examine school counselors': (a) perceived level of preparedness to use a family systems perspective (b) perceived level of competency in using a family systems perspective (c) perceived level of importance of a family systems perspective, (d) frequency of usage of a family systems perspective in the school setting, (e) the methods of learning a family systems perspective, (f) whether school counselors believe a family systems course should be a requirement for the master's degree, and (g) what barriers, if any, school counselors perceive prevent them from using a family system perspective in the school setting.

Data analysis procedures included descriptive statistics, ANOVA, *t*-test, Pearson correlation, and content and thematic analysis. An alpha of .01 was set to reduce the likelihood of a Type 1 error.

Discussion of Findings

Bodenhorn (2005) asserted that establishing a positive collaboration with families requires skills and knowledge of the family system and that most school counselors are trained in a school based program and have limited mental health counseling experience and little to no family therapy experience. As reported by Holcomb-McCoy (2004), school counselors traditionally have been trained to work with students individually, in small groups, or in the classroom. School counselors often lack the training necessary to provide a family systems perspective (Keys, 1997; Magnuson & Norem, 1998; Nicoll, 1992; Velsor, 2000; Woody & Woody, 1994). This assertion supports a key assumption underlying this study: that school counselors should be equipped to understand the importance of a family systems perspective and

should be adequately prepared and competent to use a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting.

Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2004) were among the first researchers to empirically study school counselors' perceptions of the importance of utilizing a family systems perspective when working with the child and the family in the school. The present study further explored the extent to which school counselors perceive family counseling to be important in the school setting, and explored whether the extent to which school counselors feel prepared and competent to use a family systems perspective is related to the frequency of usage when working with youth in the school setting. The majority of the participants in this study reported holding a school counseling degree; therefore, for the purposes of analysis, the degree items were collapsed into two categories: school counselors ($n=582$), and other degrees ($n=75$).

Training in Family Systems Perspective

Results indicated that participants in this study who held a school counseling degree felt less prepared to use a family systems perspective than those who held other degrees, $t(655) = 3.35, p = .001$. Participants with school counseling degrees felt less competent to use a family systems perspective than those who held other degrees, $t(655) = 3.23, p = .001$. In addition, the results indicated that participants with a school counseling degree perceived a family systems perspective as less important compared to participants with other degrees, $t(655) = 3.04, p = .002$. Finally, a significant relationship was found, $t(655) = 3.04, p = .003$, in regards to frequency of use, indicating that participants with a school counseling degree used the family systems perspective significantly less frequently than those who held other degrees. This finding regarding frequency of use is interesting, considering that nearly one-third (31.5%) of the respondents reported using a family systems perspective daily, and a similar percentage (30.9%)

reported using a family systems perspective several times a week. School counselors who held their degrees in school counseling reported they are providing a family systems perspective in the school setting; however, these results indicate that they feel less prepared and less competent, and they ascribe less importance to a family systems perspective than those participants with other degrees.

As Paylo (2011) recommended, the school counselor's understanding of family systems is essential to meet the demands of an evolving profession and should be considered through the school counseling curriculum. Perusse, Goodnough, and Noel (2001) noted that, although CACREP delineates mandatory knowledge and skills for school counselors, the accrediting body does not suggest how curricular experiences are to be structured. Magnuson and Norman (1998) stated that school counselors are expected to consult and collaborate with families and community systems; yet, many counselor education programs only require clinically focused students to complete family systems courses. Of the school counselors who participated in this study, 65% reported they had graduated from a CACREP-accredited program, and over 55% reported that a family systems course was not a requirement in their school counseling program. These findings are consistent with those of Perusse and colleagues (2001), who indicated that over half (51.9%) of school counselors were not required to take a course in family counseling or a systems perspective, and only nine percent of programs required a couple and family counseling course that was designed specifically for school counseling students.

Bodenhorn (2005) suggested that counselor education programs may be placing school counselors at a disadvantage by allowing them to enter schools where they are expected to work with families without being adequately trained to incorporate a family systems approach with students and families. Results of the present study contributed to the knowledge base by

providing information about school counselors' methods of learning a family systems perspective and their perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competence, perceived level of importance, and frequency of usage of a family systems perspective. Results indicated that the more methods of learning a family systems perspective school counselors had employed, the more they felt prepared [$r(n=657) = .279, p < .000$] to use a family systems perspective, and the more competent [$r(n=657) = 2.64, p < .000$] they felt to use a family systems perspective. Additionally, a positive correlation was found, $r(n=657) = .238, p < .000$, indicating the more methods of learning school counselors employed, the more importance they ascribe to usage of a family systems perspective. Results of this study lend support to Bodenhorn's contention that school counselors need to be adequately trained to incorporate a family systems approach by indicating that, the more ways counselors learn about a family systems perspective the more they feel prepared and competent to use a family systems perspective, and the more importance they ascribe to usage of a family systems perspective.

It might be expected that increased training in a family systems perspective would result in increased usage of a family systems perspective in the school setting. However, an unexpected finding was a negative correlation, $r(n=657) = -.31, p < .000$, between participants' methods of learning and their frequency of usage of a family systems perspective. The results indicated that the more frequently school counselors used a family systems perspective, the fewer methods of learning they had employed. Although it seems logical to assume that more methods of learning would be positively correlated to more frequency of usage of a family systems perspective, the results do not support this assumption. More methods of learning were positively correlated with participants' perceptions of preparedness and competency to use a family systems perspective but not to their frequency of usage of a family systems perspective. Perhaps the impact of

different methods of learning varies; that is, perhaps some methods of learning may actually be associated with a decision not to use a family systems perspective. Further research into the differential impact of various methods of learning a family systems perspective is recommended.

Frequency of Use of Family Systems Perspective

A positive correlation was found between the participants' frequency of usage and their perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competence, and the perceived level of importance they ascribe to using a family systems perspective. These results indicated that the higher participants perceived their level of preparedness and the higher participants perceived their level of competence in a family systems perspective, the more frequently they used a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. In addition, the higher level of importance school counselors ascribed to a family systems perspective, the more frequently they used a family systems perspective, $r (n=657) = .26, p < .000$. Because no previous research has looked at the relationship between frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and the perceived level of preparedness, competence, and importance school counselors ascribe to a family systems perspective, this study makes a contribution to the literature by increasing our understanding of variables that may influence school counselors' use of a family systems perspective in the school setting.

Lastly, the present study investigated the frequency of usage of a family systems perspective and school counselors' primary building level. No significant difference was found in the means between building levels, $F (4, 652) = 2.16, p = .07$. In a previous study, Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2004) concluded that school counselors perceived their involvement in school-family-community partnerships as very important regardless of school level; however, elementary school counselors perceived their roles in school-family-community partnerships and

partnership programs to be more important in their schools than did high school counselors. By contrast, results of this study indicated there were no differences among building levels (elementary, middle or junior high school, high school, K-12, other) and school counselors' frequency of usage of a family systems perspective. Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2007) conducted further research on building levels and found that high school counselors perceived a higher level of barriers than middle or elementary school counselors, although school counselors across all school levels reported that too many counselor responsibilities and lack of time frequently hindered their involvement in school-family-community partnerships. This study further explored the barriers to implementation of a family systems perspective in the school setting, as is discussed in the following sub-section.

Barriers to Implementation

Responses to the qualitative item in the survey provided information about perceived barriers to school counselors' use of a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. The vast majority (79%) of the 657 respondents who chose to complete the survey and return the SCP-FSPQ chose to respond to the open-ended question. The responses were analyzed, resulting in the identification of six themes. Most commonly, school counselors indicated that lack of knowledge of a family systems perspective, lack of parental involvement, and lack of administrative support were significant obstacles faced in the school setting.

It has been suggested that school-family-community partnerships have increased the academic success of students (ASCA, 2010). In addition, research has shown school counselors consider their involvement in SFC partnerships to be important (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004, 2007). The results of this research study showed that the more methods of learning that school counselors had employed, the more importance they ascribed to a family systems

perspective. Furthermore, it was found that the more importance school counselors ascribed to family systems perspective, the more frequently they used a family systems perspective in the school setting. It might be inferred, then, that the greater school counselors' knowledge of a family systems perspective, the more importance they may ascribe to school-family-community partnerships. Lack of knowledge was identified by 23% (n=120) of school counselors who participated in this study as a barrier to using a family systems perspective. Some representative comments include:

"I have not been exposed to the family systems perspective in any of my training as a school counselor."

"Not trained to any extent. I would not know where to start."

"Most school counselors are not trained as family therapist and do not have the necessary skills unless they have undertaken additional, outside training or certification."

Cobia and Henderson (2007) contended that, for SFC partnerships to be effective, school counselors should have knowledge of systems theory to use as a framework for analysis, while utilizing a systemic view to foster full understanding of how and why people function the way they do in a school system. Of participants in this study, over 55% were not required to take a family systems course in their school counseling training program. It seems reasonable, then, to assume that if school counselors do not have knowledge of a family systems perspective, they will ascribe less importance to school-family-community partnerships and will be less likely to engage in school-family-community partnerships.

School and educational responses have reflected a shift in the view of children's problems from a focus on the individual student to a view in which problems are at least partially

located in social relationships, such as the family and other social institutions (Adelman, 1996; Freisen & Osher, 1996; Terry, 2003). As suggested by Spoth, Randall, and Shin (2008), parental intervention increases parenting competencies and reduces students' at risk behavior and is directly and positively associated with increased academic performance, through positive effects on school engagement. As previously stated, school counselors are in an ideal position to facilitate the continuation of this shift by establishing school-family partnerships to help children succeed academically (Downing, 1993; Nelson, 2006). The results of this study revealed 18% of school counselors (n = 96) reported a lack of parental involvement in the counseling process as a perceived barrier. It is possible that, if school counselors received more training in a family systems perspective, they might have a better understanding of means for increasing parental involvement in the counseling process and be better equipped to foster positive interactions among the school counselor, the family, and the school. Some examples of school counselors' comments related to lack of parental involvement as a barrier are listed below:

"Having parents who are willing to make changes to the family system for the benefit of their child."

"Limited reach to families due to the setting (very limited home visits) so getting whole family involved is difficult."

"Many parents are not comfortable with the school setting, and it is difficult to get them to come in to my office to facilitate the counseling course and outcome for the students."

"Lack of parental involvement. Resistance to the idea that the problem may lie in the family and not within the child"

In addition to lack of knowledge of a family systems perspective and lack of parental involvement, school counselors reported the barrier of lack of administrative support. Brott and

Myers (1999) contended that expectations of the school administrator, teachers, staff, other helping professionals, and community constituents influence the roles and functions that school counselors carry out on a daily basis. Mason and Perera-Diltz (2008) noted that considerable variations in duties exist among school counselors across building levels. In a separate study, Mason and Perera-Diltz (2010) concluded that some school administrators recommend duties that are inappropriate for school counselors. Lamie and Williamson (2004) suggested that reassigning inappropriate duties would be instrumental in changing outdated views of school counselors. Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2007) suggested that school counselor education programs will need to devise strategies to overcome barriers and train counselors to be proactive in defining their own roles in the school setting. In this study, 13% (n=70) of respondents reported lack of support from administration as a barrier to using a family systems perspective in the school setting, lending support to the contentions of Mason and Perera-Diltz (2010) and Lamie and Williamson (2004) that administrators may lack understanding of the appropriate roles of school counselors and may assign them inappropriate duties..

The ASCA *National Model* (2012) suggests that school counselors collaborate with many different stakeholders to ensure a quality school counseling program and recommends that school counselors spend 80 percent of their time working in direct services (e.g., individual counseling, small-group counseling, parent workshops). A barrier identified by 18% (n=94) of the participants in this study was time constraints that prevented them from meeting with students and performing counseling duties. Examples of responses to the open-ended item included:

“Time to meet with students and family can be the most difficult problem as a counselor. Difficulty for students to miss class and parents to miss work during school hours.”

“I don’t have a lot of time with students so I feel like I can’t always implement exactly what I want. I tend to think about things in a systemic way and use that to structure what I am doing but I don’t always have enough time with kids to do exactly what I want.”

“I typically do not have as much time to spend with students as I would if I were in a private practice setting, this makes it very difficult to include the family members when I feel it would be beneficial.”

“The issue of time available for school counselors is critical. In our new emphasis on data-driven programs, the time available for family interactions is diminished in favor of data-driven activities involving goals, programming and planning. Add to this is the difficulty in finding a mutually available time with more than the student when she is in school. The counselor is left with the knowledge and desire to use family systems in helping the student, but having to strategize using individual interactions with the student and parent as data for interventions and planning with to help her.”

These results suggest that, with a lack of administrative support creating incongruence between actual duties and perceived duties of school counselors, and with a lack of time to incorporate counseling as well as family systems counseling, school counselors face significant challenges to meeting the demands of the ASCA *National Model*.

Finally, 3% (n = 16) of school counselors who participated in this study identified confidentiality issues and 12% (n = 60) reported cultural issues as barriers to implementing family counseling. Only 2% (n = 10) reported having no barriers to implementation of a family systems perspective in the school setting, and only 4% of participants stated they would not use a family systems perspective at all.

Limitations

Confidence in the results of the study is based in the assumption that the SCP-FSPQ is valid and accurately measured school counselors' perceptions of the preparedness, competency, importance, and frequency of usage of a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. After I initially designed the SCP-FSPQ, an expert panel reviewed the instrument for content validity. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess items for internal reliability. Cronbach's alpha for preparedness was .91, for competency .92, and for importance .90. Chronbach's alpha is considered adequate at a level of .7 and above (Field, 2009). Thus, the SCP-FSPQ may be considered to be reliable according to this measure. Nonetheless, future researchers might further test the SCP-FSPQ in order to strengthen its validity and reliability.

Additionally, use of an online survey might have resulted in a reduction of responses and selection bias (Granello, 2007). Using the total number of individuals surveyed (N=9500) divided by the total number of usable surveys returned (n=657), the response rate for this survey was 7.92%. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) recommended a sample size of 371 for a population of 9500 with a 95% confidence level, supporting the conclusion that the results of this study are likely to be representative of all members of the American School Counseling Association. To the extent that the sample is representative, the results of this study are generalizable to school counseling professionals who are members of ASCA. The results are not generalizable to professional school counselors who are not members of ASCA. All school counselors may not be current members of ASCA; thus, the results are not generalizable to school counselors who are not ASCA members. Finally, the majority of participants had six or fewer years of experience as a school counselor: Concerning experience as a counselor, 32 % of respondents

reported 0-2 years of experience. This may be a potential limitation but is usually typical for survey responders on professional development issues.

Furthermore, Internet research is completed by participants who have knowledge about technology and potential participants must have access to the internet (Lyons, Cude, Lawrence, & Gutter, 2005). Lack of interest in use of a family systems perspective may have resulted in participants discontinuing the survey or failing to initiate response altogether. These limitations could have limited the representativeness of the sample (Siah, 2005). Also, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not participants were focusing solely on the survey or partaking in distracting events such as watching television or engaging in conversation.

Finally, I assumed that all participants submitting surveys were honest in their responses to the survey items. Siah (2005) indicated that internet-based surveys are vulnerable to subject fraud, which occurs when participants do not tell the truth about their demographic variables or when participants submit responses to the survey more than once. As suggested by Buchanan and Hvizdak (2009), to decrease the likelihood that participants would provide dishonest responses, I included a detailed introductory letter to participants. To further promote truthfulness, participants' confidentiality and anonymity of response were highlighted in the consent to participate (Siah, 2005). Additionally, I controlled for multiple submissions through choosing an option in the Qualtrics™ software which prevented ballot stuffing.

Implications of the Study

This study sought to determine if family systems strategies are being used by school counselors, and if so, which factors contribute to how frequently a family systems perspective is used in the school setting. A further aim was to determine if school counselors' type of degree is related to their perceived level of preparedness, perceived level of competence, and perceived

level of importance of using a family systems perspective in the school setting. In addition, this study sought to examine whether the method of learning a family systems perspective is related to school counselors' perceptions of their preparedness, competency, and importance of using a family systems perspective. Finally, this study examined whether the frequency of usage of a family systems perspective is related to school counselors' perceptions of the importance of using a family systems perspective and what barriers, if any, school counselors believe prevent them from using family systems strategies. Results of this study suggested implications for school counselors, counselor education programs, and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs.

Mullis and Edwards (2001) stated that family systems concepts and family systems techniques are essential components of school counselors' ability to conceptualize their students systemically. Findings from this study support that contention and results indicate that school counselors who had several methods of learning a family systems perspective felt better prepared and more competent to use systems concepts and techniques when working with youth in the school setting. Findings further suggest that, the more prepared and competent the school counselors felt, the more importance they ascribed to using a family systems perspective and the more frequently they used this perspective. These findings suggest that, when school counselors have an understanding of family systems they are more likely to use a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting. Results of this study may help school counselors increase their awareness of the importance of family systems concepts and interventions when working with school-family-community partnerships.

Building on previous studies that indicated a need to adequately train school counselors in family systems perspectives (Keys, 1997; Magnuson & Norem, 1998; Nicoll, 1992; Velsor,

2000; Woody & Woody, 1994), findings from this study contributed to the knowledge base in school counselor training. Findings indicate that counselor education programs might benefit from examining the school counselor curriculum, particularly with regard to family systems courses offered to school counselors in training. As stated in the American Counselor Association (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2005), “counselors should practice only within the boundaries of their competence, based on education, training, supervised experience, state and national professional credentials, and appropriate experience” (C.2.a.). Thus, to function in an ethical manner, school counselors working directly with families should seek out additional training in family counseling if this was not included in their education background (Bodenhorn, 2005). Results of this study indicated that, for over 55% of school counselors, a school counseling course was not a requirement in their school counselor training program. However, a substantial majority (87%) of school counselors stated that they believed a school counseling course should be a requirement in the school counseling track. This would suggest that school counselors recognize the importance of training in a family systems perspective and the importance of including a family systems course in their school counseling training. Counselor education programs could align their curriculum with the guidelines set forth by the ASCA *National Model* (2012) and CACREP (2009) standards to ensure that all school counselors have a basic foundation in a family systems perspective.

In summary, requiring training in a family systems perspective may be essential to providing school counselors with the skills needed to implement family systems strategies and interventions in the school setting. As contended by Nelson and Smock (2005), without a deep understanding of family therapy constructs, it seems that informed integration of theory and competent practice would elude even the most gifted counselor.

The American School Counseling Association, counselor educators, counselor education programs and accreditation bodies (e.g., CACREP) might take into account the following statements from participants:

“I have not been exposed to the family systems perspective in any of my training as a school counselor.”

“I do not know much about family systems and have not tried to implement as I do not have any training in the perspective.”

“I’m uncertain of exactly what a family systems perspective”

“I have no training and lack the knowledge of the family systems perspective in order to utilize the concept.”

“I haven’t had any formal training in family systems perspective. My interest is piqued and I plan to do some ready on this area.”

Implications for Future Research

Findings from this study support a recommendation that future research should be conducted on school counselor training in a family systems perspective. A replication of this study using a sample that includes current master’s-level students would be beneficial, as the school counselor training curriculum may have changed since the time when some participants in the present study received their master’s degrees. School counselor internship supervisors’ theoretical orientation may also be a variable worthy of exploration; supervisors who do not espouse a family systems perspective may be unlikely to provide supervision that would foster the development of such a perspective in their interns. In addition, surveying school counselors who are not members of ASCA might give a broader representation of the population.

Further research into the differential impact of various methods of learning a family systems perspective might give a better understanding into training needs. Results of this study indicated that, the more frequently school counselors used a family systems perspective, the fewer methods of learning they had employed. Although it seems logical to assume that more methods of learning would be positively correlated to more frequency of usage of a family systems perspective, the results do not support this assumption. Future research into whether there is variation in the impact of different methods of learning on the frequency of usage of a family systems perspective is recommended.

A qualitative study examining the process of integrating a family systems perspective into school counselor training would be illuminating. Results garnered from studying school counselors' level of understanding of a family systems perspective and actual integration of a family systems perspective in the school setting might add to the knowledge base by providing the school counseling field with information on the actual application of family systems theory from assessment to incorporation. Further, school counselors who have limited understanding of practical applications of a family systems perspective could gain awareness into obstacles, successes, and procedures when implementing a family systems approach in the school setting.

Additionally, further insight is needed into the barriers that prevent school counselors from engaging in a family systems perspective. Particularly, further investigation is recommended into the lack of training, parental involvement, and administrative support when incorporating a systems perspective into the school counseling repertoire. A better understanding of these barriers could lead to strategies to remove or reduce them. Results garnered from such a study might provide school counselor supervisors, school counselor

educators, and accrediting bodies (e.g., CACREP) with necessary information to aid in helping the school counselor navigate through and implement school-family-community partnerships.

Conclusion

The current study added to the body of literature that addresses the importance of a family systems perspective in school counselors' training and integration of family systems in the school setting. Overall, school counselors' perceptions of preparedness, competency, and importance of a family systems perspective had a positive relationship with how frequently they used a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting.

This study examined if family systems strategies are being used by school counselors, and if so, which factors contribute to how frequently a family systems perspective is used in the school setting. A primary goal of my research was to determine if school counselors' method of learning a family systems perspective affects the frequency of usage of that perspective in the school settings. It was found that the more methods of learning school counselors employed, the more frequently they used a family systems perspective. Results of my study further indicated that most school counselors recognize the importance of requiring a family systems course in their school counseling training curriculum.

The results suggested a need for school counselors to obtain more training in family systems perspective, which should be considered by counselor educators, counselor education programs, and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The lack of a requirement in the school counselor curriculum of a family systems course may be leaving counselors unprepared to respond to students needs. Increasing opportunities to broaden school counselors' skill set and knowledge base in a family systems perspective may foster stronger school-family-community partnerships. As previously stated,

Nelson and Smock (2005) contended that, without a deep understanding of family therapy constructs, it seems that informed integration of theory and competent practice would elude even the most gifted counselor.

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APPENDIX A

*University Committee for the Protection of
Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans*

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Barbara Herlihy
Co-Investigator: Dorothy Martin
Date: January 24, 2013
Protocol Title: "Factors Associated with school Counselors' Use of Family Systems Perspectives"
IRB#: 03Jan13

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that the information obtained is not recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.
Sincerely,



Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

APPENDIX B

Dear School Counselor,

I am conducting a study for my dissertation research entitled, *Factors Associated With School Counselors' Use of Family Systems Perspectives*.

I have developed a survey *School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspectives Questionnaire (SCP-FSPQ)* that is designed to measure school counselors' perceptions of preparedness, competency, importance and frequency of use of a family systems perspective when working with youth in a school setting. I plan to use the data collected from this survey to better understand best practices for school counselor training in family systems and barriers that prevent school counselors from utilizing a family system approach. I intend to share the information through scholarly presentation and publication.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. All information provided is anonymous as there will be no way to identify you once you have submitted your answers. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw your consent and terminate participation without consequence at any time. The risks associated with this study are minimal. Once completed, you can elect to be placed in two random drawings, each for a \$50 gift certificate to amazon.com. The winners will receive a gift certificate code by means of email when the study is completed.

Please click the following link to begin the survey. Completion and electronic submission of the *SCP-FSPQ* will indicate your consent for participation in this study. If you are not connected automatically, simply cut and paste the URL into your browser and press enter.

http://neworleans.us2.Qualtrics™.com/SE/?SID=SV_39om0e4DhbApvUx

Please direct any questions or concerns about this study to the principal investigator, Dottie M. Martin (dmmarti1@my.uno.edu), the faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara Herlihy (bherlihy@uno.edu), or the Office of Human Subjects Research at the University of New Orleans (unoirb@uno.edu).

Thank you in advance for your participation. Your time is greatly appreciated.

Dottie M. Martin, M.A., NCC, LPC
PhD Candidate
University of New Orleans
Bicentennial Education Building, Room 212
2000 Lakeshore Drive
New Orleans, LA 70148

APPENDIX C

Dear School Counselor,

If you have already completed *The School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspectives Questionnaire (SCP-FSPQ)*, thank you again for your participation in this study. If you have not had the opportunity to participate, please take approximately 10 minutes to complete this brief survey.

I have developed a survey *School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspectives Questionnaire (SCP-FSPQ)* that is designed to measure school counselors' perceptions of preparedness, competency, importance and frequency of usage of a family system perspective when working with youth in a school setting. I plan to use the data collected from this survey to better understand best practices for school counselor training in family systems and barriers that prevent school counselors from utilizing a family system approach. I intend to share the information through scholarly presentation and publication.

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Please direct any questions or concerns about this study to the principal investigator, Dottie M. Martin (dmmarti1@my.uno.edu), the faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara Herlihy (bherlihy@uno.edu), or the Office of Human Subjects Research at the University of New Orleans (unoirb@uno.edu).

Thank you in advance for your participation. Your time is greatly appreciated.

Dottie M. Martin, M.A., NCC, LPC
PhD Candidate
University of New Orleans
Bicentennial Education Building, Room 212
2000 Lakeshore Drive
New Orleans, LA 70148

APPENDIX D

Dear School Counselor,

This is a FINAL reminder for those of you who have not had the opportunity to participate in my dissertation research entitled *Factors Associated With School Counselors' Use of Family Systems Perspectives*. If you have already completed the *School Counselor Perceptions of Family System Perspectives Questionnaire (SCP-FSPQ)*, thank you again for your participation in this study. If you have not had the opportunity to participate, please take approximately 10 minutes to complete this brief survey.

The survey is designed to measure school counselors' perceptions of preparedness, competency, importance and frequency of use of a family system perspective when working with youth in a school setting. I plan to use the data collected from this survey to better understand best practices for school counselor training in family systems and barriers that prevent school counselors from utilizing a family system approach. I intend to share the information through scholarly presentation and publication.

All information provided is anonymous as there will be no way to identify you once you have submitted your answers. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw your consent and terminate participation without consequence at any time. The risks associated with this study are minimal. Once completed, you can elect to be placed in two random drawings, each for a \$50 gift certificate to amazon.com. The winners will receive a gift certificate code by means of email when the study is completed.

Please click the following link to begin the survey. Completion and electronic submission of the *SCP-FSPQ* will indicate your consent for participation in this study. If you are not connected automatically, simply cut and paste the URL into your browser and press enter.

http://neworleans.us2.Qualtrics™.com/SE/?SID=SV_39om0e4DhbApvUx

Please direct any questions or concerns about this study to the principal investigator, Dottie M. Martin (dmmarti1@my.uno.edu), the faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara Herlihy (bherlihy@uno.edu), or the Office of Human Subjects Research at the University of New Orleans (unoirb@uno.edu).

Thank you in advance for your participation. Your time is greatly appreciated.

Dottie M. Martin, M.A., NCC, LPC
PhD Candidate
University of New Orleans
Bicentennial Education Building, Room 212
2000 Lakeshore Drive
New Orleans, LA 70148

APPENDIX E

Dear School Counselor,

Please be advised that the time to participate in my dissertation study titled Factors Associated With School Counselors' Use of Family Systems Perspectives, which has been approved by the UNO IRB (protocol # 03Jan13), has ended. Data collection ran from January 25, 2013 to February 24, 2013.

The data gleaned from this survey will provide information about school counselors' use of family-systems perspectives, their beliefs of perceived preparedness, and their beliefs about perceived competency and importance of family systems perspectives. My hope is that the information obtained from this survey will provide valuable information to better understand best practices for school counselor training in family systems and barriers that prevent school counselors from utilizing a family system approach. I intend to share the information through scholarly presentation and publication.

If you would like to receive the results of the study, please send an email request to Dottie Martin at dmmarti1@uno.edu.

Thank you for taking the time to provide information about your practices with family systems perspectives when working with youth in the school setting. The winners of the random drawing will receive a gift certificate code by means of email when the study is completed.

Finally, if you have any questions or comments about the study, please contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Herlihy at bherlihy@uno.edu or (504) 280-6661. Additionally, you may also contact the investigator, Dottie Martin at dmmarti1@uno.edu.

Sincerely,

Dottie Martin, LPC, NCC
Doctoral Candidate
University of New Orleans

APPENDIX F
SCP-FSPQ

School Counselors' Perceptions of Family Systems Perspectives

Section I- Demographics

1. What is your sex?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

2. What is your race?

- American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
- Biracial (2)
- Black or African American (3)
- Hispanic (4)
- Island Pacific or Asian (5)
- White (6)
- Other (7)

3. What is your age?

- 18-24 (1)
- 25-34 (2)
- 35-44 (3)
- 45-55 (4)
- 56-65 (5)
- 66 & Up (6)

4. I am currently working as a school counselor.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

5. How many years have you been a school counselor?

- 0-2 (1)
- 3-6 (2)
- 7-12 (3)
- 13-19 (4)
- 20 or More (5)

6. What is your highest education level?

- B.S., B.A. (1)
- M.A., M.S., M.Ed. (2)
- Ph.D., Ed.D., PsyD (3)
- MSW (4)
- DSW (5)
- Other (6)

7. What type of degree program did you graduate from?

- Clinical Mental Health (1)
- Marriage and Family Therapy (2)
- School Counseling (3)
- Social Work (4)
- Other (5)

8. My program was accredited by.

- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) (1)
- Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy (COAMFTE) (2)
- Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) (3)
- Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (4)
- Other (5)
- Unsure (6)

9. Do you hold a professional license and/or certification? Please select all that apply

- Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) (1)
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) (2)
- Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) (3)
- School Counseling Certification / License (4)
- Licensed Psychologist (5)
- National Certified Counselor (NCC) (6)
- National Certified School Counselor (NCSC) (7)
- Registered Play Therapist (8)
- Other (9)
- None (10)

10. In what building level are you primarily employed?

- Elementary (1)
- Middle or Junior High School (2)
- High School (3)
- K-12 (4)
- Other (5)

11. In What type of school setting are you primarily employed?

- Public (Non-Charter) (1)
- Public (Charter) (2)
- Private (3)
- Parochial (4)
- Other (5)

Note: School counselors' use a family systems perspective when they take into consideration that school children belong to many social systems (including the family, classroom, school, and community) that are interconnected and influence each other in a reciprocal fashion. Using a family systems perspective may include conceptualizing a case from a family systems perspective and/or employing counseling strategies that involve not just the individual child.

12. How often do you utilize a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school-setting?

- Daily (1)
- Several times a week (2)
- Once a Week (3)
- Less than once a week (4)
- Once a Month (5)
- Once in a 9-week period (6)
- Once a semester (i.e., two 9-week periods) (7)
- Once a year (8)
- I do not use a family systems perspective (9)

13. I learned about family systems perspective through: (check all that applies)

- Family Systems Course (1)
- Workshop / Seminar (2)
- Practicum / Internship Experience (3)
- Post-Degree Supervision received from Systems-Oriented Supervisor (4)
- Research / Reading (5)
- Conferences (6)
- Consultation (7)
- Other (8)
- I have not learned about Family Systems Perspectives (9)

14. What family systems perspective do you most frequently use when working with youth in the school-setting?

- Bowen (1)
- Cognitive-Behavior Family Therapy (2)
- Experiential Family Therapy (3)
- General Systems Theory (4)
- Narrative (5)
- Psychoanalytic Family Therapy (6)
- Solution Focused Brief Therapy (7)
- Strategic (8)
- Structural (9)
- Symbolic Experiential (10)
- Other (11)
- I do not use a family systems perspective (12)

15. Was a family systems course a requirement in your school counseling program?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- My degree is not in school counseling (3)

16. I think a family systems course should be a requirement for the school counseling track.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Section II - Family Systems Perspectives in the School Setting

Note: Please use this definition of a Family Systems Perspective when answering the following questions throughout the survey.

Family systems perspective is the belief that the dominant forces in our lives are located externally, in the family. Therapy is based on a framework that is directed at changing the structure of the family not the individual member. Thus, when family organization is transformed, the life of every family member is altered accordingly. Therefore, changing a family changes the life of each of its members.

17. Perceptions of Preparedness

Please mark your level of agreement with each statement that describes how well you believe you are prepared to employ the family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting.

| | Strongly Agree (1) | Agree (2) | Unsure (3) | Disagree (4) | Strongly Disagree (5) |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| To assess family roles when working with youth & their families (1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To engage the family in the therapeutic conversation (2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To explicitly structure or direct appropriate interactions among family members (3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To view patterns of behavior through a circular perspective (4) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To gather and use family history when conceptualizing a case (5) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To control the flow of communication among family members (6) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To assess spoken and unspoken rules when conceptualizing family dynamics (7) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To help students and their families establish appropriate boundaries (8) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To assess the family dynamics of scapegoating when conceptualizing a case (9) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To utilize the technique of re-framing when conducting counseling (10) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To utilize genograms when conducting counseling (11) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To utilize the technique of family sculpting when conducting counseling (12) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To utilize the technique of joining when conducting counseling (13) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

18. Perceptions of Competence

Please mark your level of agreement with each statement to describe the extent you believe you are competent to understand a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting

| | Strongly Agree (1) | Agree (2) | Unsure (3) | Disagree (4) | Strongly Disagree (5) |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| To understand family systems theory (1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To understand family development and family life cycle (2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To recognize family behavioral patterns (3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To conceptualize how gender, culture, and class impact a student (4) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To articulate systemic concepts and perspectives when conceptualizing student's problems (5) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To recognize family hierarchies in conceptualizing a case (6) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To recognize dynamics of triangulation when conceptualizing a case (7) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To formulate a systemic hypothesis (8) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To recognize boundary issues when conceptualizing a case (9) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To understand the connection between students' behavior exhibited at home and at school (10) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To understand the impact that students' behaviors have on their academic, career, and personal / social development (11) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To have knowledge and understanding of the American Association of Marriage & Family Therapy (AAMFT) code of ethics (12) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To have knowledge and understanding of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) code of ethics (13) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To have knowledge and understanding of the American Counseling Association (ACA) code of ethics (14) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

19. Perceptions of Importance

Please mark your level of agreement with each statement to describe the extent you believe it is important to facilitate a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting.

| | Strongly Agree (1) | Agree (2) | Unsure (3) | Disagree (4) | Strongly Disagree (5) |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| To utilize a systemic interventions (1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To involve the family in counseling when working with youth in the school setting (2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To explore patterns in the family history when conceptualizing student's issues and counseling (3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To identify family strengths and utilize them in family sessions (4) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To account for the impact of family interaction when conceptualizing a case (5) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To consult with the family when conceptualizing a case in the school setting (6) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To engage the family in the therapeutic conversation (7) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To structure or direct interactions among family members (8) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To use family behavior patterns when conceptualizing student's issues and counseling (9) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To consult with other professionals knowledgeable in family systems perspectives (10) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To consult with teachers, principals, and staff in the school setting (11) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To consult with other outside community agencies when conceptualizing a case in the school setting (12) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Section III- Barriers to Implementation

20. What obstacles or barriers have you experienced in either implementing or trying to implement a family systems perspective when working with youth in the school setting?

Thank you for your participation in this survey!

VITA

Dottie M. Martin earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Social Counseling at Our Lady of Holy Cross College in 2005. She received her Master of Arts degree in Marriage and Family Counseling at Our Lady of Holy Cross College in 2007. Dottie earned a Ph.D. in Counselor Education from the University of New Orleans in spring 2013. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in the state of Louisiana and a National Certified Counselor (NCC). She looks forward to continually working with families in her private practice, expanding research in family therapy and school counseling, and educating other practitioners about the significance of both.