

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND
DIRECTORS OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING: COLLABORATING TO
UNDERSTAND COUNSELOR STRESS AND PREVENT BURNOUT

by

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Liberty University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the phenomenological study was to understand stress and burnout among urban middle school counselors from selected urban schools in varying regions of Texas. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, nine MSCs who had experienced some degree of the phenomenon were selected based upon results obtained from a preliminary demographic survey and Counselor Burnout Inventory; five Directors of Guidance and Counseling were selected from neighboring urban cities, based upon their proximity to the selected middle school counselors. The researcher sought to answer four broad questions: (1) *What are the perceptions of both school counselors and Directors of Guidance and Counseling as to causes of stress and burnout in middle school counselors?* (2) *How do middle school counselors and Directors of Guidance and Counseling describe organizational factors and resources in place to improve stress management and prevent burnout?* (3) *How do Directors of Guidance and Counseling and middle school counselors describe their personal contributions to middle school counselor stress management and burnout prevention?* And (4) *How do middle school counselors describe their experiences related to burnout?* Data was collected utilizing face to face interviews, online focus groups, counselor logs, and lists of professional development provided. The data revealed that work overload, competing priorities, role confusion, lack of support, and inability to see students contributed to counselor stress, while having defined organizational processes, a good support system and a sense of humor helped alleviate stress. An unexpected finding was that constant, unpredictable, chaotic, stressful days greatly contributed to the stress and burnout of the middle school counselor. Limitations of the study and implications for future studies were discussed.

Dedication/Acknowledgments Page

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Randy Marsh. Without his patience, understanding and support, I never would have completed this huge endeavor. He was a constant stream of support for me, cooking dinners, washing dishes, tolerating the mess and the papers everywhere, and putting up with my crankiness as I often worked late into the evening and weekends, researching and writing. I thank him for his unconditional love and acceptance as he patiently sat on the sidelines while I spent most of my waking hours, when I was not at work, working on this paper.

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List of Abbreviations

Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA)

Counselor Burnout Inventory (CBI)

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)

Directors of Guidance and Counseling (DGC)

Employee Access Program (EAP)

Independent School District (ISD)

Middle School Counselor (MSC)

Texas Counseling Association (TCA)

United States Tennis Association (USTA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Based on a review of the literature, it is evident that professional school counselors experience varying degrees of stress daily while performing their job duties (McCarthy, Kerne, Calfa, Lambert & Guzman, 2010). In fact, counselor stress is often noted in the literature. For example, Bryant and Constantine (2006) found the following factors contribute to counselor stress and burnout: numerous job duties and responsibilities; complex school systems; and the often critical responses that school counselors provide for children. There are numerous beliefs about factors that cause stress for middle school counselors. Several studies have been done over the years to determine the cause (Butler, 2005; Moyer, 2011; Sears & Navin, 2001; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). However, most of the studies are quantitative, and most are dated. One thing that is agreed upon is that if the stress is chronic, it may be detrimental to the school counselor's well-being (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Counselors subjected to constant stress often experience a decrease in the ability to perform their counseling duties satisfactorily and are prone to burnout (Wilkerson, 2009).

There are a wide variety of reasons that are thought to contribute to school counselor stress. An earlier study found that having more to do than time allowed, along with conflicting and ambiguous roles, were all major stressors for school counselors (Sears & Navin, 2001). Some studies have suggested that a high counselor-to-student ratio is a factor in burnout (Butler, 2005; Moyer, 2011; Sears & Navin, 2001). Although Lee (2008) found that conflicting and ambiguous roles were significant stressors for school counselors, he found no significant correlation between counselor-to-student ratio and counselor burnout.

Willingham (2009) investigated the factors affecting role stress and burnout among

school counselors such as role ambiguity, the urban environment, and years of teaching experience; however, this study did not reveal any significant results. Willingham suggested that other studies be performed, specifically “investigating . . . the effects of setting and supervision on role stress and burnout” (p. 92). Still, other studies continue to suggest additional factors that contribute to stress and potential burnout, including role confusion, conflicts with others, and an unsatisfactory relationship with a supervisor (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Landrum, Knight and Flynn (2012) studied the effect of organizational factors on client engagement. They found that if counselors perceived themselves as influential, they were less likely to suffer from stress. In fact feeling influential appeared to have mediating effects on counselor burnout.

In a quantitative study of 611 members of an northeastern United States counselor organization, Wilkerson and Bellini (2006) found that organizational factors influenced overall stress of school counselors; their study indicated that “working relationships with teachers and administrators matter” (p. 448). An additional study by Wilkerson (2009) investigated the effect of coping styles as it relates to the amount of stress reported by school counselors. This study examined how different coping styles and mechanisms moderate stress and thus affect burnout. The author concluded that “perceived levels of organizational stress and an individual’s approach to coping have strong predictive value for the outcomes of burnout” (p. 87). A more recent study found that lack of counselor supervision and non-guidance activities contributed to counselor burnout (Moyer, 2011).

This study targeted urban middle school counselors (MSC) who had a preliminary moderate to high rating on the Counselor Burnout Inventory (CBI) (Appendix A) in at least one dimension. The Scoring Guide is included (Appendix B). This instrument was developed by Lee et al. (2007) to specifically measure stress and predict burnout in counselors. Permission to

use this instrument was obtained from Lee on July 1, 2012 (Appendix C). Additionally, the Directors of Guidance and Counseling (DGC) were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the nature of middle school counselor's stress and district practices in place that might affect counselor stress, either negatively or positively, such as organization, coordination, processes and procedures, collaboration, meetings, resources and professional development.

Chao (2011) found that "support significantly moderated . . . stress and well-being" (p. 338). By looking at both the perceptions of the MSC and the perceptions of the DGC, the researcher hoped to add to the body of research which includes both quantitative studies and qualitative studies and to provide "a more comprehensive understanding . . . as to how the variables under investigation affect burnout" (Lee, 2008, p. 81).

Situation to Self

As a former MSC, I have experienced the stress associated with the varying expectations and multiple job roles of the school counselor. There were deadlines for administrative tasks such as testing and master scheduling; responsibilities related to suicide prevention, and child abuse (sexual, verbal and physical); constant emails from teachers, administrators and coworkers about peer mediation, bullying, harassment, grades, abuse, meetings, and trainings; and a multitude of other expectations. Separate central office supervisors from different areas such as Dyslexia, 504, Special Education and State Mandated Testing had deadlines and expectations that were often not well coordinated. The ease of email made it simple to let everyone know at the drop of a hat what needed to be done *yesterday* with little if any advance notice or consideration for what may have been taking place *today*.

Additionally, I have experienced the phenomenon of stress related to being one of two counselors on a campus. Though both counselors may have the same credentials, the roles and

duties often vary. Often counselors on the same campus have differing attitudes and work ethic. Counselors often work in isolation of others. During my time as a MSC, I experienced signs of burnout including fatigue, cynicism and feelings of inadequacy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

I have also experienced working in a district that coordinated everything well in advance. Training was mandated and processes and procedures were aligned across the district and departments. Support for counselors was well established. MSC roles were more defined and there was support from administrators. Although, there was stress at certain times of the year due to testing, somehow it seemed more manageable.

This was the knowledge and experience that drove this study. It was my goal to discover not only the MSC's perception of factors relating to counselor stress and burnout, but also the DGC's perceptions of causes of MSC stress. In addition I hoped to discover both the MSC and the DGC's perception of factors and practices that help to alleviate this stress, thus raising awareness and reducing the phenomenon of burnout in the MSC.

Although I entered into this study with experience and some bias, as a former MSC, I believed I had the skills to put those thoughts and ideas aside. My sole purpose in this study was to listen to the voices of the counselors and district supervisors who were interviewed and truly understand their experience with this phenomenon in an effort to discover and learn more about the phenomena of counselor stress and burnout. Moustakas (1994) writes,

Following our own self evidence of what appears to us, we check with others regarding what they perceive, feel, and think. In the process of this kind of careful checking we may revisit the phenomenon and discover something new that alters our knowledge of the thing. (pp. 94-95)

Moustakas (1994) states that according to Husserl, the originator of phenomenological research, this is “a form of communalization” (p. 95).

Every effort was made on my part to understand what the MSCs were feeling when I interviewed them. My goal was to feel what they felt and to put myself into their place. Although I did battle with my own perceptions on occasion during the interviews, I was able to overcome those perceptions for the most part by reviewing the audio recordings and reading over the transcripts multiple times. In doing so, I was able to more fully understand the perceptions of the MSCs and DGCs than during my original interview. Each time I listened to the audio tapes, and each time I re-read the transcripts, I became more engrossed in the thoughts and feelings of the participants. This was my attempt at the Epoche. My purpose for this study was to understand the cause of MSC stress and burnout, identify what resources are available and which strategies are utilized to reduce stress, and finally to help prevent burnout in MSCs by listening to the voices of the MSCs and the voices of the DGC. It was their perceptions that I hoped to understand. It was their story that I hoped to present to the readers.

Problem Statement

According to the literature, school counselors are under much stress related to their multiple and often ambiguous roles increasing responsibilities, workload, high student-to-counselor ratio, expectations of various stakeholders, added administrative tasks, non-counseling duties, deadlines, parent demands, teacher demands, principal demands, and community demands (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Coban & Hamamci, 2009; Lambie, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; McCarthy et al., 2010; Moracco, Butcke & McEwen, 1984; Sears, 1993; Sears & Navin, 2001). Without strong support, quality training, continual professional development, coordination, processes, procedures and guidance, as well as personal coping strategies and

resources, school counselors are prone to a high level of stress and potential burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Chao, 2011; Cicero, 2009; Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005; Lambie, 2007; McCarthy et al., 2010; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Philip, 2004).

School counselors who consistently experience high levels of stress without adequate coping skills and organizational support over a long period of time are more prone to develop chronic burnout (Wilkerson, 2009). By studying these and other factors, this study provided valuable information in an effort to ensure that our school counselors are effective and capable of handling their diverse roles; effective and capable counselors can more efficiently meet the needs of the students whom they serve daily, as well as the demands of other important stakeholders (Coban & Hamamci, 2009; Lambie, 2007; Lambie & Sias, 2009; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Philip, 2004; Pyne, 2011; Wachter, Minton, & Clemons, 2008; Wilkerson, 2009; and Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout for 10 MSCs in selected urban cities in various regions of Texas. MSC stress was defined as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand” (Selye, 1984, p. 55). For the purposes of this study, burnout was defined as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of feelings of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 2003 a). Additionally, subthemes of exhaustion, incompetence, devaluing client, negative work environment, and deterioration in personal life were included in the definition of counselor burnout (Lee et al., 2007).

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because it addressed a gap in the literature about MSCs’ stress and its potentially harmful effects such as burnout. An important aspect of this study was the

inclusion of the DGC personnel. Their perceptions of factors contributing to MSC stress as well as practices and processes that may help to reduce MSC stress have provided insight into how school districts address the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout. Limited studies have included district counselor input; however, several studies have suggested that this component be included in future studies. This study strived to address this gap in the literature.

This study added the element of the perception of DGC support in an effort to understand how the MSCs' perception of this support affects their ability to cope with elements related to the stress of school counseling. Feeling supported is an element of mattering. Rayle (2006) studied the relationship between school counselors feeling that they count in others' eyes and their amount of job stress and job satisfaction. Based upon the literature, Rayle hypothesized "that it is important for school counselors to perceive that they are important and that they are making a difference to their students, teachers, parents, and administrators" (p. 212); however, the quantitative data collected in her study did not support her hypothesis.

This research sought to further explore this relationship by examining how the school counselor's perceived support of the DGC in conjunction with their own personal coping strategies and styles helped to alleviate stress and prevent burnout. Cook (2008) suggested that a study of the collaboration between DGC and counselors be conducted. "The supervisor's responsibility in advocating for the school counselors' role and professional identity . . . represents a new area of research" (p. 144).

Lee (2008) studied burnout in professional school counselors, specifically how variables such as the school counselor's character, demographics and role predicted burnout. An element coined as administrative support was studied. The results of the study showed "perceived support from the principal to be a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion among [school

counselors]” (p. 77). However, this administrative support was defined as principal support, not DGC support.

Lee (2008) suggested that qualitative studies be conducted to further investigate the variables he studied and how they affect burnout in the school counselors. Having counselors describe their perceptions of their stress related experiences along with the coping strategies and resources they found useful in alleviating their stress lent enrichment to Lee’s quantitative study. Likewise, the current study utilized input from the DGC regarding their perceptions of factors affecting counselor stress and burnout. This input provided valuable information for the current study and enrichment for Lee’s and other quantitative studies on this topic.

In addition to Lee’s study, Wilkerson (2009) studied burnout in school counselors across the nation. His quantitative study investigated how coping, years of counseling experience, caseload, and organizational factors predicted counselor burnout. Using a qualitative approach, the current study provided additional information regarding these factors, thus addressing the gap in the research regarding predictors of school counselor stress.

Willingham (2009) studied role stress and counselor burnout by examining the relationship between two variables and stress: counselors’ experience as teacher and counseling in urban schools. Her design was quantitative and utilized inventories and surveys with Likert-type answers. All of Willingham’s participants were members of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) which may have been a delimitation of the study since members may feel less burnout when they are associated with a professional organization. Therefore, she suggested that qualitative studies be implemented to “further examine the results” (p. 79).

Stephan (2005) conducted a path study of 414 MSCs to study the relationship between the environment of the school and the coping skills of the counselor and its relationship to burnout. Stephan stated that “qualitative studies would complement quantitative data and add richness to the understanding of how organizational factors, context, and personal factors affect school counselor burnout” (p. 200). In addition, Stephan concluded that “the results of [her] study give weight to the need for increased attention to the subjective experiences of school counselors in their unique settings” (p. 197). This current study addressed the unique setting of the urban MSCs in various regions across Texas; it gave ample attention to each of their unique and subjective experiences and subsequently, helped to address this gap in the literature.

Although there did seem to be some renewed interest in the job stress and burnout of school counselors, during extensive research of the literature which included online searches of dissertations and theses, Liberty’s online library, educational journals and several key counseling journals, the researcher did not locate a study that specifically examined the perceptions of both the DGCs and the MSCs. Consequently, this study sought to address that gap in the literature.

This study not only revealed causes of stress and burnout in the MSC from the MSC and the DGC’s perspective, it also led to a dialogue between the MSCs and the DGCs. It is hoped by the researcher that the information obtained in this study will act as a vehicle to reduce the phenomenon of MSC stress and prevent burnout through education and awareness.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how MSC and DGC describe the phenomenon of counselor stress and burnout in select urban cities in varying regions of Texas. The following broad questions guided this qualitative phenomenological study:

1. *What are the perceptions of both school counselors and DGC as to causes of stress and burnout in MSCs?*

Most of the literature on counselor stress was related to tasks that cause counselor stress; however many of the studies only looked at one or two aspects. Through this question, the researcher discovered what both the DGC and the MSC deem as significant causes of counselor stress. This question evoked feelings about prior stress and current issues that are stress-related and served to enrich the perceptions and narrative of the counselor co-researchers.

2. *How do MSC and DGC describe organizational factors and resources in place to improve stress management and prevent burnout?* Little was found in the literature regarding how organizational strategies affect MSC stress. A few studies were found that look at the organization and the effects on counselor stress; however, the studies were limited in scope and very scarce (Stephan, 2005; Wilkerson, 2009). Through this question, the researcher gained an understanding of the perceptions of both the MSCs' and the DGCs' beliefs and awareness of the effect that organizational factors have on counselor stress. Prior studies indicated that there was some connection between burnout and organizational factors; however, these studies were quantitative. In addition it was quite likely only the healthiest counselors participated due to their involvement in national associations (Wilkerson, 2009). The one qualitative study found addressed counselors trying to take a leadership role (Dollarhide, Gibson, & Saginak, 2008). The current study specifically addressed MSCs' and DGCs' experience with this phenomenon. This question helped the researcher understand the perceptions of both

groups of co-researchers regarding benefits of current practices and processes, specifically how organizational processes either increase or decrease counselor stress.

3. *How do DGC and MSCs describe their personal contributions to MSC stress management and burnout prevention?* No studies were found in the literature directly related to the role that the DGC plays in preventing stress and burnout in the MSC. However, there were a few studies that seemed to indicate that supervisory support helped to alleviate stress (Gnilka, Chang & Dew, 2012; Somody, Henderson, Cook & Zambranom, 2008; Sorenson, 2007 et al., 2008; Wachter et al., 2008). A handful of studies discussed the role that the counselor plays in their own stress management and burnout prevention (Vaillant, 2011; Wilkerson, 2009). This question elicited responses pertaining to the MSCs' perceptions about their ability to take responsibility for their own stress management. The researcher also gained an understanding of the DGCs' perceptions of their responsibility and role in the reduction of the MSCs' stress and burnout. Some studies have addressed the need for proper training and professional development to address counselor stress; however, most of these studies are dated (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). The ASCA updated counselor expectations during the last decade (ASCA, 2005). Counselors may now have different duties and expectations due to this change. This question was designed to help the researcher gain an understanding of how the co-researchers perceived the value of professional development, conferences and training as a vehicle of stress reduction and burnout prevention.
4. *How do MSC describe their experiences related to burnout?* Research indicates that feelings such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and decreased feelings of

personal accomplishment are predictors of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). The CBI survey developed by Lee et al., (2007) was utilized in the pre-survey to locate counselors who were feeling at least some signs of burnout over five dimensions: *Exhaustion, Incompetence, Negative Work Environment, Devaluing Client, and Deterioration of Personal Life*. However, questions related to this broad question were designed to elicit the essence of the participant's feelings about the phenomenon of stress and burnout.

Research Plan

This was a qualitative phenomenological study. This type of study was chosen in an effort to obtain a greater understanding of the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout via the voices of the MSCs and the DGCs. "In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52).

While a quantitative study could have provided *more* data, the Likert-type scales utilized in surveys are not all inclusive of the many factors that might contribute to counselor stress, nor are they all inclusive as to the coping strategies of school counselors or support provided by district supervisors. Additionally, many of the instruments thus utilized to measure school counselor stress and the variables causing the stress are not developed specific to counselors, but instead are specific to educators or other health professionals (Maslach & Jackson, 1983); therefore, listening to the voices of the MSCs and the DGCs was the best way to gain an understanding of this phenomenon.

MSC participants were chosen based upon their answers to the CBI and a short demographic survey (Appendix D) taken from Stephan's (2005) study. Permission to use the demographic survey in its entirety was received in 2009 (Appendix E). This CBI along with the demographic questionnaire and the informed consent letter was emailed via the secure version of

SurveyMonkey.com to MSCs in selected urban cities in various regions of Texas. Once the participants who were experiencing signs of burnout were identified, the researcher contacted the participant by email or telephone and made an appointment to follow up with one-to-one semi structured interviews. Each interview lasted less than 90 minutes and was audio recorded. Interview questions were designed to elicit information regarding causes of MSC stress, stress management and burnout. This qualitative data enriched and validated other quantitative studies that have been completed by other researchers in this area (Cook, 2008; Lee, 2008; Stephan, 2005; Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Belini, 2006; Willingham, 2009). It also added to the limited body of current research regarding MSC stress and burnout.

Additionally, DCGs were interviewed. These participants were chosen from neighboring urban districts of the chosen MSC participants. They were contacted by either phone or email. The researcher shared a scripted invitation (Appendix F), asking them to participate. If they wished to participate, a letter of informed consent (Appendix G) was provided to them and an interview time of 90 minutes was scheduled in a place convenient to them. Deciding on a set interview time was important as it helped both the participant and the researcher with time management (Seidman, 2006).

In addition to individual interviews, both the DGCs and the MSCs were asked to participate in an online focus group. Being strangers to one another is preferable for the participants of a focus group (Merriam, 2009). The researcher decided that the participants would be unlikely to know one another since the DGCs were chosen from neighboring urban cities. Both the MSCs and DGCs logged on to the secure website using codes known only to the individual participant and the researcher. The researcher facilitated the discussion using questions and discussion items based upon the broad questions in the research study (see

Appendix H). This online focus group discussion further enhanced the study by allowing the participants an opportunity to describe their experiences with MSC stress and burnout; it also elicited valuable feedback between the two groups of participants as to what practices and resources were currently identified as helpful in alleviating counselor stress. This dialogue proved useful in identifying interventions or preventions that could be put into place to further support the MSC in relation to stress reduction and burnout prevention. According to Moustakas (1994), “Continuing alterations of validity occurs as people articulate and describe their experiences. Reciprocal correcting of reality takes place in social conversations and dialogues” (p. 57).

Cook (2009) suggested that studies be conducted regarding the collaboration of the DGCs and the counselors. Gnilka et al. (2012) suggested that researchers study whether a counselor’s stress level and its effect on clients is affected by the relationship with their supervisor. This component of the research plan attempted to address these questions and gaps in the literature.

Finally, counselors were asked to keep journals related to stress and stress management for a total of four weeks (before and after the interview). Data from these journals about MSC stress and stress management were used to triangulate the interview data. This information was compared to the interview data and the online focus group data; the resulting observations were discussed in the results section of the study.

Delimitations

Since the majority of school counselors are female, this study made no attempt to study an equal number of females and males. An attempt was made to have an equal number of novice school counselors (one to five years’ experience) and seasoned school counselors (over five

years' experience). There was an attempt to locate counselors based upon the varying demographics of the schools in which they serve. Via the demographic survey, the researcher attempted to locate counselors who work on various campuses with differing demographics from urban schools in different regions of Texas. This was done in order to attain maximum variation in the sample (Merriam, 2009).

By interviewing school counselors and DGCs from varying regions of the state, rather than interviewing several school counselors from one region, the researcher hoped to gain a clearer picture of potentially stress related factors that may be unique to a particular region. For example one region may have a high recent immigrant student population; another region may have a high number of low-socio-economic students. This type of sampling is known as maximum variation (Merriam, 2009). This provided a better understanding of the MSC's perceptions overall and may make the results more pertinent to all MSCs.

Another delimitation of this study concerned the DGC participants. No DGC participant was chosen from the same district as the MSC participant; instead, each was chosen from different districts within close proximity of one another and with similar demographics and size. This was done to prevent the MSC from fearing repercussions from their own DGC for voicing opinions during the interview or during the online focus group. This was simply an effort to reduce any risk or anxiety that may be associated with MSCs voicing their honest opinions. This helped to allow the MSCs to be more relaxed and more willing to tell their stories about stress and burnout, openly, without fear of reprisal.

Another delimitation of the study was that the researcher only interviewed MSCs from urban school districts in Texas. No attempt was made to study MSCs from small, rural or suburban districts. The researcher understood that these MSCs in different settings may very

well have their own set of stressors and may be experiencing burnout. However, the rationale for this choice was that most urban school districts have DGC supervisors, and this study intended to explore that element to help to understand MSC stress and burnout.

Additionally, no attempt was made to gather data outside of the state of Texas. The rationale for this was that there is much diversity in the state of Texas and the researcher hoped that this data would be reflective of most urban districts across the country. The final delimitation is that the researcher only targeted MSCs for this study. Although, high school counselors may have as much stress as MSCs, the rationale for limiting this study to middle school was because the researcher believes that each level of counseling has its own stressors, unique only to that grade level. Rather than weaken the study, the researcher felt that this would strengthen the study by making it more relevant to a unique population of counselors. Choosing a phenomenological study over a case study extended the study to varying regions, searching out those who are experiencing the phenomenon. This is known as purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). This was done to increase the validity of the research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Stress and burnout among school counselors is a phenomenon often discussed in the literature. Kolodinsky et al. (2009) explored the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the resulting alignment with the ASCA's (2005) standards on school counselor's frustrations. Coll and Freeman (1997) explored how budget constraints and increasing student enrollment resulted in increased workloads among counselors, thus causing stress. McCarthy et al. (2010) studied the effect of demands and resources on counselor's stress. Gysbers (2006) traced the changes in guidance and counseling supervision from the early 1900s to the present and observed that although it is possible to have a good guidance and counseling program without strong supervision, it is more likely to happen when the supervision is strong. Various others discussed factors regarding stress and burnout among school counselors (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Lambie, 2007; Lee, Cho, Kissinger & Ogle, 2010; Morrisette, 2000; Sears & Navin, 1983; Wachter et al., 2008; Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006; Yildirim, 2008). Other researchers studied the moderating effects of supervision and coping strategies (Cohan & Hamamci, 2009; Conn, Roberts & Powell, 2009; Dollarhide et al., 2008; Lambie & Sias, 2009; McMahon, 2002; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Rayle, 2006; Reynolds & Cheek, 2002; Somody et al., 2008; Sorenson, 2007; Walter, et al., 2008; Wickramasinghe, 2010). These and other studies will be discussed in the following literature review.

Many theories guide this study and are the basis for its theoretical framework including Selye's (1984) stress theory, Maslach's (1993) burnout theory, Kouzes and Posner's (2007) leadership theory, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping theory, and Maslow's (1943) motivation theory. This theoretical framework, as well as significant literature pertaining to the

history and role of the school counselor, the role of the DGC, and factors affecting stress and burnout, will be discussed in this section.

Theoretical Framework

Some studies have been conducted regarding role ambiguity, heavy workload, non-counseling duties and the stress that these and other variables cause school counselors; however, most are dated (Cicero, 2009; Kuranz, 2002; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Nelson, Robles-Pina, Nichter, 2008). No studies were found that examine the nature and scope of the stress in relation to the coping strategies and leadership practices utilized at both district and campus level of the experienced MSC in urban middle schools in Texas. This research is based on an ontological philosophical assumption that “reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 17).

According to stress theory, each participant may respond to the phenomenon of stress regarding varying factors of the school counselor’s workload, tasks, and organizational factors in their own way because they are individuals with unique thoughts and feelings. They each may have a different reaction to the stress. Some may thrive under the pressure, while others may falter, according to their own individual coping mechanisms (Selye, 1984).

Stress Theories

During the early 20th century the concept of stress came to be associated with an individual’s relationship with their environment and how it affected their well-being. Much emphasis was placed on how the faster pace of living in this new century affected psychosocial reactions of the body. This was the time that the word stress began to take on a new meaning. Primarily associated with engineering, the word now began to represent a state in the body which could affect mental health and physical illness. Concern for functionalism and work

performance based upon this concept began to emerge during these early years (Cooper & Dewe, 2008). Basically, scientists began to look at psychosomatic illness, “the relationship between emotions and disease” (Cooper & Dewe, 2008, p. 14).

One scientist who spearheaded this approach to illness was Walter Bradford Cannon (Selye, 1984). Cannon discussed homeostasis, which is the body’s effort to return itself to equilibrium in times of stress via physiological activities. Cannon theorized that this response was immediate, yet complex, allowing the body to maintain stability even though there was some fluctuation brought on by stressors. His work spans three decades and is often the starting point in explaining stress (Cooper & Dewe, 2008).

Like Cannon, Selye (1984) explored how stress is related to health problems. In his experiments, rats were injected with Formalin, a toxic irritant. He categorized their reactions into three stages which he later referred to as the *stress syndrome*. First there was the *alarm reaction*. His first experiments showed that this stage was followed closely by a *stage of resistance* or adaptation. His experiments showed that no living thing could survive in a constant state of alarm without death ensuing; therefore, this adaptation stage was imperative to survival. If prolonged exposure to the noxious agent or stressor persisted, the animal in his study would enter a third phase or *stage of exhaustion* (Selye, p. 37). He coined the term *general adaptation syndrome* for these three stages. He found through his study that the same syndrome could be elicited by injecting the rats with other things besides Formalin and even by subjecting them “to cold, heat, x-rays, or mechanical trauma; one can [even] produce it with hemorrhage, pain, or forced muscular exercise” (Selye, 1984, p. 35). Through his study, he discovered that although we all respond somewhat differently to stressors, on the whole we each tend to manifest some

common signs of stress. These signal that it is time to “stop or change [our] activity—that is, find a diversion” (Selye, 1984, p. 174). Some of these common signs are:

- General irritability, hyper-excitation, or depression.
- Pounding of the heart.
- Dryness of the throat or mouth.
- Impulsive behavior, emotional instability.
- The overpowering urge to cry or run and hide.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Feelings of unreality, weakness, or dizziness.
- Predilection to become fatigued.
- “Floating anxiety.”
- Emotional tension and alertness.
- Trembling, nervous ticks.
- Tendency to be easily startled.
- High-pitched, nervous laughter.
- Stuttering and other speech difficulties.
- Bruxism.
- Insomnia.
- Hypermobility.
- Sweating.
- The frequent need to urinate.
- Diarrhea, indigestion, queasiness in the stomach, and sometimes even vomiting.
- Migraine headaches.

- Premenstrual tension or missed menstrual cycles.
- Pain in the neck or lower back.
- Loss of or excessive appetite.
- Increased smoking.
- Increased use of legally prescribed drugs.
- Alcohol and drug addiction.
- Nightmares.
- Neurotic behavior.
- Psychoses.
- Accident proneness (Selye, 1984, p. 174-178).

Selye concludes that the most significant factor is not the stressor itself; instead, it is a person's "ability to cope with demands made by the events in [their] lives, not the quality or intensity of the events that counts" (Selye, 1976, p. 17). Simply put, the way one handles what happens in one's life is what matters the most (Selye, 1976). He coined the term *general adaptation syndrome*, which was later referred to as *stress syndrome*.

McEwen and Stellar (1993) explained the term *allostasis* as the body's attempt to meet the demands placed upon it by external forces via the fluctuation of physiological changes.

According to the Mayo Clinic (2011),

[one] undoubtedly face[s] multiple demands each day, such as shouldering a huge workload, making ends meet, taking care of [one's] family, or just making it through the morning rush hour. [One's] body treats these so-called minor hassles as threats. (para. 2)

According to Norden (2007), studies in neuroscience demonstrate that chronic stress can produce damage to the immune and cardiovascular system, as well as the brain (as cited by Duncan,

2010). If a person remains in a persistent state of stress, mental cognition and health may be affected in a negative manner (Gwirtz, 2008; Mayo Clinic, 2011). Persistent job related and interpersonal stress plays a major role in burnout (Maslach, 2003b).

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do “people-work” of some kind. It is a response to the chronic emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings, particularly when they are troubled or having problems. Thus, it can be considered one type of job stress. Although it has some of the same deleterious effects as other stress responses, what is unique about burnout is that the stress arises from the social interaction between helper and recipient. (p. 2)

This illuminates the need to identify and understand MSCs’ stressors.

Coping Theory

In his studies Selye (1979) alluded to the fact that the impact of stress is related to how the individual handles the event and not the severity or gravity of the event. This theory was developed more fully by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Selye’s studies were conducted on animals; however, Lazarus and Folkman theorized that complex cognitive appraisals are an important component of how people cope with stress.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguished three types of cognitive primary appraisals: “(a) irrelevant, (b), benign-positive, and (c) stressful” (p. 31). The first type of appraisal is of no concern to the person; therefore, it produces no response. The second type produces an initial positive response; however, it could then evoke a negative response according to the individual’s experience with the situation at hand. Finally, the third type produces either a threat or a challenge, according to how it is perceived and evaluated by the individual (Lazarus & Folkman,

1984). According to these authors, appraisals are often mixed and complex based on the factors such as the person's prior experience and the current situation. It has been noted that coping style is an important factor in not only physical, but also psychological wellness (Endler & Parker, 1999). Additionally, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress-strain coping theory suggested that inadequate coping abilities may contribute to the increase in stress, thereby resulting in a higher level of burnout. "Since the 1960s there has been growing recognition that while stress is an inevitable aspect of the human condition, it is coping that makes the big difference in adaptational outcome" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 6).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), strategies which have the purpose of lessening emotional stress include such things as "avoidance, minimization, distancing, selective attention, positive comparisons, and wresting positive value from negative events" (p. 150). These strategies are often referred to as emotion-focused.

Problem-focused strategies according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) are basically the same as solution-oriented strategies with the exception that they are not only directed to solving a problem in the environment, but they are also directed inwardly to solve issues within one's own self. Examples of problem-focused self-directed coping strategies are changing one's degree of aspiration, reducing the involvement of the ego, discovering different paths to gratification, acquiring new behavior standards, or cultivating new skills and practices. These self-directed problem-focused coping strategies are used in conjunction with the environmentally directed problem solving coping strategies to aid the person in problem management or solution in stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), the problem-focused self-directed coping strategies, such as discovering different paths to gratification and changing degree of ego

involvement, are also known as cognitive reappraisals. People generally use a combination of problem-focused and emotional-focused coping strategies when dealing with stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In fact, one may use both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies simultaneously. At times using both forms can be helpful in coping with stress; at other times using both forms of coping strategies can encumber stress management (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Coping is influenced by available resources. Health, positive self-esteem, problem solving abilities, social skills, social support and material sources such as money, are all examples of possible resources that may be available to people to help them cope with their stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Theory of Burnout

Christina Maslach has conducted many studies and written several articles and publications pertaining to burnout. An expert in the field of study, she developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). According to research by Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), many people who work in service occupations such as mental health services, nursing and counseling are prone to burnout. According to Maslach (2003b), there are three areas that define burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of feelings of personal accomplishment.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined emotional exhaustion as feeling exhausted and overextended, not only mentally, but physically as well. Upon awakening in the morning, the person is fatigued; they have no desire to begin projects or deal with people. They feel completely used up and drained. This is the first reaction to the stress of job demands.

The authors go on to define depersonalization as a type of cynicism. The person begins to distance himself from the people around him and the job, becomes more negative, gives up on ideals, and basically just goes through the motions. This is an effort to protect oneself from exhaustion and disappointment. But the resulting negativism is very harmful to the person's well-being and ability to perform job duties (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Finally, Maslach and Leiter (1997) define a lack of personal accomplishment as feeling ineffective and inadequate. In this stage one may feel that the world is against him and feel overwhelmed by responsibilities that once were fun and challenging. The person may begin to trivialize accomplishments, thus losing the confidence to make a difference. In turn others lose confidence in the person, which further emphasizes his lack of effectiveness.

A survey specific to the service occupations such as nursing and mental health occupations was developed in 1981 by Maslach. Until recently, this burnout inventory was the closest one available to a school counseling burnout inventory; however, more recently, Lee et al. (2007) developed a burnout inventory specific to school counselors (CBI).

Motivation Theory

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), physiological needs must be met before a person can concentrate on the next level of needs. Stress is physiological. If counselors feel they are unable to overcome or cope with stress, they may become stuck at this very basic level; this may prevent them from pursuing higher needs (Maslow, 1943). Additionally, today's unstable economy, combined with cuts to educational budgets, understandably leaves counselors concerned about their jobs and their economic well-being. This fear that basic needs may not be met combined with the stress of the job overload and demand may render the professional school counselor unable to move forward.

Belongingness is another level on the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). Those who do not feel adequately supported by their supervisors may not feel that they matter (Rayle, 2006). Ultimately, this may affect their perception of *belongingness*. Not feeling as though they belong or matter may prevent the professional school counselor from putting forth their best effort.

With so many levels of needs possibly being negatively affected by the depressed economy and negative changes to school legislation, coupled with the stress of the counselors' multiple roles and demands, it was even more important that we investigated these issues, seeking answers directly from the counselors and their supervisors, listening to their perceptions in an effort to fully understand the issue. Gaining this understanding may have provided an avenue for DGCs to foster a supportive environment conducive to school counselors developing healthy coping mechanisms and stress preventive measures. Through the understanding gained from the voices of the DGCs and the MSCs, meaningful professional development may be developed for our counselors and additional training might be provided for our campus administrators; this should allow our counselors to enjoy a healthier work climate, with fewer chronic mental and physical issues (Heibert, 2006; Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen, 2009).

Leadership Theory

DGCs are leaders. According to path goal theory, a supportive leader focuses on the well-being of those whom they lead (Gorton & Alston, 2009; Hackman & Johnson, 2009; Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Through supportive leadership, confidence is bolstered and stressful tasks are more likely to be completed satisfactorily (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). According to Gorton and Alston (2009) when a job is stressful, supportive leadership is important. How a person

perceives a stressful situation determines its effect on their well-being; additionally, by creating a climate of hardiness, a leader can help followers cope (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

According to Kouzes and Posner (2007), one way this can be done is by ensuring that tasks are “challenging, but within the person’s skill level” (p. 209). According to this theory, DGCs who practice supportive leadership can help to alleviate counselor stress, prevent burnout, and create an atmosphere where counselors are more likely to cope with their stress, complete their tasks and ultimately provide better services for their students.

Review of the Literature

The Role of the School Counselor

The role of the school counselor has changed over the years (ASCA, 2005). In fact, it continues to evolve and develop as society changes and as the needs of the student and the educational systems are altered (Cobia & Henderson, 2003). School counselors were originally utilized to provide vocational guidance; however, presently, they are perceived in multiple ways by varying stakeholders.

Not only do the changes in society and the educational systems affect the role of the counselor, but the level of the counselor’s job affects their role (McCarthy et al., 2010). Job duties of an elementary school counselor may not be the same as job duties of a MSC. Likewise, job duties of the MSC may not be reflective of the job duties of the high school counselor (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Nelson, Robles-Pina, & Nichter, 2008).

Additionally, the role of a counselor in an urban school district may be totally different than that of a counselor who works in a rural district (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Nelson et al., 2008). According to Weist, Myers, Danforth, McNeil, Ollendick and Hawkins (2000), urban schools are not only more culturally diverse, but they also tend to have a greater number of

students who are poor, subjected to crime, and living in overcrowded situations. According to the author, this type of setting often produces children who have a greater amount of mental health issues than rural or suburban youth. Increased mental health issues may add additional elements of stress for the school counselor (Philip, 2004). Therefore, it is imperative to study the school counselor in the counselor's unique setting.

Finally, each district is comprised of unique students. Therefore, it is also important to view a counselors' role through their own particular lens (Nelson et al., 2008).

Historical role of the school counselor. In the early 1900s school counselors were basically non-existent. In 1906 Frank Parsons, a professor, author, editor and attorney (Brewer, Cleary, Dunsmoor, Lake, Nichols, Smith, & Smith, 1942), was invited by Phillip Davis, the director of a center for civic education known as Civic Service House, and Meyer Bloomfield, a Harvard graduate, to speak to one of the graduating classes of one of the evening high schools in Boston about choosing a vocation (Zytowski, 2001). Parsons was an excellent speaker (Brewer et al., 1942); therefore, his talks generated much interest from the students, eventually leading to the formulation of a plan for "systematic vocational guidance" (Zytowski, 2001, p. 61) which included choice of vocation; guided, thoughtful self-analysis; knowledge of different vocations; advice from experts; and the significance of recording the process (Brewer et al., 1942). This was the beginning of vocational counseling and paved the way for what we now know as school counseling (Brewer, et al, 1942).

During the early 1900s teachers were given the responsibility of providing vocational guidance to students in their classrooms by integrating it into the curriculum (Gysbers, 2005). The focus of vocational education was to prepare students for the work force (Gysbers, 2001).

The goal of vocational guidance was to categorize students according to their abilities towards likely careers (Gysbers, 2001).

During World War I, intelligence testing and other types of assessments were developed for measuring student growth and determining good fit for military positions (Schmidt, 2008; Studer, 2008). Sputnik I's launching greatly affected school counseling because it marked the beginning of the race into space. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 allocated money to the states to not only provide school counseling, but also to set up programs in the universities to train students for a profession in school counseling (Studer, 2008).

Eventually, the focus shifted towards an emphasis on academic guidance (ASCA, 2005). Over the past 100 years, school counseling has evolved from strictly vocational responsibilities to being responsible for developing a comprehensive guidance plan that focuses on the academic and social needs of each and every student (Gladding, 2007; ASCA, 2005).

Current role of the school counselor. The ASCA (2005) has defined the role of the school counselor as

certified/licensed educators with the minimum of a master's degree in school counseling and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students through a comprehensive school counseling program addressing the academic, career and personal/social development of all students. (para. 9)

Typical roles of school counselors however, are extremely varied (Nelson et al., 2008).

Although school counselors are currently trained to take a leadership role and develop a comprehensive guidance plan, this has not always been the case (Dollahide, et al., 2008). Many practicing school counselors graduated before these changes were made by the ASCA.

Therefore, without proper professional development or guidance, they may not be familiar with or even aware of the new expectations for school counselors.

Additionally, when school counselors are placed into schools, they are generally assigned traditional tasks which may include class scheduling, test administration, addressing the needs of students with academic or behavioral problems, individually, referring students to social services and programs within the community, and providing college and career advice (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Dodson, 2009; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). Epstein and Van Voorhis (2010) discuss the dilemma that administrators have when placing counselors: Do they continue to do these typical tasks? Or do they redirect the responsibility for these tasks to others, thus freeing up time for the school counselors to pursue the leadership and accountability role that has been suggested by ASCA?

A review of the literature produced varying expectations of the school counselor (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Beale, 2003; Fitch, Newby, Ballesterro & Marshall, 2001). Although there is overlap in all of the descriptions, ambiguity still exists regarding appropriate school counselor roles and duties (Dodson, 2009; Fitch & Marshall, 2004). In an effort to determine how principals viewed the role of the school counselor, Amatea & Clark (2005) interviewed 28 principals from various levels. The data depicted that there were four distinctive views of school counselor roles: (a) leader, (b) consultant, (c) individual and group counselor, and (d) administrative team member. Results from Amatea and Clark's study indicated that administrators continue to expect school counselors to conduct themselves in a more traditional role rather than in a more contemporary role of leader as is emphasized in the ASCA National Model (2005). The study concluded that school counselors need to become more proactive in advocating for their new role and embark on discussions with their administrators concerning

their perceptions of the school counselor's role (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Beale, 2003; Dodson, 2009; Fitch et al., 2001).

Not only are school counselors expected to continue with the typical roles previously discussed by Epstein and Van Voorhis (2010), but they are also expected to mete out measures of their time to address other needs based upon the ASCA National Model (2005). White and Kelly (2010) reviewed the issue and found that school counselors were well suited in their training to deliver research based support interventions to not only help students meet academic success, but also to prevent students from dropping out.

Services provided by school counselors in this role included both "reduction of risk factors and enhancement of protective factors" (White & Kelly, 2010, p. 228). These authors suggested that a critical segment of the school counselor's role is to develop and coordinate programs to address behaviors that are representative of students who are at risk of dropping out of school. These programs include tutoring interventions, parent nights, peer tutoring programs, peer support groups for minority students, parent training, parent resources, service learning programs for students, study skills lessons, and academic support (Beale, 2003; Ryan, Kaffenberger & Carroll, 2011; White & Kelly, 2010).

Dodson (2009) noted that the school counselor's role was ambiguous. Although ASCA (2005) redefined the school counselor's role, not all principals are aware of this (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Dodson, 2009; McGlothlin & Miller, 2008) due to their lack of training in the matter (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Though the ASCA National Model (2005) defines both "appropriate and inappropriate roles for a school counselor" (Dodson, 2009, p. 481), building principals continue to assign non-counseling tasks to school counselors (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Beale, 2003; Dodson, 2009; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). A study

conducted in Arizona by Kolodinsky et al. (2009) of 155 school counselors indicated that school counselors were very frustrated with non-counseling duties which left them feeling off-task.

Researchers tended to agree that school counselors must become proactive and collaborate with their principals to clarify their roles (Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Beale, 2003, Dodson, 2009); otherwise, principals will continue to expect the school counselors to be responsible for non-counseling duties that others in the building do not have time for or do not want to undertake (Dodson, 2009; Vail, 2005). Dodson (2009) suggested that school counselors advocate for appropriate roles by utilizing data. According to his study, data that provides evidence of success based upon school counselor interventions would “help to change perceptions and gain support for appropriate school counseling roles” (Dodson, 2009, p. 484).

Based upon ASCA suggestions for counselors to become more accountable for student success, Epstein & Van Voorhis (2010) suggested that the school counselor allocate 20% of their time to new tasks such as parent involvement and partnerships for student success. Colbert, Vernon-Jones & Pranksy (2006) acknowledged that the expanded role of school counselors “must be more compatible with the more traditional roles” (p. 81). Finally, Beale (2003) noted that “if counselors do not relate their programs to the basic mission of schools they risk extinction” (p. 71). Redirecting the school counselor’s time to preventions and interventions would require approval from principals and DGCs (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010).

These studies illuminated the multiple roles that counselors may have based upon both new and old expectations. They also suggest the possible need for strong advocacy from the DGCs to define counselor duties in an effort to eliminate role ambiguity. Finally, the studies also suggest a need for administrative support for school counselors while they transition into the new roles depicted by ASCA.

School Counselor Supervision, Roles and Types

The term *supervisor* as it relates to counseling may have multiple meanings. There are clinical supervisors and administrative supervisors (Somody et al., 2008; Lambie & Sias, 2009). A counseling supervisor may be defined as an experienced, credentialed, professional who is available and designated to provide support, instruction, and feedback to a less experienced counselor, thus fostering skill development; the ultimate goal is the delivery of more ethical services to the client (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Somody et al., 2008; Studer, 2005).

However, a DGC may have varying credentials and may perform multiple roles. Some DGCs may be school counselors, while others may not. Still some school DGCs may hold a state license to counsel in the mental health field, while others may not. Budget crunches make it more likely that DGCs may have various duties and responsibilities not related to school counseling. This wide variation of roles and credentials is noted in the literature (Cicero, 2009; Cook, 2008).

School counselors are expected to have multiple competencies in order to address the diverse needs of students in schools today (Crutchfield & Borders, 2006). Texas expects school counselors to possess competencies in eight domains: “Program management, guidance, counseling, consultation, coordination, student assessment, professional behavior and professional standards” (Somody et al., 2008). In addition to these factors, counselors demonstrate their professionalism by demonstrating commitment to the counseling profession. Support from supervisors for professionalism includes caring support, mentoring, encouragement and counseling interventions when necessary (Somody et al., 2008).

According to a study by Somody et al. (2008), both clinical as well as administrative supervision is beneficial in order to provide school counselors with the support they need to

adequately address the diverse and ever increasing needs of students in schools today. Their case study of four counselors from Northside Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas demonstrated how assessment, intervention, training, and support by the DGC were beneficial in improving the quality of the school counselor's performance.

Studies indicate that although there is need for clinical supervision of school counselors, it is not always available (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006). Because of this some counselors must rely on peer supervision as an option when no district counselor supervisor is available or when the DGC does not have a clinical background (Wachter et al., 2008). Studies show that the intense nature of repeated exposure to crisis can be a potential cause of burnout (Fong, 2005). Therefore, providing support to school counselors who must deal with these crises is an important factor in preventing burnout (Wachter et al., 2008).

According to McMahon (2002) email supervision is a viable alternative to no district counselor supervision. Results from her study of 28 counselors in Australia who had no DGC suggested that in the absence of face to face supervision, email supervision was reported to increase feelings of support and connectedness among colleagues. This result supports other studies concerning the effect of supervision on counselor well-being. Over half of the participants stated that they liked the email supervision because they had time to reflect, could remain anonymous and it was convenient to their choice of timing.

Both Wachter et al. (2008) study and McMahon's (2002) research supported evidence that peers could provide school counselor support when a DGC was not available; however, limitations were observed. Time related issues were a minor concern for some of the participants, as they had to invest time to prepare their cases; they also had to wait for feedback.

But the study presented favorable evidence that technology could be useful in school counselor supervision.

Conn et al. (2009) noted another alternative method of counselor supervision. In a study of 76 school counseling graduate students, they utilized a combination of both face to face and media based supervision. The study compared this group to another group of students who received only face to face supervision. Results showed “there was no significant difference between groups on perceptions of quality of supervision” (Conn et al., p. 303). The authors concluded that media based supervision may be the answer to finding qualified counselor supervisors for areas that do not have a DGC.

Cicero (2009) conducted a study of six DGCs in one district in Maryland to gain understanding of their perceptions of systemic factors affecting school counselors’ ability to become educational leaders as is part of the new school reform as documented by ASCA (2005). Several of the supervisors in this study noted that their role was to support school counselors, helping them address their challenges and “reduce anxiety so school counselors could do their jobs” (Cicero, 2009. p. 131). Other supervisors in this study mentioned that providing professional development for school counselors was important in the development of the counselor’s leadership roles. Finally a few supervisors expressed their awareness of the need for collaboration of school counselors to prevent feelings of isolation.

McMahon & Patton (2000) conducted a qualitative study of 15 randomly selected focus groups to understand the perceptions of school guidance counselors and senior guidance counselors concerning the effects of inadequate supervision. Margin coding was utilized on the transcribed data to discover important themes. One theme that emerged was that of isolation and its resulting barrier to developing better counseling skills. Additionally, the study found that

school counselors developed their own network for support when supervision was inadequate; however, it was noted that this support is not a substitute for supervision. Finally, the overall perception which emerged from this study indicated that new school counselors were especially prone to high levels of stress when supervision was lacking.

Gnilka et al. (2012) studied the relationship between counselor stress, coping strategies, working alliance and supervisory alliance among 232 counseling students who were working on their practicums in various settings. This quantitative study found that high “stress levels were a negative predictor of the supervisory working alliance” (p. 67). Counselors who reported less overall stress and who felt able to control their surroundings indicated that they had stronger bonds with their supervisors (Gnilka et al., 2012). Therefore, the counselor’s perception of a positive relationship between the counselor and the supervisor increased the counselor’s ability to cope with stress. According to the researchers of this study, more research into the mediating effects of the supervisory relationship on counselor stress is needed (Gnilka et al., 2012).

This information correlates with the findings of McMahon and Patton (2000) who found value in supervision. In this study counselors described the importance of supervision not only as a connectedness, but also as a means to collaborate and “discuss difficult issues” (p. 345). Many felt that supervision promoted their “emotional well-being and mental health” (p. 345) and helped to prevent burnout.

Factors Predicting School Counselor Stress and Burnout

Several theories exist relating to job stress and burnout. In 1929, Cannon discussed homeostasis, which is the body’s effort to balance itself. In the 1950s Selye and Fortier, along with Cannon, discuss how chronic stress can trigger health problems (Selye, 1976). According to Selye (1956) emotional stress is by far the most significant stressor in humans. Additionally,

the effects of stress are not so much dependent upon what happens to a person, but instead are dependent upon the way one handles the stress (Selye, 1984, p. 370). Selye discussed occupations and environments in which stressors can be health threatening. Among these stressful occupations and environments discussed were helping professions and isolation. He also discussed how the stress of problem solving and anxiety can be detrimental to overall health in some individuals. Again, he stated that one's coping mechanisms are key predictors of the effects of stress (Selye, 1956).

Burnout is defined as an array of negative feelings and behaviors which affect all areas of performance (Savicki & Cooley, 1982). According to Maslach (1993), burnout can be assessed in the following areas:

- Emotional exhaustion.
- Depersonalization.
- Personal accomplishment.

Maslach (2003a) noted that the challenges in work environments are complex; therefore they impact individuals differently. Social conflict and excessive workload may produce exhaustion and cynicism, while a lack of resources, such as information, tools, supplies or time can result in a feeling of inefficacy (Maslach, 2003a). According to the author there are two contrasting beliefs regarding cause of burnout: (a) the problem lies within the person, and (b) the problem is a result of the situation, not the person. Maslach (2003a) found that research better supports the argument that burnout is situational because

Many studies, across many occupations and in different countries, have identified the consistent impact of employee burnout on a range of job characteristics (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1988). For example, chronically difficult job demands, an imbalance between

high demands and low resources, and the presence of conflict (whether between people, between role demands, or between important values) are consistently found in situations in which employees experience burnout. (p. 191)

More recently Wilkerson (2009) conducted a study on counselor burnout specifically targeting practicing school counselors. The random sample was taken from the ASCA membership list and included 37 male counselors and 161 female counselors. Results from the study suggested that burnout may be malleable and connected to the person's choice of coping strategies. Vaillant (2011) noted that some coping strategies are healthy, while others may not be. This aligns with what Selye (1984) discussed in his stress theory. He felt that the way a person handled stress was key.

Burnout has been found to be “related to anxiety and depression” (Maslach, 2001, p. 403); however, research illuminated that unlike depression, burnout is directly related to the work environment and does not pervade other areas such as home-life (Bakker et al., 2000; Glass & McKnight, 1996; Leiter & Durup, 1994). In these studies, burnout was found to be job-related. According to Maslach (2003a), “job burnout is a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to stressors in the workplace. Specifically, it involves the chronic strain that results from an incongruence, or misfit, between the worker and the job” (p. 189).

Additionally, Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) noted that the risk of burnout is greater in the beginning of a career and occurs more frequently among those with more education. These authors asserted that those with passive, defensive coping styles are more prone to burnout than assertive, confrontational types.

Philip (2004) studied 100 psychologists who worked in private practices in South Africa. Participant selection was based upon membership in the Psychological Society of South Africa.

The quantitative study utilized Maslach's Burnout Inventory, a coping questionnaire, a survey about the participants' work experience, and a questionnaire concerning biographical data. Philip found no significant relationship between either problem-focused coping or emotion-focused coping and reduction in stress and burnout among psychologists practicing in South Africa.

These findings contradicted others who found that there was a significant correlation between coping factors, stress and burnout (Cherniss, 1980, Leiter & Maslach, 1988). However, the authors felt that this may have been due to the instrument not addressing stressors specific to burnout for psychologists. This study not only illuminates the need for qualitative studies which should add to the quantitative literature by going straight to the source, hearing the counselors' perceptions, rather than gathering data from a Likert type scale which may or may not address the specific problem, but it also illuminates the need to utilize an instrument made specifically for counselors when measuring their stress and burnout.

Wilkerson & Bellini (2006) conducted a quantitative study of a random sample of 94 members of a school counseling organization; they also found that interpersonal and organizational factors may predict burnout. Coping styles and administrative support, respectively, are examples of these types of factor. Gnilka et al. (2012) in a quantitative study of 232 student professional counselors, found that high levels of stress were related to negative coping styles and that low levels of stress were predictive of a good working relationship with the student counselor's supervisor. Of the 232 participants, only 42 were school counselor trainees; consequently, it should be noted that this supervisory relationship was between a trainee and a supervisor which is different from the proposed study.

The author stated that “future researchers may also want to consider the supervisor’s perspective of the supervisory working alliance . . . and explore through qualitative . . . methods how attachment styles, stress, social support and coping resources influence both types of alliances” (Gnilka et al., 2012, p. 69). It was also suggested that future researchers explore the working relationship between the counselor and the supervisor from the supervisor’s perspective using qualitative methods examining areas such as stress, support and coping resources. The current study will investigate mitigating effects of supervision on the phenomenon of stress of practicing certified MSCs and their DGC through qualitative methods.

Webber (2004) conducted a quantitative study of 247 school counselors from New Jersey to see what factors affected burnout. One of the factors studied was social support which included both supervisory, principal and peer support. The study utilized a Pearson correlation and found that one factor predictive of counselor burnout was lack of support of the DGC. This type of support was important in reducing or preventing “emotional exhaustion” (Webber, 2004, p. 143) which is a significant factor in predicting burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

Other factors associated with burnout include large caseload, and role ambiguity. Mascari (2002) found that rare, critical events such as suicide and abuse, are major stressors for school counselors; therefore, they could be a factor in predicting burnout (Fong, 2005; Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993). Gibbons and Studer (2008) recommend that suicide awareness training be implemented in schools by the school counselors. “school personnel may be found criminally negligent in student suicide cases under certain circumstances” (p. 273). This could be a source of stress for counselors who have no support or guidance from a DGC.

An additional area of concern could be ethical dilemmas. In a study by Astramovick, Coker & Hoskins (2005), it was noted that counselors have more dilemmas with confidentiality

than with anything else. This could be a major stressor, especially if guidance and support is lacking.

Coping Strategies

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) noted that “while stress is an inevitable aspect of the human condition, it is coping that makes the big difference in adaptational outcome” (p. 6). The authors stated that World War II fueled interest on how performance was affected by differing levels of stress. This realization that stress affected people differently was the basis for much research into the moderating variables and the subsequent interactions of the effects of stress. Studies continue about the significant issues of “stress and performance” and “encourages the investigation of individual differences” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 8-9).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) there are two types of coping strategies that one may access in a stressful situation: Problem-focused and emotional-focused. Problem-focused coping strategies include both environmental solutions as well as self-directed solutions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). External strategies include problem definition, solution generation, analyzing pros and cons, decision, and implementation of the decision. In addition to these external problem-focused coping strategies, internally focused strategies may include altering the level of ambition, discovering new avenues of fulfillment, developing additional skills or techniques, and changing behavior requirements. Emotion-focused coping strategies may include things such as avoiding, distancing, minimizing, reframing into a positive light, utilizing optimism, and positive appraisals of incidents (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Both problem-focused and emotion focused coping strategies often depend upon available resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These resources may be both external and internal. Examples of internal or self-directed resources are beliefs, social skills, self-esteem,

and self-efficacy. External examples are social support, competent supervisors, and financial resources.

Wilkerson (2009) studied individual coping strategies and the effects they have on burnout in school counselors. One of the aspects of his study was to determine which of the three types of stressors was most predictive of counselor burnout: demographic, organizational or individual. He found that the emotion-focused coping strategy was more likely to predict a lower perception of personal accomplishment, while task-oriented coping strategies produced higher perceptions of personal accomplishment. This study suggested that emotion-focused coping is basically a good predictor of burnout and the authors suggested that school counselors might benefit from “developing proactive approaches for dealing with stress” (Wilkerson, p. 435). Implications of the study were that school counselors could benefit from collaborating with their supervisors and other leaders to clarify and better define their roles because there was a strong correlation between organizational issues and burnout.

Lambie (2007) studied the ego development of school counselors and how it affected burnout which by definition would be a problem-focused, self-directed coping resource according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The study utilized three instruments to collect data from 225 participants. The instruments consisted of a demographic questionnaire, an ego maturity inventory, and a burnout inventory. They found that higher levels of ego maturity were correlated with the school counselor being able to better cope with emotional tiredness. They also found that school counselors with higher ego maturity tended to express more satisfaction with their personal accomplishments. They concluded that school counselors who operate with higher levels of ego maturity were better prepared to set good boundaries and take care of

themselves. These strategies allowed them to acknowledge and accept job limitations and maintain satisfactory feelings about their profession.

This study also showed that support was correlated with burnout prevention. The authors suggested that “supervision may serve as an effective form of occupational support to combat burnout” (Lambie, 2007, p. 86). Maslach (2003a) discussed burnout intervention research. She stated that Maslach and Leichter (2001) “attempted to develop an organizational approach to assessing burnout and developing strategies for change based upon the fact[s]” (Maslach, 2003a, p. 192).

Organizational Factors

Organizational factors are associated with counselor stress and burnout as well as job satisfaction (Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006; Landrum et al., 2012). Wilkerson and Bellini (2006) looked at the variance and influence of three factors in predicting burnout: demographic, intrapersonal, and organizational. They surveyed 94 school counselors from the northeastern United States. The study was quantitative in nature. The focus of the study was to attempt to determine which factor or factors could predict burnout, and found that organizational factors were approaching significance in predicting emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. According to Maslach (2003a), these are both strong predictors of burnout.

Wilkerson (2009) again conducted a study exploring organizational stressors, demographic stressors, and personal coping strategies in an effort to discover the factors that most influence burnout. He utilized a fairly large random sample of school counselors based upon their membership with the ASCA. Of 482 sampled, 187 responded. Wilkerson found that those who lacked the authority to make decisions were more likely to experience lower levels of personal accomplishment. “This study presented evidence that both perceived levels of

organizational stress and an individual approach to coping have strong predictive value for the outcomes of burnout” (p. 436). However, according to the author, one of the limitations of the study was the possibility that only the healthiest counselors participated; this is suggestive of a need for a study that will go directly to the school counselors who indicate they are experiencing stress in their careers in an effort to hear directly from them their own perceptions of not only their counseling related stressors, but also their perceptions of how their coping styles affect their stress and prevent burnout (Wilkerson, 2009).

Dollarhide et al. (2008) studied five participants in a qualitative study regarding their leadership activities. The participants were interviewed monthly to gain information about their pursuit of leadership roles in the school and were asked in the last interview to discuss challenges, both within themselves and within the organization, their leadership growth, and variations in their levels of confidence. Without organizational support, it was found that the school counselors felt alone and not supported in their efforts. Some stated that they felt anxiety and pressure. Trying to take a leadership position as is recommended by The American Counseling Association can bring about stress when the organizational factors are not conducive to this type of activity for counselors.

Yildirim (2008) studied the relationship between social support and school counselor burnout in Ankara, Turkey. Surveys of 214 participants were completed. It was reported that principal support was an important factor in predicting burnout. Collegial support was “significantly related to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment” (p. 609). Results from this study may indicate the importance of organizational factors in reducing burnout; however, studies in the United States would perhaps be more representative of principal behavior and collegial behavior due to differences in the organizations. Therefore, it is

important to explore these factors with participants in the United States to better understand how organizational issues can impact a school counselor's stress and potential burnout.

Landrum et al. (2012) collected data from the staff of 115 outpatient drug programs across multiple states to determine the effect of organizational factors on client engagement. Their study found,

that the degree to which members of the organization perceive themselves as having influence can moderate the relationship between stress and staff burnout. When influence is higher within a program, stress is not related to burnout. However, when influence is low, higher stress is associated with higher burnout. Thus, influence serves as a buffer against burnout. Programs where staff report more knowledge sharing, influence in the decisions made by the program, and are being viewed as a leader by their peers have lower organizational burnout even when stress was high. (p. 228)

This study, though not about school counselors, seems to indicate that organizational factors might play an important factor in school counselor stress and burnout. School counselors who do not feel that they are influential in their schools and who feel they are not part of the leadership team, may feel isolated, and may be more prone to stress and burnout.

Summary

The role of the school counselor has evolved over the years; however, it is obvious that principals and administrators are not always aware of the ASCA new vision for school counselors. In fact it is apparent that the roles of the counselor continue to be ambiguous. Principals and other stakeholders do not often understand the role of the counselor; therefore, the counselor continues to experience confusion due to this ambiguity between administrator's perceptions and the ASCA suggestions. This ambiguity coupled with the school counselor's

desire to change could prove to be a major source of frustration and stress for the school counselor who may not feel supported in this transition.

There is some literature describing school counselors and factors predicting stress and burnout; although many of these are dated. A handful of studies about supervision of school counselors and stress exist however, these are varied as to the definition of supervision (Lambie & Sias, 2009; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Wachter et al., 2008). Some supervision is merely during a practicum period, others refer only to clinical supervision, while relatively few refer to studies involving practicing school counselors and their DGCs (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006).

There are also studies on the effect of the supervisee's perception of the supervisory relationship on professional counselors' stress (Gnilka et al., 2012). This relationship is between a clinical supervisor and a student counselor trainee rather than a DGC and a school counselor. Furthermore, most of the studies on this topic have been quantitative. Currently debate exists as to the moderating factors that affect stress and burnout (Philip, 2004). This debate is also reflected in Maslach's (2003a) discussion on burnout in the workplace and the interventions,

While individual oriented approaches may help alleviate exhaustion, [they] may not affect the other dimensions of burnout. In addition, individual strategies are relatively ineffective in the workplace, where people have much less control over stressors than in other domains of their life. (p. 192)

This study investigated not only the source of stress for the school counselor, but it also explored the role of both the MSCs and the DGCs in reducing stress and preventing burnout. It has been noted that stress and burnout is related to both personal and organizational factors (Philip, 2004; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Wickramasinghe, 2010). This study will explore all

aspects of school counselor stress, including organizational factors such as process and procedures.

Although it is important to understand counselor's perceptions of the source of their stress, it is also imperative to understand how the counselors and the DGCs perceive their own responsibilities in coping with stress and preventing burnout in school counselors. This qualitative study will add another dimension to the earlier studies addressing school counselor stress; by speaking directly to the counselors themselves, important information should be discovered. This information should provide enrichment and enhancement for the earlier quantitative studies on related subjects. According to Moustakas (1994), an expert in the field of phenomenological studies,

In phenomenological studies the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or a problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for other further research and reflection The method of reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological approach provides a logical, systematic and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience. (p. 47)

Personal reflections and perceptions of the participants in this study should provide a basis for future studies as well as provide enhancement for those that have previously been completed on similar subjects.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout for 10 MSC in selected urban cities in five varying regions of Texas. However, saturation was achieved after nine MSC were interviewed; therefore, no attempt was made to interview a 10th MSC.

There are several sections in this chapter. Each section is explained in detail. The research design is explained as well as the researcher's role. Information about the selection of the participants, the selection of the sites for the study, methods of data collection procedures and analysis are also explained in detail. A discussion regarding the trustworthiness of the data collection methods and the research follow this explanation and any ethical issues that may be of concern are then addressed.

Design

Through a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994), this study strived to understand the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout through the perceptions of both the DGCs and the MSCs. This type of research is rooted in the work of the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1973). He believed human experience to be an integral part of obtaining knowledge.

According to Van Manen (1990), "a human science perspective . . . assumes that lived human experience is always more complex than the result of any singular description" (p. 16). Therefore, it was necessary to interview the participants to gain more understanding as to the complexity of their experiences with counselor stress and burnout rather than to rely solely on quantitative studies which utilize questionnaires with Likert type scales which abbreviate

answers into a single description.

Once the Institutional Review Board (Appendix I) gave permission for the study to proceed, potential participants were identified via a short demographic survey and the CBI, which is a burnout inventory developed for counselors by Lee et al. (2008). These instruments were delivered to MSCs in selected urban cities in varying regions of Texas via the secure version of SurveyMonkey.com. A recruitment letter (Appendix J), explaining the study, along with an informed consent form was included in the SurveyMonkey.com link. Once counselors were identified who had experienced the phenomenon of counselor stress and burnout, one 90 minute, in-depth, semi-structured interview was scheduled with each participant. While 90 minutes was not a magical number, it provided both the participant and the researcher a set amount of time for the interview (Seidman, 2006). This helped with scheduling and time management for both parties. Interview questions (Appendix K) were designed to elicit perceptions of factors affecting counselor stress, stress management and burnout. This method of inquiry provided a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, Seidman, 2006).

DGC participants were identified from neighboring urban cities of the chosen MSC participants via telephone calls or emails made by the researcher. A scripted letter inviting the DGCs to participate in the research study was either read or emailed to the potential participants. If the DGC agreed to participate, a 90 minute face to face interview was scheduled and informed consent letters were sent or delivered to the prospective participant either via email or in person. Informed consent was obtained before the interview or data collection commenced. Deciding on the length of the interview ahead of time reduced anxiety in the participant and provided both the participant and the researcher a set schedule to work with while still allowing ample time to hear

the stories of the participants (Seidman, 2006). DGCs were asked to answer several open ended questions regarding MSC stress and burnout (see Appendix L).. They were also asked to describe organizational supports. These structured interview questions were used to guide the interview; however, when necessary, other unstructured probing questions were asked to gain additional information. Data from these interview questions, along with other methods of inquiry, including an online focus group, and logs from the counselors related to their stress, provided ample data necessary to depict the MSCs' and the DGCs's understanding of the phenomenon of stress and burnout for MSCs. This utilization of various forms of data helped to validate the findings and is known as triangulation (Creswell, 2007).

Using a transcendental phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study as the researcher gained an understanding of the participants' perceptions by attempting to put her own experiences aside, and looking at the information collected with curiosity, "as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994. p. 34). Husserl, a German philosopher and the originator of phenomenological inquiry, often referred to this state as the *Epoche* (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). While it is debatable as to what extent researchers can actually bracket their own biases, it is common practice in phenomenological studies to attempt to do so (Merriam, 2009). Rather than simply look at statistics, this study strived "to reveal more fully the essence and meanings" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105) of the participants' experiences with stress and stress management through qualitative measures rather than quantitative.

Research Questions

The following broad questions guided this qualitative phenomenological study:

1. *What are the perceptions of both school counselors and DGC as to causes of stress and burnout in MSCs?*

2. *How do MSC and DGC describe organizational factors and resources in place to improve stress management and prevent burnout?*
3. *How do DGC and MSC describe their personal contributions to MSC stress management and burnout prevention?*
4. *How do MSC describe their experiences related to burnout?*

Through the research questions and research design, the researcher sought to understand the MSCs' and the DGC's perceptions of coping strategies and supports provided and deemed necessary by the school districts. The researcher also hoped to gain understanding as to how the experienced MSCs utilize these and other coping strategies and coping resources in order to avoid burnout and maintain their health and mental well-being, ultimately allowing them to perform their job in a manner beneficial to students, parents, teachers and other stakeholders.

Participants

The participants in this study were nine professional MSCs and five DGCs from select urban cities in various regions of Texas. MSC participants were chosen based upon their answers to an online CBI and a demographic questionnaire; the purpose of these instruments was to ensure that the counselor participants had experienced some degree of burnout. DGCs were selected from among neighboring urban districts of the selected MSCs. While the DGCs were not selected from the same school district, they were chosen from districts within close proximity with similar demographics.

Counselor Participants

Counselors were chosen based upon the pre-survey information. The researcher sought to identify 10 MSCs, two from each of five urban school districts across five different regions of Texas. An attempt was made to identify one novice and one seasoned counselor from each

school district. (However, as previously discussed, due to saturation of the data, it was decided to stop after the ninth MSC was interviewed.) This attempt to identify both novice and seasoned counselors who fit the criteria was done in an effort to provide as much diversity in the study as possible. Purposely identifying counselors who have experienced the phenomenon and who have varying years of service and unique demographics in their settings helped to increase the validity of the study (Merriam, 2009).

Prior to conducting the study, but after Institutional Review Board Approval was granted, the researcher conducted a pilot study with her own DGC and a MSC who was an acquaintance of hers. A recruitment letter and a separate Informed Consent were provided to the DGC and the MSC. These instruments can be found in Appendices (M, N, & O). The purpose of the pilot study was to test the research questions and to get a feel for the Survey Monkey software as well as the online focus group software. The DGC and the MSC were unavailable to test the online focus group software; therefore the researcher tested that software utilizing a few of her friends. However, the DGC and the MSC piloted the questions during the interview. Once these tests were completed and because no changes were necessary, the researcher began the process of identifying the participants for the study.

The researcher contacted potential MSC participants from select urban cities in various regions of Texas by phone or email via public school websites. Establishing rapport with the participant began as soon as the participant heard about the study; therefore, this initial contact was an important part of the interview process (Seidman, 2006). Upon contact, the researcher spoke briefly with the potential participant, then read the invitational letter explaining the study. If the MSC was willing to participate in the study, the researcher sent via the secure version of

SurveyMonkey.com, a copy of the invitational letter, the CBI, the demographic questionnaire and the informed consent letter.

Once the data from the Survey Monkey instruments was received, the researcher identified MSCs who were experiencing some signs of burnout based upon their responses to the CBI, a burnout inventory developed by Lee et al., (2007) specifically to identify school counselor burnout. The researcher checked their demographic questionnaire to determine the number of years of experience as a MSC. Potential participants were grouped as either novice (five or less years) or experienced (over five years). This process ensured that MSC participants had experienced some aspects of the phenomenon of stress and burnout and that there was an equal number of novice and experienced counselors. This method of locating participants who could provide information central to the study is known as purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009, Siedman, 2007).

In addition to identifying participants based upon degree of burnout and years of experience as a counselor, the researcher attempted to identify MSCs from varying demographic settings based upon the answers received on the demographic questionnaire included in the initial interview packet via SurveyMonkey.com. Every effort was made to include MSCs from differing demographic areas because the demographics of the school may have caused unique issues that may in turn have created stress for the MSC. This process of identifying as many different types of participants as possible is known as maximum variation (Seidman, 2006). Maximum variation provided diversity in the sample and therefore, allowed for a wider scope of transferability of the findings among readers of the research (Merriam, 2009).

Once potential participants were identified, the researcher again contacted the potential participant, preferably by telephone, to ensure that they were interested in participating in the

research study. This direct contact was an important part of the study as it was the first step in developing a trusting relationship with the participant (Seidman, 2006). During this phone call the researcher went over the invitational survey and the informed consent with the potential participant. If the MSC agreed to participate, the researcher made an appointment with the participant for the interview at a place and time agreed upon by both and convenient to the participant. The researcher brought the informed consent to the interview, went over it again and had the participant sign it before the interview began. Qualitative data collected from the one-on-one interviews added to the present body of research, enriching and validating other quantitative studies that have been completed by other researchers in this area (Cook, 2008; Lee, 2008; Stephan, 2005; Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Belini, 2006; Willingham, 2009).

The goal of the CBI was to locate counselors who have experienced the phenomenon of stress and burnout at some time during their role as a counselor. According to Creswell (2007), this type of sampling ensured that participants were individuals who added to the understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The goal of the demographic survey was to locate participants who are novice and seasoned counselors. Another goal of the demographic survey was to increase diversity in the sample by including schools and districts with different socio-economic and ethnic makeup in an effort to gain a broader understanding of the essence of the experiences of counselors across the entire state of Texas. This sample attempted to provide maximum variation and helped to identify “important common patterns” (Creswell, 2007, p. 127).

Director of Guidance and Counseling Participants

Once the MSC participants were identified, five DGCs were chosen from neighboring urban cities. This number was chosen in order to ensure that the study had at least one DGC

from each of the five varying regions in Texas being studied. Diversity in setting enhanced the study by providing “maximum variation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). The DGC was not chosen from the same district as any MSC. The rationale for this was to help prevent the MSCs from fearing that the statements they made would somehow be used negatively against them. It was hoped that this extra layer of anonymity would encourage more open answers in both the interviews and the online focus groups since counselors would not have to discuss issues in a focus group with their own supervisors.

Site

A total of 10 different districts across five regions of Texas were chosen for this study. At most, two campuses from each of five urban districts across the selected five regions in Texas were chosen. An additional five neighboring districts from these same five regions were chosen for DGC participants. The rationale for choosing these five regions was simply to add as much variation to the sample as possible. This technique is known as “maximum variation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). Texas is a very large state; therefore, there was a potential for differences among student populations, school counseling practices, school counselor roles, community expectations, leadership, and central office and campus support. Selecting participants from different urban cities in varying regions provided a clearer picture of the essence of the MSCs’ perception of their stress reduction coping mechanisms. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). However, all schools were located in an urban area. As the researcher was located centrally, it was fairly easy to access each of the districts as they were all an approximate equal distance from her place of residence; each was located within a 500 mile radius of the researcher’s central location.

Procedures

Procedures for this study include drafting a proposal and submitting the proposal to the chair and committee members; once approved by the committee, the proposal was submitted to the research consultant. Following approval by the research consultant and the chair, the researcher submitted an application to the Institutional Review Board for approval. Once approval for the study was procured, the researcher first conducted a pilot study. The pilot study served to ensure that the interview questions and other procedures were adequate to enable the researcher to gather pertinent data for the research study (Seidman, 2006).

Seidman (2006) highly recommends conducting a pilot study. Once the pilot study was completed, the researcher reflected on the process. Had changes been needed the researcher would have discussed the necessary alterations to the study with the doctoral committee and made any necessary changes. The researcher then would have reapplied to the IRB for approval of any needed changes. Upon final approval of the IRB of the changes (if necessary), the researcher would have begun to collect data. However, after the pilot study, and after reflection, the researcher did not see any need to make any changes to the procedures; therefore, she went ahead with the study as it was originally established.

The first step in the data collection procedure was to identify the participants who had experienced the phenomenon of stress and burnout. Two types of participants were utilized in this study: MSC and DGCs. The MSC participants were identified via an online demographical survey and the Counselor Burnout Inventory (CBI) which was sent to the prospective participants via a secure version of SurveyMonkey.com. The demographic survey asked the potential MSC participants to provide demographic information about their district and school size, as well as demographics about the potential participant. The CBI was developed by Lee et

al. (2007) specifically for use in identifying counselor burnout. Scoring for the CBI was done via the included scoring guide. This instrument was found to be reliable and valid based upon a study completed by Yu, Lee, and Nesbit (2008). It was decided ahead of time that participants who scored at least 12 or above in at least one of the five dimensions on the CBI would be eligible for inclusion in the study. Scores on each element could range from 4-20. A score of 4-11 in one dimension would indicate no burnout in that area. A score of 12-14 would indicate mild burnout in that dimension; a score 15-17 would indicate moderate burnout in that particular dimension; and a score of 18-20 would indicate severe burnout in that dimension. The CBI was determined to be a reliable and valid instrument for assessing these five dimensions of counselor burnout based upon research done by Lee et al. (2007).

It should be noted that while it was desired to locate the most stressed out and burned out counselors, those who met the criteria in only one area were considered for inclusion based upon their answers to the demographic survey. This helped the researcher attain maximum variation in the sample as this was an important element of the study, as well. It should also be noted that even those who rated very high in several dimensions on the burnout inventory could have been functioning counselors, persevering and making the best of the situation. This typography would be expected of a persevering counselor (Lee et al., 2010).

Included in the informed consent, delivered via SurveyMonkey.com to the MSCs, was a statement that all completed surveys and CBIs returned within two weeks would be entered into a random drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card. It was hoped that this minimal incentive would encourage the timely return of more completed surveys without affecting the real motivation for participation. Anything more than a token amount could influence the participants' motivation for participating in the study (Seidman, 2006). However, more completed surveys would

increase the probability that counselors who have experienced the phenomenon of burnout would participate, thus providing the purposeful sample the researcher sought to find to increase the meaningfulness of the data (Merriam, 2009).

Those who are experiencing burnout often feel exhausted, cynical, and ineffective; therefore, they may lose their idealism (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). They may only go through the motions, doing what is necessary to get through the day. Therefore, it was hoped that the token incentive might help to encourage counselors experiencing the symptoms of stress and burnout to complete the surveys and CBI inventories instead of just ignoring them. The more counselors who completed this survey, the better the chances were that MSCs who had experienced the phenomenon of stress and burnout would be identified from a diverse number of districts and regions. It was hoped that this practice would help the researcher obtain a purposeful sample with maximum variation which would increase the chances that the data received would be transferable across the middle school population; this was expected to enhance the reliability and validity of the study (Merriam, 2009).

Although all prospective MSCs participants were asked to sign the informed consent form which was included on the secured SurveyMonkey.com link, only those MSCs who have actually experienced the phenomenon of burnout to some degree were eligible to participate in the study. These final participants were selected from the counselors who had experienced the phenomenon based upon the findings of the CBI. The researcher checked the demographic surveys, and attempted to identify an equal number of novice and experienced counselors from different regions. In addition to years as a counselor, the researcher attempted to identify counselors who serve unique populations. This method of locating participants was purposeful and provided maximum variation of the sample (Merriam, 2009).

Once the participants were identified and informed consent acquired via SurveyMonkey.com, the researcher contacted the prospective participants via telephone to schedule the interviews with the participants. This personal contact was very important in developing trust and rapport before the interview. Interviews were approximately 90 minutes long. Deciding upon a predetermined time was important to both the participant and to the researcher; participants needed to know how much time they would be allotting to the study, and researchers needed to be able to schedule the interviews. The location of the interview was agreed upon by both the researcher and the participant and was convenient to the participant. This process was followed in an attempt to reduce participant anxiety (Seidman, 2006).

All MSC interviews were audiotaped. The audiotapes were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist who provided a letter of confidentiality (see Appendix P). Once the transcripts were received by the researcher, they were reviewed. The researcher listened to the audiotapes while reading over the hard copies of the transcripts looking for accuracy, making any necessary corrections. Once the researcher was confident that the transcripts were correct, the actual audiotapes were placed in locked storage; however, a copy of the audio tapes and hard copies of the transcripts were saved on the researcher's password protected computer. Both printed and electronic versions of transcripts were coded based upon the pseudonyms of the participants. Hard copies were kept in locked storage when not in use by the researcher. No one had access to the transcripts except the researcher. At the end of three years, the transcripts and audio tapes along with the electronic versions kept on the researcher's password protected computer will be destroyed as required by law.

Similar procedures were followed for the interviews with the DGCs. These participants were identified based upon their proximity to the identified MSC participants. No DGC was

chosen from the same district as the counselor; instead each of the DGC was chosen from a neighboring district with similar demographics to that of the counselor participant. The researcher contacted the DGC participants by telephone via information found on public school websites. During this initial contact, the researcher described the study in detail, reading from a prepared script. The prepared recruitment letter along with a copy of the informed consent form was then emailed to the DGC for their review. If the DGC indicated that they would like to participate, a face to face 90 minute interview was scheduled at a place convenient to the DGC. Before the actual interview took place, the researcher went over the procedures and the informed consent with the DGC. Once the consent was signed, the researcher proceeded with the audio recorded 90 minute interview.

Data collected in the DGC interview was audio taped and transcribed as in the MSC interviews. All precautions were taken to ensure that the participants were not identifiable in any publication; therefore, each was assigned pseudonyms as were their regions, schools and districts. Transcripts and audio tapes were kept under lock and key or on a password protected computer belonging to the researcher. Furthermore, any identifying information as to the coding and pseudonyms used were locked in a different file cabinet than the transcripts. This helped to reduce any risk of the identities of the participants being known.

Both MSCs and the DGCs were invited to participate in an online focus group. Each participant received a code to enter into the focus group. This code was only known to the researcher and the participant. Once the participants logged on to the focus group, they answered questions about counselor stress and burnout. Questions for focus group were based upon the four broad research questions. The answers to these questions were automatically

transcribed by the focus group software and downloaded to the researcher's computer once the focus group was completed.

As was hoped, a dialogue took place between the participants about stress and burnout prevention in the MSC. The focus group was secure and operated much like a chat room. Each participant was given a pseudonym so that no one was identifiable during participation in the group.

After the first focus group, the researcher found that not all participants were available to log on during that particular session; therefore, two more focus group sessions were set up with permission of the chair, the research consultant and the IRB. This smaller group was more conducive to a focus group as it was more manageable, giving each participant ample time to express their answers and to respond to others. Each group had between three to five participants scheduled. One MSC was unable to participate in the focus group due to unforeseen circumstances; however, all of the DGCs participated.

Data analysis was completed by the researcher by sifting through the transcripts looking for formulated statements. These statements were coded and emergent sub themes were developed from these formulated statements. Once these emergent sub themes were discovered, further reduction was necessary. The researcher then reduced the data to overarching themes that were related to the four broad research questions in an effort to help organize the plethora of information received. Once this was done, the data was triangulated utilizing information collected from other sources including the online focus group, the counselor logs, the professional development lists, the CBI and the demographic survey. The purpose of the triangulation of the data was to help to establish validity (Merriam, 2009).

Finally, an in-depth textural description of the data was formulated based upon the themes that emerged. Themes were combined and reduced to greater overarching themes in an effort to help the reader understand the large amount of data. Each theme was tied back to the research question that it answered. The researcher wrote an in-depth description of each theme, organized by the four broad research questions in the findings section of the manuscript.

The Researcher's Role (or Personal Biography)

As a professional school counselor, this research topic is very near to my heart. I have struggled first hand with the stress that a school counselor often endures. I also have experienced the phenomenon of burnout; however, I very much want to hear about this phenomenon from the viewpoints of other counselors. I want to know what they have experienced. Although it was difficult to totally separate my experiences from those of the MSCs whom I interviewed, I made every attempt to do so. Husserl called this state the *Epoche*; “In the *Epoche*, we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). This Greek word means to abstain or stay away from (Moustakas, 1994).

As a MSC for 13 years, I have experienced the stress of coordinating the state mandated tests, a non-counseling duty, and not being able to leave that duty to help a student in crisis. I have also felt the frustrations of role ambiguity by being assigned administrative duties in which I had to discipline students or reprimand teachers; I have felt the stinging consequences of these actions when those students and teachers no longer trusted me and seemed to avoid me. Additionally, I have experienced the added pressure that loose organizational structures and ambiguous or absent procedures place on counselors as they attempt to fulfill their duties. I have first-hand experience with the lack of having someone to collaborate with and being unsure how

to proceed when a child is at risk. I also have experienced having so many tasks to complete, that I had to stay late, work into the wee hours of the morning and still fear that I would not complete the tasks. I have experienced memory loss due to overload and stress, as well as minor health issues related to overwhelming stress related to job duties, organizational structures, change in leadership, and various other stress related issues. I have experienced signs of burnout, including fatigue, depersonalization, and feelings of incompetence.

On the other hand, I have also experienced working in a well-coordinated district which supplied ample training and supervision for school counselors. In this district, though the job was the same, the stress seemed to be less intense, somehow manageable. It is this difference that drove me to understand how counselors are affected by varying factors such as role ambiguity, work overload, non-counseling duties, organizational structures, processes and procedures, and district counseling support. It was this experience that drove my curiosity to understand how other counselors coped with the stress of the counseling role and how they described their experiences with burnout.

As a counselor, I am trained to put my own experiences aside, to focus on the client, to be empathetic and genuine, to paraphrase and reflect on what is said; these skills did benefit me during the interview process. It is noted in the literature that counselors' skills are consistent with the qualitative inquiry process (Reisetter, Korcuska, Yeley, Bonds, Nikels & McHenry, 2004). As is required in this type of study, I made every attempt to bracket my own experiences prior to conducting this research (Creswell, 2007). I paid close attention to the details and the stories of the participants who have experienced this phenomenon. I believed that only through the lived experiences of the participants and the honest analysis of the data would understanding of the phenomenon be gained. Gaining understanding of the phenomenon of stress and burnout

in the MSC and sharing the results of this study in an honest and forthright manner was my goal and purpose of conducting this study. This was my role as the researcher.

Data Collection

Various forms of data collection were utilized in this study, including surveys, a counselor burnout inventory, face to face interviews, online focus groups, counselor logs, and professional development lists. Each MSC participant was asked to participate in one 90 minute interview consisting of nine semi-structured in-depth interview questions derived mainly from the unanswered questions in the review of the literature. In addition to these interviews the counselors were asked to keep a log of their stress and how they coped with it during the weeks before and after the interviews. All counselor participants were asked to complete a preliminary survey to help identify those counselors who were experiencing some level of burnout. And finally all counselors were asked to participate in a 90 minute online focus group of the MSC participants and the DGC participants.

DGCs were asked to participate in one 90 minute face to face interview, one on line focus group with the counselors, and they were asked to provide a list of resources and activities their district provides to help reduce stress and prevent burnout. The interview consisted of 11 questions. Questions were derived from the review of the literature. The researcher chose the questions to gain more knowledge of the DGCs role and perception of MSC stress and burnout.

Interviews

MSC interviews. Qualitative studies utilize personal experiences of participants to help the researcher understand what is common to all participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Face to face interviews with participants who have experienced some degree of the phenomenon of stress and burnout are the typical method of data collection in

a qualitative phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). Generally, open ended questions are utilized and the process is informal (Moustakas, 1994); however, in this study, a semi structured interview was utilized to help guide the researcher in order to elicit a comprehensive account of the MSC's experience with the aspects of the phenomenon of stress and burnout. All of the questions were open ended and only a few probing questions were asked when necessary. This is common in phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviews were scheduled for approximately 90 minutes; they were audio recorded and transcribed afterwards by a professional transcriptionist. The questions in Table 1 were used as a guide in the interviews of the MSC participants. Additional probing questions were asked, when necessary, to increase the likelihood that participants provide rich textural descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. The data collected from these interviews was analyzed along with other types of data to describe the essence of the meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Table 1

Standardized Open-Ended Semi Structured Interview Questions for Counselors

Questions

1. How did you come to be a MSC?
2. How would you describe your typical day as a MSC?
3. Describe factors that create or alleviate stress in your role as a school counselor?
4. Describe how you cope with the stress that you encounter as a school counselor?

5. Describe procedures in place on your campus or district to deal with critical events, such as suicide or reporting an outcry of child abuse. How do these processes or procedures add to or help to alleviate the stressful nature of this process?
 6. Describe your experience with counselor support from administrators in your district.
 7. Describe how you utilize stress management resources in your district?
 8. Describe your experiences with counselor burnout?
 9. Is there anything else that you would like to add or that you would like me to know about your experience with stress or burnout as a MSC?
-

Question one was designed to get background information about the counselor. Question two and question three were designed to help the researcher understand the duties of the MSC and what causes stress. Some studies have indicated that stress is caused by counselors being assigned administrative tasks. Other studies have reported the cause of stress being a heavy workload. Still other studies found that organizational factors cause stress. This question is open-ended enough to allow for varying answers. In question three, the researcher hoped to find out what the counselor does that reduces stress as well. Question four was designed to help the researcher understand the coping strategies and resources utilized or available to the counselor.

It is noted in the literature that ethical dilemmas can cause counselor stress. Question five was designed to address this issue and to help the researcher understand any experience the MSC may have had with this issue. Question six was posed to elicit any experiences that the MSC may have with counselor support and needs. This support may be from an administrator, a parent, or a peer. This question is designed to help the researcher understand the scope and significance of counselor support as perceived by the participant. It is noted in some of the literature that counselor support may be important in reducing stress for the counselor.

Question seven was designed to help the researcher understand how the counselor perceives resources available for coping with stress and how they utilize these resources. Question eight was designed to allow the MSC an opportunity to tell her story about her own experience with burnout. This is the section where the researcher expects to find the rich textural descriptions of the phenomenon. Question nine was designed to elicit any other information that the counselor may want to add relating to the phenomenon of stress and burnout. This is the counselor's story. This question gives the counselor an opportunity to talk about other things that the researcher may have failed to touch upon.

DGC interviews. Phenomenological studies utilize personal experiences to convey the real life experiences of those who are experiencing the phenomenon. Phenomenology seeks to view the experience in its wholeness; this means viewing the phenomenon of stress and burnout in MSCs from various angles in an effort to develop a more unified vision of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). As the DGC, these particular participants had valuable information pertaining to the phenomenon of stress and burnout of MSCs. The DGCs view of the causes of MSCs stress and burnout were an integral part of the design of this particular body of research due to their unique relationship with the MSCs. DGCs perception and information regarding activities and practices of the MSC were utilized to convey the story of the MSCs by providing in-depth information into this phenomenon from their viewpoint.

The DGCs were asked to complete one 90 minute face to face audio taped interview. The length of the interview was determined in advance. This allowed both the participant and the researcher to plan. By having a predetermined time limit for the interview, the researcher hoped to reduce anxiety on the part of the participant. This also helped both the researcher and the participant with time management. Deciding on a set interview time was important as it

helped both the participant and the researcher with time management (Seidman, 2006). This interview utilized 11 semi-structured interview questions directly related to the DGCs role and their perception of MSC stress and burnout. The interview questions were strictly adhered to with only a few minor probing questions utilized when necessary. The audio tapes were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The information collected was utilized by the researcher to more fully understand the phenomenon of stress and burnout in the MSC. The data was analyzed for formulated statements and themes. These themes were described and referred to when the story of the MSC participants was constructed. This data not only helped to explain the stress and burnout from the perspective of leadership, but it also contributed to the construction of the essence of the meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Table 2

Director of Guidance and Counseling Interview Questions

Questions

1. How would you describe your education, certificates, licenses and experience that led you to the position of DGC?
 2. What are your roles and responsibilities?
 3. In your time as a director of guidance and counseling, what would you say are the most stressful events or times for your MSCs? What makes you feel this way?
 4. How would you describe organizational factors that might cause your MSCs stress?
 5. Describe the processes or procedures currently in place to assist your MSCs in their job duties?
 6. Describe how you support your MSCs when it comes to stress reduction and burnout prevention?
 7. Describe how and when meetings, workshops, and professional development are designed and placed on the school calendar?
 8. What would you say the most significant signs of stress and burnout might be and how do you think that might affect your MSCs or the people for whom they advocate?
 9. What resources do you offer your MSCs such as training, professional development, supplies, collaboration, consultation and how often do they utilize those resources offered?
 10. How often do you meet with your MSCs and how is the agenda developed?
 11. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss about MSC stress and how you perceive the phenomenon?
-

The literature indicated that DGCs had varying credentials (Cicero, 2009; Cook, 2008). The purpose of question one was to determine the experience and credentials of the DGCs in our study. Research indicates that DGCs have varying credentials (Somody et al., 2008; Lambie & Sias, 2009). The review of the literature revealed that often counseling supervisors have varying roles. Some may supervise the counselor clinically, while others supervise them in other areas. Question two was included to clarify exactly what the duties and responsibilities of the DGC in the current study were.

Question three was designed to help the researcher understand the perspective of the DGC in regards to what causes counselor stress. Only one study was found in the literature that included feedback from the counseling supervisors. This study was conducted in a district in Maryland to gain understanding of their perceptions of systemic factors affecting school counselors' ability to become educational leaders (Cicero, 2009). However, no studies were found addressing the DGCs perception of the cause of MSC stress and burnout. The researcher wanted input from the DGCs as to their perspectives in order to help address this gap in the literature.

Question four concerned organizational factors that might contribute or detract from MSC stress. There was evidence in the literature that organizational factors do contribute to MSC stress (Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006; Landrum et al., 2012). Therefore researcher wanted to know from the DGCs perspective how this affected MSCs regarding stress and burnout.

DGCs are often responsible for the oversight of processes and procedures that affect school counseling (Cicero, 2009). No specific discussion of how processes and procedures affect MSC stress and burnout were found. Therefore the researcher through question five

sought to understand the DGCs' perception of how these procedures help MSCs with their job responsibilities.

According to the literature DGCs are advocates for school counselors, acting as collaborators and consultants. They also provided training and resources (Cicero, 2006).

Question eight was also developed to investigate the DGCs level of support for counselors who are experiencing signs of stress and burnout. Question nine was asked in an effort to understand what types of professional development was offered in the neighboring regions. Question six was developed to gain an understanding of how much of this support was directed towards reducing stress and burnout in the MSC.

Question seven and 10 relate to organizational factors. Understanding that organizational factors can affect stress and burnout, the researcher wanted to know more about how meetings were planned and how the topics were developed and placed on the agenda. Research has shown that MSCs may feel that they matter if they are involved in this process (Rayle, 2006). Finally, question 11 was asked to allow the DGC to discuss any topics that they may be aware of that might be a concern or that they felt was important regarding MSC stress and burnout.

Focus Group

Focus groups have been utilized as a method of inquiry in social science research as far back as the 1950s (Merriam, 2009). In a qualitative study the participants in a focus group are those who have knowledge of the subject being studied (Merriam, 2009). The MSC participants had knowledge of their own experiences with burnout, while the DGCs had knowledge of practices, procedures and policies in place to help counselors reduce stress and prevent burnout. DGCs had knowledge of the phenomenon of MSC burnout due to their unique relationship with

the counselors. It was possible that the DGCs had personal knowledge of the phenomenon themselves; however, none chose to elaborate on that specific aspect during the focus group.

Three separate online focus groups were created utilizing a secure version of itracks Chat© which is powered by Qualtrics. Three groups were created to ensure that all participants had access to the focus group and to ensure that the group operated with efficiency. According to research smaller groups are better than large groups. All groups had at least one DGC and at least one MSC participant so that they could have a dialogue about MSC stress and burnout. Participants logged onto the site with their personal code supplied to them by the researcher at the assigned time. The researcher facilitated the group with four discussion questions designed in advance based upon the four broad questions of this research study. The questions can be found in Table 3. Answers to questions were revealed to others in the group as they answered. Once the question was answered, there was five-10 minutes time allotted for clarifying questions, suggestions, remarks and open discussion. The entire online focus group lasted no longer than two hours. The discussion was text based and was transcribed utilizing the Qualtrics itracks chat software; the transcripts of the discussions were retrieved via a secure link. The focus of all questions in the discussion regarded factors to understand and reduce MSC stress and prevent burnout.

Table 3

Online Focus Group Questions/Discussion Items

Online Focus Group Questions/Discussion Items

1. Describe your perception of the causes of stress and burnout in MSCs.
 2. How would you describe organizational factors and resources that help to alleviate stress and prevent burnout or contribute to it?
 3. How would you describe your personal responsibility when it comes to MSC stress management and burnout prevention?
 4. How would you describe your experiences related to burnout in the middle school counselor?
-

Surveys/Questionnaires

The CBI developed by Lee et al. (2007) was used in the preliminary Survey Monkey link. This survey was developed specifically for counselors. Permission to use the instrument was gained via an email on July 1, 2012 from its developer Sang Lee. Researchers tested this instrument for reliability and validity and determined that it was reliable for identifying counselors who were experiencing burnout (Lee et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2010; Yu et al., 2008). The inventory was used to identify MSCs who were experiencing at least some degree of the phenomenon of burnout. This is known as a purposeful sample (Merriam, 2009).

A demographic survey and a CBI were delivered via SurveyMonkey.com to 47 MSCs who were working in urban school districts across Texas. Approximately 30% responded to the survey and of those 10 MSCs met the criteria for the study. After being contacted by the researcher by telephone, nine of those who met the criteria agreed to participate in the study. It

was determined that after interviewing the nine MSCs, saturation was reached so no more attempts were made to identify a 10th MSC.

The demographic survey created by Stephan (2005) was utilized in the preliminary Survey Monkey link, as well. Permission to use this document in its entirety was gained via email from Julie Stephan on July 2, 2012 via email. This demographic survey was utilized to attain a sample of maximum variation by identifying those counselors who are either novice or experienced and by identifying similarities and differences in the demographics of the school in which they teach. Utilizing maximum variation increases the validity of the study (Merriam, 2009).

Counselor Journals

Counselors were asked to keep a journal of work related stress and how they managed the stress that they encountered for a total of four weeks, both before and after the interview. These journals were utilized as a part of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Counselors logged their work related stress, if any, and what they did to manage it at the end of each day and wrote a reflection of the situation. At the end of the four week periods, the journals were submitted to the researcher electronically via email. Counselors were asked to use their pseudonym on the journal to help them to maintain privacy.

List of Professional Development

DGCs were asked to provide lists of professional development offered to the MSCs for the current year. This list was used to understand what types of resources are available to MSCs in various districts to help them with their job duties and potentially help them manage their stress. DGCs either delivered this directly to the researcher on the day of the interview or emailed it soon afterwards.

Data Analysis

Bracketing

The researcher fully described her own experiences relating to stress and counseling; having done this she then attempted to put her personal beliefs and experiences aside. This allowed the researcher to focus on the participant responses with less bias. According to Moustakas (1994), “this is an experience in itself . . . an unfettered stance” and is also known as the *Epoche* (p. 85). “The goal is to describe things as they are, not as the . . . researcher typically, and automatically, interprets things based on past experience” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 496). The researcher used her skills as a counselor to fully concentrate on the MSCs’ experiences, as well as the DGCs’ experiences. These skills included genuine concern, caring, listening, paraphrasing and checking for understanding (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2010). Occasionally, the researcher would ask a probing question, when necessary to elicit the story of the participant, but for the most part the researcher was intent on listening to the story of the participant.

Within one day of the original audio taped face- to-face interviews, the researcher again listened to the audio-tapes. And again, the researcher attempted to set aside her biases and listen solely to the responses of the participants. During this process she attempted to block out her own thoughts and memories about her experiences again, and simply listened to the stories of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Develop a List of Significant Statements

The audio tapes were sent to the professional transcriptionist. Once the transcripts were returned, the hard copies were printed out and sent to the members to check for accuracy. Each member approved the hard copy of the transcripts as being an accurate representation of their

face to face interview. Once this was completed, the researcher again listened to the audio tapes while reading the transcripts, highlighting and circling significant statements that stood out. Once this was done, the researcher printed out the transcripts again. The researcher then read the transcripts a final time, while listening to the audio tapes, analyzing the data, looking for formulated statements. This is a “dimension of Phenomenological Reduction” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95). A formulated statement is a statement that is unique or different from the others (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

During this reading the researcher again attempted to bracket her biases and feelings and indeed began to experience the essence of the participant’s experience more fully. She circled words and phrases that seemed significant and wrote notes and memos in the margins of the transcripts.

By this time the data was beginning to become a bit overwhelming due to the sheer volume. The researcher checked with the peer reviewer and it was decided that she would construct an Excel spreadsheet of the data to help organize it. The researcher constructed a color coded spreadsheet with each question in its own column across the top of the spreadsheet and each MSC’s name was on a color coded row tied to their name. Under each question, the researcher typed out the significant statements found in each MSC’s interview below the column pertaining to the question being answered. This was repeated until all questions and all MSC transcripts had been reviewed.

Each formulated statement was given equal worth (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This process permitted the researcher an opportunity to develop a list of distinct topics which do not overlap and are not alike.

Turn Statements into Themes

Once the formulated statements were determined and the “repetitive and overlapping [were] deleted” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97), the formulated statements were clustered into themes (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This process helped the researcher to not only organize the data, but also to understand it. Constantly comparing these themes, enabled the researcher to recognize emerging themes and ideas (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007). Using the spreadsheet during this analysis was very helpful as there was a massive amount of data to look through. Because the research was so broad, the researcher decided to group some of the themes into larger clusters. This generated five main themes and fifteen subthemes.

Backup Themes with Specific Examples

Once these themes and ideas began to emerge and were determined, the researcher used the verbatim examples from the interviews to construct textural descriptions of participants’ experiences, backing them up by concrete examples from the interviews. “A textual experience is an account of an individual’s intuitive, pre-reflective perception of a phenomenon from every angle” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496). The textual descriptions were organized based upon the broad research question to which it applied. This was helpful in organizing the data and ensured that all major subthemes and themes were addressed in the writing process.

Reflect on Setting

The researcher utilized the demographic information and the CBI to reflect on the counselor’s backgrounds and current settings along with data collected during the interview. The researcher described the setting fully, focusing on the feel of the phenomenon, using as much imagery and description as possible. This effort helped the researcher fully understand “‘how’ the experience happened” (Creswell, 2007, p. 158).

Combine and Write

The researcher then combined all of the above elements and wrote a complete description of the phenomenon (perceptions of the MSCs' and the DGCs' stress, coping strategies, and burnout prevention). This writing was descriptive in nature, and attempted to fully convey the totality of the participants' experience as it relates to the phenomenon of stress and burnout in middle school counseling. The resulting text and its relation to the theories behind this study was the culminating point of the study, and resulted in an "exhaustive description of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). This description was an "intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The end product became a compilation of the essences of the participants' experiences (Creswell 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

The researcher utilized a pilot study, member checks, and peer review to guarantee the accuracy of the data and the themes that emerged (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007). The peer reviewer was contacted during and after the pilot study during and after the member checks and during the data analysis to ensure that the researcher was following protocol to ensure the accuracy of the emerging themes. Members were not only sent their transcripts for full review before data analysis, but they were also furnished with the emerging themes developed from their interviews and the write up of their demographics and burnout level as established by the CBI for their review. In addition to this once the textural and structural description was written, a copy was emailed to each member for any feedback and to get their approval as to the accuracy of the details. One small change was requested pertaining to some information in a statement that might possibly have made the counselor or her school identifiable. That information was

deleted to ensure that privacy was maintained. Another request was to change the spelling of the pseudonym chosen for one of the MSCs. These were relatively small changes and had no impact on the essence of the stories being told. All changes were made as requested.

Pilot Study

After approval was received from the IRB, a pilot study was conducted within the researcher's own district with volunteer participants utilizing the pre-survey, the interview questions, and the online focus group platform. This helped to ensure that the surveys packets, online focus group activity (and the software platform), and all of the interview questions were developed properly. This study was beneficial in understanding how the online platform worked. The pilot study was also beneficial in testing the interview questions. It was found that both the DGC interview questions and the MSC interview questions were sufficient to gather the intended data as long as a few probing questions were used as discussed in the original protocol. Therefore, no changes were necessary and no change in protocol needed to be submitted to the IRB based upon the pilot study.

Member Checks

Each participant was given an opportunity to review their information, their transcripts of the audio taped interviews, and the themes derived from their interview answers for accuracy. This increased the validity of the information. Once the data was organized and analyzed, the researcher checked back with the members to ensure that the themes extracted from the data were the true perceptions of the participant (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007). This was done by either phone or email, whichever was more convenient for the participant.

Triangulation

Various forms of data collection were utilized in this study including face to face interviews, focus groups between the MSCs and the district guidance counselors, counselor logs of work related stress, and DGC lists of professional development offered. These forms helped to substantiate the precision of the themes that emerged from the interview data (Creswell, 2007). This was done to increase the trustworthiness of the data analysis.

Peer Review

The researcher collaborated with a peer in the field who asked challenging questions regarding process. This helped to ensure that the researcher was open and honest during the data collection and analyses process (Creswell, 2007). A volunteer acted as the peer reviewer. At several stages of the data analyses process, the researcher collaborated with the peer reviewer in an effort to ensure that the formulated statements, themes and resulting essence of the experience were acquired with as much truthfulness and precision as possible.

Ethical Considerations

All data collected was treated as confidential material. No data was left unattended with any identifying information on it. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for their interview, surveys, logs and online focus group participation. This pseudonym was known only to the researcher and the participant. A key to the pseudonyms was kept in a separate locked file from the data. As soon as data was received, the pseudonym of the participant (only known to the researcher and participant) was immediately assigned to the data.

Professional transcribers transcribed the data and signed an oath of confidentiality. Once the data was transcribed, reviewed by the researcher and deemed as accurate by both the researcher and the member, the audio recordings were kept under lock and key in the

researcher's home file cabinet. Uploaded computer files were kept on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected. These electronic audio data files will be destroyed with the chair's permission. The transcribed texts, any handwritten notes, and documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office until three years have elapsed. At that time, the data will be destroyed.

The MSCs may have become agitated or more anxious discussing stress and burnout issues; however, it was not expected that this would cause any undue hardship. Furthermore, the MSCs may have felt concern about voicing their opinions. To help alleviate this concern, the researcher explained to them that various steps would be taken to eliminate any identifying information that would link the participants to their responses during all steps of the research study and in the resulting research publication. To begin with the actual regions of Texas were not named, but were simply described according to their general vicinity. Likewise, the districts were given pseudo names. The MSCs and the DGC were assigned pseudo names, as well, rather than their real names. Because of this consideration, all MSCs and all DGC were from separate school districts to ensure that no MSC worked for the same district as the DGC. Finally, each participant was advised that if they felt uncomfortable at any time, they could discontinue with the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the results of the data analysis. In this chapter the findings are specifically discussed. First the purpose statement is revisited. And then the participants are introduced using tables to indicate their respective regions and districts. Following this table each participant is introduced with an individual snapshot of their profile. MSCs' demographics, along with their school demographics, are presented and excerpts from the face to face interviews are added in an effort to allow the reader to gain a mental snapshot of the participant. Factors pertaining to how the participant came to be a MSC coupled with their current level of burnout are important components of the snapshot.

Following the snapshots of the MSC participants are the snapshots of the DGCs. These snapshots consist of demographic data and other pertinent information taken from the face to face interview. Directly following these snapshots, the researcher identifies significant formulated statements (subthemes) and subsequent emerging themes extracted from the data. The data findings in this section are organized by Research Question. The section begins with a table depicting the overall findings, followed by individual tables related to each research question and sufficient discussion and examples of the personal narratives of both MSCs and DGCs to allow the reader to experience the true essence of the stress and burnout phenomenon. A rich textural description of each significant formulated statement (subtheme) and resulting emerging theme in relation to the four broad research questions, along with specific examples from participants' face to face interviews and the focus groups follows each question to further enhance the participants lived experiences.

The final section of this chapter summarizes all of the findings and combines all of the emerging themes based upon the four broad research questions into a rich textural description of

the essence of the phenomenon. The summary also includes a chart which again summarizes each theme and significant formulated statement, noting which participant(s) made reference to the formulated statement/theme. This chart is included in order to not only furnish the reader with the themes and statement, but to give them insight into how prevalent the themes and statements actually were represented in the data.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout for nine MSC in selected urban cities in various regions of Texas. MSC stress was defined as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand” (Selye, 1984, p. 55); burnout was defined as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of feelings of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 2003a); counselor burnout was further defined according to the five elements of the CBI which include exhaustion, incompetence, negative work environment, devaluing of client and deterioration of personal life (Lee et al., 2007).

Participant Profiles

Data was collected from nine MSCs across five different regions of Texas and five DGCs. All in all, 10 different school districts were represented. Regions represented were Northern, Western, Eastern, Central and Southern (pseudonyms). Districts represented are North 1, North 2, West 1, West 2, East 1, East 2, Center 1, Center 2, South 1, and South 2 (pseudonyms).

One DGC was recruited from each of the five regions where MSC participants were identified: Tammie, Northern; Jo, Western; Gloria, Eastern; Cathy, Central; and Dana, Southern. (All names and regions are pseudonyms). They were recruited from districts based upon their proximity and similarity in size and demographics to districts of the MSC participants. A total of five DGC were recruited. Tammie was recruited from district North 1. Jo was recruited from

district West 1. Gloria was district East 1. Cathy was recruited from district Center 1. And Dana was recruited from district South 1.

Two MSCs were recruited from one district in each of the five different regions with the exception of the Eastern region which only had one MSC participant. MSC participants were Allie, Donna, Kianna, Nicole, Bambi, Porsche, Elizabeth, Rapha, and Mistie (all pseudonyms). They came from the school districts within these five regions of Texas: Northern Region, Western Region, Central Region, Southern Region and the Eastern Region (all pseudonyms). They represent the following urban school districts in Texas, North 2, West 2, East 2, Center 2, and South 2 (All pseudonyms). Both Allie and Donna are from the same school district within the Northern Region, North 2. Kianna and Nicole are from the same school district in the Western Region, West 2. Bambi and Porsche are both from the same school district in the Central region, Center 2. Elizabeth and Rapha are both from the same school district in the Southern Region, South 2. And finally, Mistie is the only counselor from her region, the Eastern Region; her district is East 2. Table 4 summarizes the participant data.

Table 4

Participants

<i>Participant</i>	<i>DGC</i>	<i>MSC</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>District</i>
Tammie	X		Northern	North 1
Jo	X		Western	West 1
Gloria	X		Eastern	East 1
Cathy	X		Central	Center 1
Dana	X		Southern	South 1
Donna		X	Northern	North 2
Allie		X	Northern	North 2
Nicole		X	Western	South 2
Kianna		X	Western	South 2
Mistie		X	Eastern	East 2
Porsche		X	Central	Center 2
Bambi		X	Central	Center 2
Elizabeth		X	Southern	South 2
Rapha		X	Southern	South 2

Note. DGC = Director of Guidance and Counseling, MSC = Middle School Counselor

The Figure 1 summarizes information regarding each of the MSC participant's level of burnout. This information regarding level of burnout was taken from the CBI which was administered to each potential participant via a SurveyMonkey link. The CBI was developed by Lee et al. (2007) to identify counselors who are experiencing burnout.

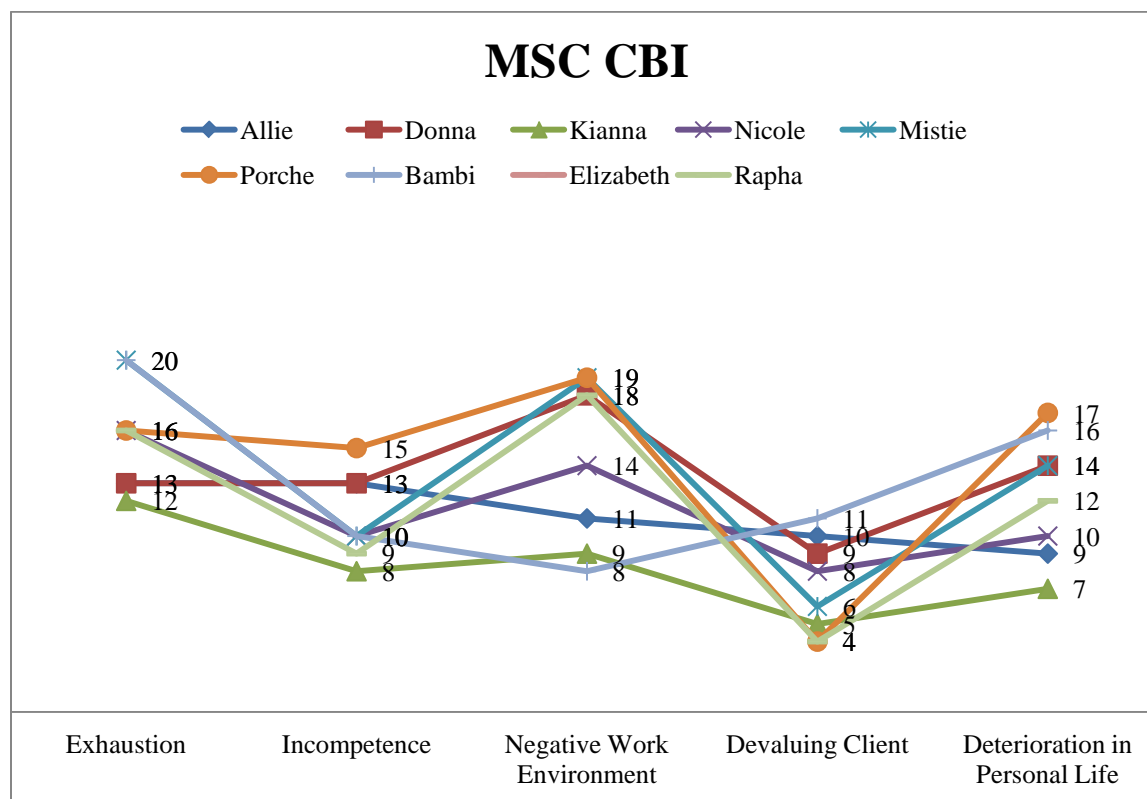


Figure 1. MSC Level of Burnout from CBI

According to the CBI, each of the MSCs participants exhibited at least mild burnout in at least one dimension of the burnout inventory. Criterion for inclusion in the study was determined by the researcher before the study began. Any MSC who scored at least 12 points on any one dimension of the burnout inventory was eligible for the study. Scores on each element could range from four-20. A score of four-11 in one dimension would indicate no burnout in that area. A score of 12-14 would indicate mild burnout in that dimension; a score 15-17 would indicate moderate burnout in that particular dimension; and a score of 18-20 would indicate severe burnout in that dimension. The CBI was determined to be a reliable and valid instrument for assessing these five dimensions of counselor burnout based upon research done by Lee et al. (2007). As can be depicted from the line chart, it is apparent that the majority of the MSCs portrayed a “W” cluster. This “W” cluster was noted in an earlier study by Lee et al. (2010) as

representative of what was called a “persevering counselor.” This type of counselor, though exhibiting moderate to high levels of *Exhaustion*, *Negative Work Environment* and *Deterioration in Personal Life*, exhibited relatively lower levels in the areas of *Incompetence* and *Devaluing Client*. According to Lee et al. (2010), counselors with this typology “tended to be more flexible and responsive to the clients’ needs, even when reporting emotional and physical exhaustion in their workplace and personal life” (p. 135).

The following is a quick snapshot of each of the nine MSC participants. Included in the snapshot are MSC demographics including age, ethnicity, highest degree held, years of experience as a counselor, years in current position, teaching experience, membership in professional organizations, certificates and any additional licenses held. Additionally, campus demographics including current enrollment, percent of minority students enrolled, percent of economically disadvantaged students enrolled are included. Participant and campus demographic information was taken from the preliminary demographic survey. Level of burnout was taken from the CBI. Additional information about how each participant came to be a MSC is gleaned from question one of the MSC Interview Guide. Data from the interviews is also utilized to validate and support the degree of burnout in dimensions identified via the CBI.

Snapshots of MSC Participants

Allie. Allie is a novice MSC as this is her first year. She is white, and between the ages of 25 and 34. She holds a master’s degree and is a member of the Texas Counseling Association. She also belongs to the Texas Classroom Teachers Association. She taught two years before becoming a MSC and holds both a middle school teaching and an elementary teaching certificate. Allie reports that between 51 and 75 % of the students on her campus are minority

and that 25-50 % is economically disadvantaged. She is one of two counselors on a campus whose enrollment is between 501 and 750 students. Allie describes how she came to be a MSC.

Well, actually my first major in college was nursing. And I took a chemistry class and quickly decided I did not want to do anything in the health sciences. I changed my major to Psychology and didn't really know what I was going to do after that when I graduated... But I knew I wanted to move on to do something else... and I liked helping people and kind of found myself—I just found people coming to me a lot anyway personally and saying, “You’d make a great counselor.” I pursued the Counselor Ed program. Then in middle school counseling, I actually did an internship in all three levels: elementary, middle and high school. And I decided that middle school was kind of the perfect mix of counseling and scheduling and all the kind of administrative duties. I like a balance, so yeah.

Based upon the CBI, and preset criteria determined by the researcher, Allie is exhibiting mild to moderate signs of burnout in two of the five areas measured: Exhaustion and Competence. However, from her perspective she did not really feel that she was experiencing burnout yet. But she did imply that she felt she would be if she continued at the present pace and did not practice better self-care.

I don't have it yet. I'm thankful for that, but I can see how people get it for sure. You're dealing with people's issues all day long. That's why that wellness piece is so important, but then if you're not taking care of yourself, then that does lead to burn out so ...

When asked if she felt this could lead to burnout if she continued in this way, she responded, “*yeah.*”

Donna. Donna is from the same district as Allie, North 2. She is a seasoned MSC with over 10 years' experience as a school counselor. She has been in her present middle school position for over five years. She is between the ages of 45 and 54, is white, and holds two different master's degrees. She belongs to the Texas Counseling Association and has both a middle school and an elementary school teaching certificate, along with her K-12 counseling certificate. She taught school for seven years before becoming a school counselor.

Donna reports that her present campus has a current enrollment of 501-750 and that both the minority and the economically disadvantaged students are greater than 75 %. Donna decided to become a MSC to help other children after she had a negative experience with her own boys who were exhibiting obvious signs of ADHD.

Well, I was teaching in a rural school district in this area, and I was a teacher. And my two oldest sons were going to school out at the school I was going to. We were all commuting out there every day, and it was very small. Their classes were really small, and my boys started exhibiting trouble in school about the same time. One was in kindergarten. One was in second grade.

I really felt like they had ADHD. Their dad has it. Their grandfather has it. Their uncle has it — A lot of family history of ADHD. And I found it very difficult to get help from the school. Nobody would help my kids and so even as small as the classes were, about 15 or 16 kids, the teachers just didn't want to do for my children what they couldn't do for everybody in their room. It made me furious.

I decided that I just wanted to go back to school to do something to help children. Maybe I could help somebody else's child, maybe not my own, but somebody else's. I couldn't decide whether I wanted to be a counselor or a diagnostician. I kind of took

classes in both areas for about a year and then kind of went the counselor route. So, that's kind of how I became a MSC.

Donna scored moderate levels of burnout in all five dimensions measured on the CBI: exhaustion, incompetence, negative work environment, devaluing client, and deterioration in personal life. Although Donna did exhibit signs of devaluing client, this was her lowest score. Overall, this dimension appears to be the least affected by the burnout syndrome in these MSCs.

Well, yeah, and really, a lot of these kids don't want to change and that's frustrating to me... They don't see the need for it. They think the world should change and it's—I don't know. That's kind of hard to work with. I haven't figured that part out yet. I think sometimes they just want out of class.

Donna scored moderate on the other four areas of burnout. She perceived her burnout this way:

You know, I think my main idea about it is there's going to be stress in whatever you do. It wouldn't matter if I was flipping hamburgers at Burger King, I am going to have some kind of job stress. We all are going to have job stress. We're all going to have burnout especially if you do something for a very, very long time. You just deal with it. You figure out how to deal with it. If you don't like something, you make it better. If you really don't like something, and you really don't think you fit somewhere, then move somewhere else.

Otherwise, I mean I don't think there's a thing in the world that I could do about—well, my partner is a brand-new counselor, and I was telling her “Just wait until the spring, just wait. You're just not going to believe it!” And it's true. It's happening...

Donna would be considered a persevering counselor based upon the research of Lee et al. (2010) because even though she is showing moderate signs of burnout in all other areas, she is still continuing to serve students. This is evident since she scored only mild burnout in this area.

Kianna. Kianna is a novice MSC from the Western Region, having less than five years' experience. She is 25-34 years old and has been a MSC for four years. She is white and has her master's degree. She is a member of the ASCA and taught for three years prior to becoming a MSC. She holds certificates in K-12 counseling, and both middle and secondary teaching. She is one of three counselors in a school with a population between 751-1000. She reports that her campus has between 51 and 75% minority and economically disadvantaged students. Kianna is not certain how she came to be a MSC. It seems she just happened upon the opportunity.

Well, honestly, I don't know. I don't know how I landed here. But I went to school.

Obviously, I got my masters in counseling... and I was a high school English teacher...

And there was a position that opened; so, I applied, and here I am! So, it just kind of all fell into place...

When asked about her perceptions of MSC stress, though Kianna was exhibiting some signs of burnout on the CBI, she did not consider herself to be burned out. But she did feel that the phenomenon was real.

I have seen a little bit of counselor burnout in our district because I don't know, there's just a lot of people who are very negative and who—but I mean, the stress from the job just eats away at them and they aren't always very successful and they don't stick around very long. So without—I'm not naming any names, it's just—it happens and it's real. And it can be, especially at the middle school level, the kids can be very exhausting.

Situations can be very exhausting. They're at a difficult age. And so it does happen, I have seen it. I haven't gotten there yet. I'm hoping not to. But, it's real, it's there.

In fact, Kianna was the MSC who showed the least signs of burnout, barely qualifying for the study in the area of exhaustion.

Nicole. Nicole is a seasoned school counselor, having worked in the field for between six and 10 years. However, she has held the MSC position for one year only. She is 45 to 54 years old, white and has a master's degree. In addition to her K-12 Counseling Certificate, she holds a Secondary Teaching Certificate. She was employed as a classroom teacher for 14 years and is currently a member of ATPE. Nicole reports that her current campus has an enrollment of 751-1000 students. She states that 26-50 % of the students are minority, and that 25-50 percent are economically disadvantaged. Nicole is from the same district as Kianna; however, they do not work on the same campus.

Nicole talks about how she came to be a MSC,

Well, this is actually my first year at middle school. I was a high school counselor for eight years. Before that I was an English teacher for several years. I've got 19 years in education now. So I—when my mother developed breast cancer, I decided to move back [here]. I grew up here. And so, when I started applying for jobs this one became available, and I thought, “Well, that might be a nice change to go to a middle school,” because I'd always taught and been a counselor at a high school and had never worked at the middle school level before.

According to the CBI, Nicole was experiencing a moderate amount of counselor stress in two of the five dimensions measured: Exhaustion and Negative Work Environment. When asked about her perception of MSC stress and burnout, Nicole had this to say:

Well, I was a counselor...for eight years. And I did leave that for a little while. And I've come back to it now, and it is very easy to get burned out, especially at this time of year when so much is going on and there's so much on your plate....and then just one more thing gets added...and another thing gets added... And so, it's—

I see a lot of burn out with fellow counselors. In fact, another counselor that I'm very close to in this district is experiencing that to the point that they're considering leaving the profession...and that has even occurred to me, as well—or going back into teaching... because sometimes you do feel like you're just so burned out. And it's definitely a problem that I would say is very rampant among MSCs.

Mistie. Mistie, a seasoned counselor, has been a MSC for over 10 years. She has held her current middle school position for 14 years. She is between the ages of 45 and 54, holds a master's degree, and is white. She is a member of ATPE. In addition to her K-12 Counselor certificate, she holds a Secondary Teaching certificate. She taught school for 3 years prior to becoming a school counselor and also is a Licensed Professional Counselor. She reports that her campus in District East 2 has a current enrollment between 501–750 students. She currently is the only MSC on this campus which has more than 75% minority and more than 75% economically disadvantaged students.

Mistie came to be a MSC when the company she worked for as a private therapist closed. She liked this age group because they have real problems and they listen.

Well, I've been a family therapist, and I've always worked with kids and just really like the middle school age. And the company I was working for—an agency, they were going under. So basically, I applied for elementary and middle school, but I really like this age. And I think if you like it and you have a talent for it then ... I don't think most people do

[laughter]. I don't know that most people do. It's not something that everybody can do, this age group so... Yeah. I really like it because they come in with real problems, and they come in with problems where they're still listening to you; so, it's really neat.

According to the CBI, Mistie is exhibiting severe signs of stress and burnout in the dimensions of *Exhaustion* and *Negative Work Environment*. She is also exhibiting mild to moderate levels of stress and burnout in the area of *Deterioration in Personal Life*. When asked about her experiences with burnout, this is part of her response.

I've seen some friends go through it. This year I felt like I'm going through it. I stopped one Sunday night when I was talking to friends or whatever and came home and evaluated this: If you started from college, I've been helping people 30 years, and I'm tired; I'm real tired. I need to—I think I need to go somewhere where somebody picks me instead of me picking up their messes, but I find that I'm so tired when I go home that I can't face doing that. And I made myself this year tell friends that I needed to leave so that I would get the push, and [laughter] it's still not working so... I don't know. I don't know that I could do anything without significance so...

And last year—well another big stress is this is my fourth principal in seven years. And starting over every time, we're always behind. So like this year, we turned over the whole principal staff, and I was the only one that knew what was going on. And so I had to do a lot of the paperwork issues or the scheduling issues that weren't my job. And now that I find that spring is coming along, we're getting ready for next year, they're not seeing that the things that I did last year were an exception...

Another stressor is this new principal did absolutely no team building in the beginning... I finally said, "Look, I'm going under because there's so much negativity

around here.” And when I told him that, he replied that “morale was a counselor’s job.”

And from that point on, I just kind of was not on his side. So we’ve kind of butted some heads and that’s stressful.

Porsche. Porsche is between the ages of 55 and 64. She is white, holds a master’s degree and has been counseling over 10 years. This is her third year in her current position as a MSC. Before becoming a counselor, Porsche taught school for 12 years. She holds a K-12 counselor certification, a principal certification, and two secondary teaching certificates. She is a member of ATPE and TCA. She is the lead counselor of three on a campus with an enrollment between 751-1000. Porsche reports that between 51 and 75% of her students are minority and over 75% of the students are economically disadvantaged. Porsche became a MSC because she likes the age level. She states that she tried other levels, but ended up in middle school because she was drawn to this age group.

I started out my career teaching Special Ed in middle school and then I became a counselor. That was elementary. But then I was working for another district, and I was working with all middle school and high school kids. And then I just ended up just straight middle school for some reason. It was—I don’t know. They just have always kind of appealed to me. And a lot of people avoid middle school, but I think they’re funny and they’re entertaining. They’re irritating. They’re a little bit of everything, but they’re never dull. It just kind of—that’s just where I’ve kind of ended up—is with middle school.

Porsche scored moderate to high on all of the dimensions of burnout measured on the CBI, with the exception of *Devaluing Client*. She scored very low in this area, indicating that she still enjoys working with and counseling the students.

This was just—I got my kids through. We loop up with our kids. So, I’ve been with my kids. I got them through. I’m getting them into high school, and I just have to find something that’s just less stressful. That’s the whole thing. I have to have something that’s less stressful because I literally... I have no life. And I just need some place that, you know, wants me to work with kids.

Bambi. Bambi is between the ages of 45 and 54. She is white, holds her master’s degree and has between six and 10 years’ experience as an educator. However, this is her first year at as a MSC. In addition to her K-12 counseling certificate, she is a Licensed Professional Counselor with the state of Texas. She holds teaching certificates at various levels. She taught for three years as a teacher and was a behavior specialist and a visiting teacher for her district for several years, prior to accepting her first position as a MSC. She is one of three counselors at a large campus with enrollment exceeding 1250. The campus is 25-50% minority and has less than 25% economically disadvantaged students. Because they are not a Title 1 school, they do not receive extra funding for some of the extra personnel for which other schools may qualify. Bambi decided to accept a position as a MSC to get off the road, develop relationships with others, and be close to her sons who both attend the school where she is a counselor.

... I spent the last 10 years working at the district level. I was a Gen Ed behavior specialist and a child study facilitator for the district... and so I’ve been in my car driving around... And one of my schools that I came to serve last year was [this campus] and my twins go to school here. And I just decided, “You know what, it will be so sweet not to have to drive every day and to be one mile from my house and be with my boys.” And

so, I came and talked to the principal and she was like, “Heck yeah, I’ll hire you, [Bambi].” So, here I am.

Bambi scored moderate to high on two dimensions of the CBI, *Exhaustion* and *Deterioration in Personal Life*. When asked about her experiences with burnout, this was evident.

Oh, I’m tired. Yeah, I keep yawning.... Just tired and not being able to sleep and not nearly enough time with my family. I feel bad. I came here, and I’ve loved being here with my sons. That’s been fantastic. And so much more fun than any of the three of us thought it was going to be. But ...you know, just feeling like I’m not there for them in the evenings where I have been able to do that in the past....I feel like I’m giving—expending all of my emotional and physical energy during the day and there’s not much left for my family in the evening, and I don’t like that.

Elizabeth. Elizabeth is between the ages of 35 and 44. She is a novice counselor with less than five years’ experience. She is white, and holds her master’s degree along with a certificate in K-12 Counseling. She is not a member of any organization. She is one of two counselors on a campus with an enrollment greater than 1250 where 26-50% of the enrollment is minority and 10-25% is economically disadvantaged. Before becoming a counselor, Elizabeth taught for seven years. She went into counseling because she thought she could “make a difference.”

Okay, I was a teacher for six years and a coach, and I just decided that that would be a great move for me. So, I went to school, I went to UTSA, and received my degree through the CACREP Program. And then I taught for another year, and then I found my current job. So, I just felt like I could do this, that I could actually make a difference.

Elizabeth scored moderate burnout on the CBI in the dimensions of *Exhaustion*, *Negative Work Environment* and *Deterioration in Personal Life*. Though exhibiting signs of burnout, she is still functioning well in the other two dimensions measured. However, her health is beginning to decline. She associates this decline with the stress of her MSC position. When asked about her experiences with burnout, Elizabeth had this to say.

Well, I'm having arrhythmias. I've gained a lot of weight and I—because I'm a stress eater. I'm not as happy as a person. I don't—what's the word? I don't enjoy the children as much as I should anymore... So, just—I'm tired. And then when I do see a child, I sometimes rush them out of my office so that I can complete my other task, which I know I have to complete and that's not fair... And, I just—I'm wondering how long I'm going to stay... and I don't think I'm going to stay long because I have no purpose.

Rapha. Rapha is a seasoned counselor with over 10 years' experience and is between 45 and 54 years of age. She is Hispanic, holds her master's degree and is a Licensed Professional Counselor. She is a member of TCA and ASCA. Before becoming a counselor she taught for eight years. She is in the sixth year at her current campus which has an enrollment of 1001-1250. She is one of two counselors on her campus and serves a population that is 51-75% minority and 51-75% economically disadvantaged. Rapha became a MSC because it was the job she was offered. However, she has come to find that she loves working with this age group because they are “pliable.”

I got the job, and I got an elementary position for a year. And then I went to the high school for eight- nine years. Then we moved to [this city] and this was the first middle school position that I got when we moved to [this city]. I didn't think I was going to like it at first because I didn't like teaching middle schoolers, but I have really loved working

with this age group. They're sixth, seventh and eighth grade. I kind of feel that they're still at an age where they're pliable. You can work with them. You can see changes if you work with them.

On the CBI, Rapha exhibited moderate to high levels of burnout in the dimensions of *Exhaustion, Negative Work Environment* and low levels of burnout in the dimension of *Deterioration in Personal Life*. However, she exhibited little or no burnout in the areas of Incompetence or Devaluing Client. She acknowledges that she is experiencing burnout, and she expresses concern for her health, both physical and mental and associates these concerns with the stress of the job.

I really do feel that the stress of the job has taken a toll on my health... I think it has affected my health because I just had blood work done, and I'm borderline diabetic... Well, it has everything to do with my health because -anxiety; I have been on antidepressants for three years now...

So we get very burned out. We get very burned out. We get very tired. I have not experienced the burnout in counseling as I have experienced in this district. These past six years have been really rough. It is the worst that I have ever, ever experienced...

... Who wants to come work here when the environment is just so bad...? And this is my sixth year, and it hasn't changed. Well, I'm ready to go somewhere-[else].

Snapshots of the District Guidance and Counselors

Tammie. Tammie is a white female who is approximately 40 years old. She is energetic and upbeat, the type of person who makes one feel instantly at ease. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and attended graduate school to be a school counselor. She first taught for 19 years and was a high school guidance counselor before becoming the Director of Guidance and

Counseling over the North 1 District. Her job duties are numerous and include supervising the counselors and social workers in her large urban district. She also coordinates Title 1 for her district. She is over curriculum for some non- core subjects. She supervises AP testing. She is over the trauma team, develops guidance lessons for the counselors and other duties as assigned. When asked what her roles and responsibilities were she replied like this: “Everything. Anything that doesn’t fit in anybody else’s box comes to me...”

Jo. Jo is a white female who is approximately 50 years old. She is a very straightforward and friendly person who also seems very down to earth. She has a bachelor’s degree in mathematics. She taught math for about 8 years, and became a school counselor basically because she thought learning the information would make her a better classroom teacher. Once she completed her counseling degree, she was an academic school counselor for eight years and a crisis counselor for three years. It was about this time that there was an opening for a Director of Guidance and Counseling. Many of the people whom she had worked with were asking her to apply for the position. She did apply and has been in the position for one year. “A lot of people were asking me to do it so that they would feel like they had an advocate, so that’s why I went that direction.”

Gloria. Gloria is a white female who is approximately 55 years old. She is very personable and appears to take her job very seriously. She was a teacher before becoming a high school counselor. She was a high school counselor for eight years and applied for the DGC position when it came open. She wears many hats, overseeing all of the counselors in the East 1 District. She coordinates all of the professional development for the counselors and serves on many committees. She supervises seven social workers and is over dual credit, and various other programs. She works with both counselors and principals to address district initiatives. She

feels that all of her prior experience prepared her for the job as DGC but she has learned much since accepting the position about the entire district. “Since I’ve been director, I’ve certainly learned a lot about how the whole district works rather than just how the counseling department works and functions.”

Cathy. Cathy is a white female who is approximately 60 years old. She is very friendly, professional and has a sense of humor that is apparent almost immediately. However, she is very serious about her role as a DGC. She is certified as a school counselor, a College and Career counselor as well as a special education counselor. She also is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Texas. And she has her administrative certificate. She is over both college and career and mental health school counseling programs. She meets with the counselors monthly and collaborates and meets with the nurses. She meets with various community program representatives, and also does various other duties as assigned. She provides all types of training for the counselors including suicide prevention. She states, “The goal is to keep the kids in school, keep them in class, keep them successful. So I do a lot of training with the counselors.”

Dana. Dana is a white female who is approximately 55 years old. She is a very friendly and professional individual who knows her job very well. She clearly articulated exactly her professional experience and duties. She began her career as an English teacher. She earned her master’s in reading and taught reading remediation for a few years before completing her master’s program in counseling. She became a counselor, then an LPC and later decided to work on her doctorate in psychology. She earned her doctorate in psychology and later became a licensed psychologist after completing her residency. She has worked for the South 1 ISD for over 30 years and has been the DGC for nine years. Dana oversees approximately 250 school

counselors and all the social workers in her large urban district. She has various other duties such as providing staff development and insuring that the counseling program is delivering the same services to all campuses in the district with respect to their unique needs yet “provides the same level and quality of service at every campus.” She also provides support in the way of consultation for her counselors: “All day long, counselors are calling with consultations.”

Causes of MSC Stress and Burnout: Emerging Themes

Research Question One: *What are the perceptions of both school counselors and DGC as to causes of stress and burnout in MSCs?*

As the data was analyzed six sub themes and two main themes emerged regarding what causes MSC stress and burnout and are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

Formulated Statements and Emerging Themes from Research Question 1

Themes 1 and 2

Formulated Statements

Theme 1. Unpredictable routine, work overload, excessive tasks and competing priorities.

1. Unpredictable, extremely draining, chaotic, stressful days!
2. I need to see kids!
3. We are the dumping ground!

Theme 2. Lack of validation, support and power.

4. No one knows what I do!
 5. We need support/validation from administration.
 6. We have no power! (The principal is the captain of the ship!)
-

Theme One: Unpredictable Routine, Work Overload, Excessive Tasks and Competing Priorities

The underlying theme of *Unpredictable, extremely draining, chaotic, stressful days!* resonated among most of the MSCs. Several significant formulated statements were reduced to this common theme. MSCs consistently mentioned that they never knew what to expect when they came to work. Even their best laid plans could be changed at the drop of a hat. This was a major stressor and was indicative of the overarching theme of *Unpredictable Routine, Work Overload, Excessive Tasks and Competing Priorities*. MSCs talked about being interrupted, losing their train of thought and being expected to complete everything in the midst of all of the chaos.

Another formulated statement, *I need to see kids!* was also indicative of the larger theme *Unpredictable Routine, Work Overload, Excessive Tasks and Competing Priorities*. Saddled with extra duties, all with priority deadlines, MSCs had little, if any, time left in their schedules to see students. In the following section, the MSCs express how they feel about this overload and resulting inability to see kids.

Finally, *We are the dumping ground!* was the final formulated statement taken from the significant formulated statements. It was clustered into the theme of *Unpredictable Routine, Work Overload, Excessive Tasks and Competing Priorities*. MSCs and DGCs discuss how this affects the MSCs' stress level. Appointed to take on a multitude of extra duties coupled with all of the competing agendas proved to be extremely stressful for the MSCs. The following is a textural description of the stressors mentioned by the MSCs during the interviews and the focus groups.

Unpredictable, extremely draining, chaotic, stressful days! One of the most prevalent significant formulated statements found during the interviews was simply that MSCs don't have a typical day. When asked about her typical day, Allie had this to say:

Oh boy, well, it's kind of funny because my husband asks me this every day and I'm like, "I know I was busy all day, but I can't really tell you. I don't really know what I did." Lots of crisis; just constantly dealing with people, situations We could have a plan but that rarely happens because there's always things that come up, so lots of scheduling, lots of mediating, and we have a lot of meetings.

When asked about her typical day, Elizabeth had a strikingly similar answer:

That's a good one. From the time I walk in, every day is different. There can be parents waiting in our office unbeknownst to us. There could be a withdrawal. There can be an

enrollment. There could be an upset child. And then as we go throughout the day everything changes. So, no day is the same—I can say that, except for our duties.

That’s lunchroom duty, which I rarely make anymore. Everything changes. So, I don’t have a regular day.

When asked about her typical day, Bambi also has a similar response. She uses words, like “chaotic,” “unpredictable,” “draining” and “stressful” in her description:

[Sigh]...There is no typical day as a—[MSC]... the only thing typical about a middle school day is that you can’t predict what it’s going to be. And so...chaotic would be something I would describe it as... exciting because it’s never the same... unpredictable, extremely draining and very stressful. So, that’s how I describe a typical day.

Donna describes her typical day in this way:

I would describe it as never the same. No two days are alike. You hit the door running. Just a lot of different kinds of activities that I do. There’s lots of paperwork, and there’s lots of kids coming in and out needing different things. Some need true counseling. Some just need guidance. Some need their schedule changed. Some need whatever, and their parents are the same way. We get lots of parent phone calls for different things, and so we kind of just do really whatever happens during—whatever comes up during the day; we kind of just do it.

Nicole, Mistie, Rapha, Porsche and Elizabeth describe numerous duties, tasks, and opportunities that are a part of their day. Some are planned, but many are unplanned and just happen as the need arises. Kianna also finds that she never knows what her day will bring, “Being in this job you never know. You never know what you’re going to do and it really is—it’s a lot—I mean, it’s very interesting as to what comes about your day.”

I need to see kids! Another subtheme which was revealed when asked the causes of MSCs stress is the fact that the MSCS don't feel like counselors. Instead they feel like they do administrative work and do not get to work with the students and their problems.

One thing most of the MSCs agree upon is that they need to see kids rather than doing these volumes of administrative tasks. Porsche says, "Okay, and we have a lot of meetings, a lot of meetings, a lot of meetings... and though the word is we put kids first, we actually put meetings first." Porsche believes her role is to work with kids. "I just need some place that, you know, wants me to work with kids." Both she and Rapha are considering leaving because what the principals have them doing for the largest part of the day does not line up with what they think they should be doing. Rapha believes that she should be working with students.

Likewise, Nicole says, "And so, that is one factor that stresses me when I'm not available for students, and I'm being pulled in too many different directions." Mistie had this to say about all the other obstacles in the way of seeing students:

I would like to say that my average day is seeing kids all day and just talking to them about problems. Like today, I did four-year plans...I'd rather see the kids than do paperwork.

Rapha feels that the job she was trained to do, counseling, is not being done. Instead, she feels that she only sees students long enough to put a "band aid" on their issues; however, if she were allowed to do what she was trained to do, instead of the volumes of administrative duties, she feels strongly that she could help students. "We're trained to help students. We're trained to help people find resolutions to some of their issues. But in the job, we don't use those skills. We use more administrative skills."

The stress of not being able to see children, but instead doing other duties such as testing has taken a toll on Elizabeth. She is not only having health problems, but she is thinking about leaving the profession. One of the major factors contributing to her burnout in her opinion is that “the counselors rarely see students” due to the overwhelming administrative tasks that they must complete. Elizabeth says,

I do my job, and I do it well, but I’m not a counselor. And when kiddos say, “We need to go see the counselor,” sometimes I laugh, and I think, “We don’t have counselors on this campus. We have paper-pushers.” So I know that this past week, I think I saw five children. That’s it; most of the time I was testing. How on earth can I do this 20 years longer? And so, I just feel like I’m at a dead-end because I’ve lost my purpose.

Mistie sums her disdain with the situation like this:

So there are so many obstacles right now or so many duties that you find you’re out of the class—you’re not in your office, and you’re doing the scheduled things. And so then kids get out of the habit of seeing you...

Dana, a DGC, understands how the MSCs feel. She believes that the MSC’s “desire to serve students and being derailed from the main tracks of the important work with students” is a major contributing factor of burnout. She expresses that MSCs are “responsible for many clerical tasks that compete with their ability to see students within their counseling role.”

We are the dumping ground! Every MSC and DGC interviewed mentioned having multiple duties and an overwhelming number of responsibilities. This was a major source of their stress. However, Dana, a DCG, was the first to use the phrase “competing priorities.” When asked what she thought caused the MSCs the most stress, she answered, “I think competing priorities.” Dana went on to describe how counselors were assigned high priority tasks such as

state-mandated testing, how this really wasn't part of what counselors need to be doing and how it affected counselors.

The state-mandated assessment is something that must be implemented with perfection. There can be zero errors and at the same time when they are so absorbed in all that goes with the state-mandated assessment, there are still parents walking through the door and students walking through the door that need their immediate attention. When the competing agendas from every angle are all so urgent that nothing can be put to the side, you can't really triage because everything has high, high, high impact. It puts a human being, a professional, in a very, very tough situation If state-mandated assessment went back to academic deans, principals, and others, and allowed counselors to do what they do best, I think there could be a swift remedy for that.

Jo, a DGC, states, "The District continues to put more responsibilities on the counselors without taking anything away." Cathy, another DGC, agrees with both Dana and Jo: "Counselors are available for staff, students and other counselors without time to complete tasks before other tasks begin." She explains that "because they don't have a classroom assignment, they are continually given more assignments."

Tammie, a DGC, also agrees with this premise. She finds that MSCs are assigned extra duties and that this is contributing to the burnout.

I believe that burnout begins because of the amount of "extra" work that is placed on MSCs. Too many times a campus and/or a district have extra duties that do not fit into any other categories so they are placed on the counselor.

Kianna mentions all of the various responsibilities MSCs are required to do. These include academic awards which is a "huge to do." And getting students registered for the following year

is stressful. “Registration is a huge stress for me.” She also emphasizes that standardized “testing is a big one that creates stress.” She also says “students and student issues and concerns and conflicts can be very stressful.” She readily admits “There’s a lot of expectations of us in the spring. That can be very stressful.” She goes on to say, “Counselors are definitely responsible for the ‘all other duties as assigned’ category.”

Elizabeth is feeling the weight of the competing priorities and overwhelming responsibilities, as well. She describes an “overwhelming amount of paperwork.” She also states how in her district “counselors are in charge of so many duties... we are the dumping ground.”

Rapha also feels that they are being dumped on with a multitude of duties. Every time something comes up, it is assigned to the counselor. This causes her a great deal of stress. “We end up getting more and nothing gets taken off of our plate. And so, that’s very frustrating. I think that’s very stressful.”

Unlike the others, Donna accepts the extra duties as a way of life. “Yes, we do have extra duties, but anyone working in the public school system wears many hats...it goes along with the territory.” However, she has one extra duty that she really doesn’t like. She is required to mentor a group of students. She feels guilty because she doesn’t like it and she doesn’t think she does it well. “I don’t think I do a very good job and it bothers me. It bothers me that I don’t like it.” It interferes with her other duties, also.

Every staff member, secretaries, principals, the librarian, everybody has their 12 kids.

And we’re supposed to be like their little school mama. Yeah, and I’m like I don’t know about you, but I have a 16-year-old son who’s not very into school, not very motivated.

...I get tired of nagging him about his grades. I don’t want to nag these kids about it. It’s

just not something I enjoy doing. That really kind of stresses me out on a daily basis to be honest with you.

Porsche talks about all of the meetings and extra duties she has piled on her plate.

We spend lots of time in meetings, attending every ARD we facilitate every 504, we do every CST, every attendance meeting, every leadership team meeting, any meeting—we're there. So it kind of makes seeing kids a little more difficult.

She describes her need for someone to help her with all of the competing priorities, but that doesn't happen. Instead, she is told "They're both equally important, and you stay until they're both done." She expresses how she has no life outside of school because she is spending so much time getting all of the work done.

I literally... I have no life. I work. Most nights, I'd say I don't go home until 10:00 or later. There are nights I'm literally here until two in the morning. That makes for not only burnout, it doesn't help me feeling well. It doesn't improve anything, but if I don't have certain things done, I mean, there's just—you know, I have to do what I have to do.

Bambi has the same issue. Sleep deprived from spending so much time at work, trying to get it all done, she continually apologizes for yawning throughout the interview. She tells about what causes her stress.

Yeah, things for me that create stress are just feeling like I never have enough time to... get what I need to get done... the sheer number of people that come in and want help; just not being able to keep up with the phone calls and the emails and the number of kids that ask to see you and get to those for the day... I mean I work—I'm here pretty much 12 hours a day, and that's way more than I bargained for.

She talks about a few of the overwhelming responsibilities counselors are responsible for taking care of when they arise and explains why it is difficult for her to be off campus or absent.

We had a couple suicidal things. We had somebody run off campus. We had someone that was attacking a couple of people. It was like, “Thank God, I didn’t go.” Uhm...But when one of us is out or one of the two of us is out; it’s bad [Yawning].

Nicole talks about the competing priorities and how she feels so much stress and pressure when she is placed in a situation where she needs to do two things that both have high importance. She really feels stressed when she cannot serve students in need.

I’ll have to say a lot gets put on the counselor’s shoulder, and it becomes very overwhelming, sometimes because you can’t always be available for a student when they need you if an administrator has you doing something else that’s really not student-focused. And so, that is one factor that stresses me: when I’m not available for students, and I’m being pulled in too many different directions.

Mistie is overwhelmed by all the deadlines and the duties expected of her while she is the only counselor at her school of 585 students. “I know the counseling department understands that you just can’t meet all deadlines as a solo counselor, but the principal does not get it.”

Nicole describes how duties mount up and how that causes burnout. “It is very easy to get burned out, especially at this time of year when so much is going on, and there’s so much on your plate! And then just one more thing gets added! And another thing gets added!”

Allie, a first year MSC, feels that prioritizing is the key to minimizing stress; however, often it is not that easy. She feels a lot of guilt when she tries to set boundaries.

Just telling myself that, “I’m going to put this away, and I’ll come back to it.” Or if someone comes to me immediately and says, “I need you to deal with this situation right

now,” just saying to them up front, “I will put this on my list, and I’ll get to it as soon as possible.” That’s hard because that’s not what they want to hear. They want you to take care of it immediately. And sometimes we have multiple crises going on at once, but you have to set priorities or else you kind of fail on everything.

She talks about all of the other duties she does besides counseling duties including testing. But she also talks about how many meetings they have to coordinate and attend and expresses concern that it takes her away from counseling duties.

I’ve noticed there’s more leadership responsibilities or committees that you might be in charge of. For instance, we both do 504 and student support team meetings. That can take away from some of your other counseling duties, and so it’s just yeah, knowing how to prioritize.

Summary. The topic of *Unpredictable Routine, Work Overload, Excessive Tasks, and Competing Priorities* is a major theme in this research study. All nine MSC’s and all five DGCs mentioned most, if not all, aspects of this theme when asked about the causes of the phenomenon of stress and burnout. Every single MSC talked either explicitly or implicitly about the overwhelming number of administrative tasks that they were assigned to do in addition to their everyday counseling responsibilities. Bambi summed it up pretty well when she described her typical day as being “chaotic... unpredictable, extremely draining and very stressful.”

Being available for parents, students, and teachers and being loaded down with extremely detailed administrative tasks that require attention to detail and great focus because there is no room for error combined with the chaos of the normal school day is ongoing for these counselors. It may seem “exciting” at first, but eventually over the course of the year or many years it begins to take its toll. Unable to complete their normal duties and these tasks during the

day, they work extra hours daily, exhausting themselves. And as Porsche says, “Most nights, I’d say I don’t go home until 10:00 or later.” She stays to work on those tasks that have to be done because she has no choice. There is no way to “prioritize.” Each task has to be completed. Bambi expressed what most of the MSCs expressed when she said, “I never have enough time to... get what I need to get done.” This constant state of never being caught up and always being behind is very stressful. Couple that with the type of tasks that counselors are being asked to do, and the stress level rises. Allie explains this constant interruption, “There’s a huge amount of room for error if we do drop what we’re doing and so yeah, just forgetting stuff because we’re constantly interrupted.”

This explains why so many MSCs are working after hours to complete tasks. With no time in the day and constant interruptions, they have to stay after everyone else leaves to make sure they complete all tasks without error. Dana, a DGC, summed it up best,

When the competing agendas from every angle are all so urgent that nothing can be put to the side, you can’t really triage because everything has high, high, high impact. It puts a human being, a professional, in a very, very tough situation.

Theme Two: Lack of Validation, Support and Power

Another theme that surfaced when asking MSCs and DGCs about the causes of stress and burnout was the *Lack of Validation, Support and Power*. The following three formulated themes were clustered in Theme Two: *No One Knows What I Do! We Need Administrative Support!* and *I Have No Power (The Principal is the Captain of the Ship)!* This theme along with the associated formulated statements is discussed in the following section and is followed by a summary of the textural description.

No one knows what I do! Every MSC interviewed made at least one significant statement relating to the fact that no one really knows what they do. Sometimes that someone was the principal; sometimes it was the teachers; sometimes it was the parents; sometimes it was the students. Even the DGCs admitted that the middle school counseling role was largely undefined. Interestingly, sometimes it was the MSC, herself, who was unsure of her role. This formulated statement was a part of the overriding theme of *Lack of Validation, Support and Power*.

When asked specifically about what caused her stress, one of the things that stressed Allie out was “not knowing exactly what my role is a lot of times.” Since Allie was a new counselor, that might be understandable. However, she went on to say that basically no one except the other counselor knew what her role was. Allie stated,

Oh, one more thing that creates stress, I think, is that I was talking about role definition; that’s hard for me. I went from being a classroom teacher where there are 60 other people on campus that know exactly what your job is and then going to there’s only one other person in the building that knows what you do all day. Sometimes it’s easy to feel like people think we just sit in here and do nothing all day or that—they just don’t understand, they don’t see what we see and that can add to stress, too.

Elizabeth had a similar stressful experience, “I’ve had teachers walk by and ask me if I do anything all day because I’ll be sitting there talking to a kid laughing with them.”

Not only teachers, but also parents have their expectations of what counselors do. Elizabeth relates this experience,

So, if a counselor is seen in the office then the parents who come in to see them expect to be seen. They don’t know that the counselor’s doing other things, but they expect it.

Rapha states that this year has been one of the worst “because we’re not counselors, we’re administrators and we’re not trained to be administrators, we’re trained to be counselors.” She feels that because principals do not understand what counselors do, they continue to pile more work administrative work onto the counselors, making it impossible for them to have any time to do what they are meant to do. This creates great stress for Rapha.

I think what creates stress with my job is it’s the frustration of administration not understanding what we do. That creates a lot of stress. They—first of all, maybe not know exactly what we do, and therefore more is piled on our plate because well—”but the counselors can do that.” It’s the kind of—I don’t know. That’s what I feel that, well, “the counselors can do that. Oh yeah, the counselors can do that.” And so, we end up getting more and nothing gets taken off of our plate. And so, that’s very frustrating. I think that’s very stressful.

So the stress of not doing the counseling job and having to take up all of the administrative stuff weighs on us because we would rather be counseling kids and working groups and maybe going into the classroom, which none of that is happening. Porsche feels the same way,

I mean, it’s really having just a spreadsheet done exactly the way that one person wants it and sending it back four times for little bitty tiny things. Is that really more important than seeing a child that’s cutting herself and whose dad has died? And I have a bag of stuff to make a memory box, and I don’t have time because I’m doing a spreadsheet? Both of these counselors are so frustrated and stressed out that they are thinking about leaving at the end of this year.

Bambi states that even though her campus is not low socio-economic, it has very “high needs.” But based upon the population, they do not get any extra hands. They are working to take care of all of the students themselves. She obviously had no idea what being a MSC on her campus would entail before she took on the role. “I never dreamed that it would be... I mean I work—I’m here pretty much 12 hours a day! And that’s way more than I bargained for...”

Nicole expresses in no uncertain terms that she wishes the administrators knew what it was like to be a MSC.

We need more—we need administrators in positions that actually know what it’s like to be a MSC. It would be really nice to have an administrator who had been any kind of a counselor before because they truly don’t know what a counselor’s job entails. And they’re not in on the meetings and they’re not in—they see it from their perspective... And I wish that they could see it from ours. So, it’s almost like I wish there was—you know how you have to have a certain number of teaching years before you can be a counselor or before you can be an administrator? I think you should also have to have been a counselor before you’re an administrator too, just so that you see the whole picture.

Then there is the state’s perception of what counselors are supposed to be doing. This stresses Donna out because she has worked at several schools and she’s never done what the state guidance model says that she has to do. Donna is very attached to what the state describes as non-counseling duties. In fact those duties make her feel balanced. Without those duties, Donna says she would be “heart-broken,” and simply a “complaint department.”

There’s the guidance model that we’re supposed to do. We’re only supposed to do this percentage of this and this percentage of that....One of the things I think that keeps me

from being burned out is doing all the extra things. Honestly, it doesn't bother me to do the testing. It doesn't—and I love scheduling. I love data. If they ever took it away from me, I would like be heartbroken because it's just something I enjoy doing.

Even the state, who defines what school counselors should be doing, does not actually know what the counselors really do. And this is a significant stressor for Donna.

Kianna states that “teachers don't know what our job entails...” She has overheard discussions that “counselors don't do anything.” Mistie is quick to acknowledge that this is a major stressor for her,

I think one of the major things is that the principal, the assistant principal, and we have a dean of instruction... don't seem to know what my job is. And they don't seem to know that I have directives from my department. That's real stressful...they just don't understand.

Tammie, a DGC summed it up. She realized that sometimes,

We not only may not know what MSCs do, but we may simply forget about them, thinking that their job is easy. Sometimes I think our middle school is just forgotten. We think they're easy. Well, they're just middle—they're just elementary kids just bigger. Well, they're not. I think we forget our middle schools across the board. I think we forget our counselors. I think high school thinks, “Oh, well middle school is so easy. You don't know what it's like.” I think our elementary just looks at them like, “Oh, my gosh! I couldn't do those big kids, anyway.” They're just forgotten. All of our principals have a different theory of what a counselor should do and how they use them. That's caused a lot of stress.

Gloria, another DGC, also realized that not everyone knows what a MSC does.

Some people think the job is easy. Some counselors even go into the job because they think it is easy. But they soon find out that that just isn't the case. And it is a bone of contention for others not to understand just how hard they work and what they actually do. So one counselor stood up and told them, "I'm a MSC, and I'm here because I was told this was the easiest counseling job." Well, okay, that set off a firestorm of—you wouldn't believe the calls I got the next day. "You're not going to believe what she said."

And I thought, "I think some people have come into it thinking it's easy, but it's not. When they get there, they realize it may not be what high school is doing, and it looks different than what elementary is doing, but the needs of that age of kids is tremendous. And if you're really serving kids, like two counselors sitting here who said, 'We never have a minute,' because they're serving kids all the time, then you're not going to think this is an easy job."

Cathy, a DGC, explained the fact that nobody really knows what a MSC does.

They're kind of in the middle like a middle child, and I think sometimes they feel treated as a middle child. And that's unfortunate because you're saying, "Well, they're not graduating. And you're not dealing with classroom guidance, and you're not carrying the puppets around. And you're not doing the sand tray and you're not doing all that cool stuff that you can do. What do you do?"

And so, I think that's a misconception with administrators and with teachers, because you're just down there. You don't have a classroom. What are you doing down there? God, you need whatever. And so, I think it's a misconception of... the importance of MSCs and what they really do. ... I do think, for the most part, they feel like middle—they feel like stepchildren. Oh, you're just in middle school.

Cathy readily admits that the MSC's role is the least defined. "I think the middle school role is not as defined as it is in elementary and high school." She sums it up by saying this, "Principals don't really know what their counselors do, but they just know they are busy."

Jo, a DGC, recognizes that she may not know exactly what a MSC does, because even though she was a MSC for students in crisis, she has never done the academic counseling at that level. "I did junior high as an SAS counselor, but I didn't do the academic piece. So there might be something they know that I don't know. I really try to depend on them."

Dana, a DGC, made this statement, "It's just meeting all those state and federal guidelines with the personnel that any school district has that sometimes causes the organization to have to use the staff that they have in ways that they may not even want."

Having been a MSC, herself, for 10 years, Dana recognizes that middle school is unique. She also recognizes the importance of the MSC. "[Middle school children] really need a lot of time with counselors and a lot of good presentations and good information to help them make choices." She seems to understand the passion that many of our MSCs have voiced when they state, "No one knows what I do!"

We need support/validation from administration. The second sub theme that emerged regarding causes of stress and burnout in MSCs was the need for support and validation from administration. This was a major theme and though one of many, seemed to resonate strongly throughout the interviews and focus groups. Even those who had strong administrative support identified it as crucial.

Rapha, a very experienced MSC, is adamant about the need for administrative support and validation. She feels strongly that this is one of the major causes of her burnout. She

discusses this not only in her interviews, but in the focus group and her journals of stress related activities.

My experiences have been feeling unvalued, feeling angry for being blamed [for] some things I did not do or had no control over, feelings of frustration when I offer suggestions, and they are never considered, feeling . . . I work alone not as a team, feeling . . . can't see kids because I have deadlines to meet.

During the focus group, Mistie replies to this, "Rapha, you said what is on my mind!" Both Mistie and Rapha express their frustrations concerning feeling unvalued, frustrated, isolated, and unable to see kids.

One reason Rapha feels the lack of support is because she has such a large caseload. There are only two counselors on a campus of 1250. She says, "There's no way. There's no way that we can get it all done." She feels strongly about not having enough help on her at risk campus. She feels that the principal "does not get it and does not care."

Mistie, has a large caseload as well, as the sole counselor on a campus of 585. She relates,

It's just way too much for us to do. And I think that's another reason why I feel that the support is not there. It really is not, especially in a Title I, at risk campus that we run.

The support is not there.

Rapha strongly feels that a major cause of burnout is this lack of support and validation from administration for the counselors. "Burn out has to do with our jobs as counselors being misunderstood by the administration." Tammie, a DGC, agrees. "Also, sometimes it is a lack of support from the administration in these areas that also create part of the burnout." Gloria, a DGC, agrees and states that she knows that she has to be an advocate when it comes to her

counselors. “As a director I have to acknowledge the problem and offer support where I can. I have to be willing to fight battles for them with administration.” Tammie also agrees that she is aware of the problem. “When I first became a director I was amazed at the number of administrators that had a bad attitude towards counselors.”

Nicole is very forthright about the subject. She does not feel supported by administration, explaining,

Well, my experience compared to what I’ve experienced in the past since I’ve been here, I don’t feel a lot of support to be real honest. I feel like we are just, I mean, loaded down. When we try to speak up or when we try to go to an administrator and ask for support in some way or help in some way, I don’t really feel like we get that to be real honest.

Nicole feels that she is undervalued and underutilized as a counselor and instead does administrative duties and clerical duties.

Burnout is a big issue. Usually about five years in or so, people are just tired. We are just—I mean, they just see—they feel overwhelmed, under-appreciated, but also—I don’t know if this is the right word to use, but under-utilized...

Porsche feels like she has totally different values than her principal. “Yeah, we just have different philosophies. We have different values, and yeah. And she’d say the same thing, I’m sure.” Porsche wishes that she worked on a campus where her opinions were valued. She discusses how her friend has a very different relationship with her principal and how that makes her feel.

Yeah, just interactions with administration kind of stuff. You know, my best friend is at a different middle school. And for some days I’m like “I don’t even want to hear about [laughter] ...how good it is over there, and that you have discussions, and you do

brainstorm, and your principal does value your opinion” and some days I’m just like, “I don’t want to hear about it, [laughter] sorry.”

Jo, a DGC, believes that counselors need to be listened to if they are to feel supported. “We have to listen to the counselors and address their concerns to the best of our abilities. I have been told repeatedly by our counselors how important it is that I listen.”

Donna talks about past campuses where she had bad relationships with principals. “I’ve had jobs where I haven’t really bonded well with the principals. That kind of made coming to work not as enjoyable.”

Elizabeth compares past and present campus administrators and how they made her feel about her job,

Previously, I didn’t have an administrator support on campus, but this year it has just been amazing. And it’s almost like I am allowed to do my job and do it well, and the only time that any question is asked is if they just want clarification. Otherwise,” Don’t bother me. Do what you know to do. You’re the professional. Take care of it, and “that’s what you were hired to do.” Previously, it was “you have to come to me for every decision you make!” And that’s hard; that’s a lot of stress. So, “Kudos to our new administration.”

Elizabeth strongly feels that there is “not enough staffing in the middle schools.” Unlike her previous campus administration who did not value her expertise, this new current administrative team does. However, she is not feeling supported from her district. She sees the district wide view of counselors as “This is your job: Other duties as assigned; a counselor is a side thought.” This does not leave her feeling very valued. Instead it leaves her feeling as though she has “no purpose.”

Kianna agrees that leadership is very important.

I also think that leadership plays an important role. If you have administrators who support you, then you may have the opportunity to explore the roles of a counselor that aren't visited very often (student issues, social skills, and true guidance counseling pathways).

Allie, the newest MSC, indicated that on her campus the administrative support was "amazing." She stated that they were "quick to help" out when needed. Allie likes this about her campus administration, explaining,

If we ever need anything supply-wise or just whatever it is, they're always asking, "Can we help you? Is there anything that we can do?" So that's really nice.

Mistie feels supported by her district but not by her campus principals. She tells this story about how she feels she is viewed on campus this year.

Well, this year, sometimes I have to jump up and down and go, "Hey, I'm the counselor," you know. "Quit handling things yourselves," or, "I do more than just schedules." One teacher for two years thought I was a secretary.

And there was a subtle statement made that makes one think that Mistie doesn't feel valued. She said, "I think that we don't get as much 'you do such a great job' as we need." Additionally, in the focus group when Rapha talks about feeling unvalued, Mistie replies, "Rapha, you said what is on my mind!"

I have no power. (The principal is the captain of the ship.) Several MSCs and DGCs made reference to the fact that they have no power. Most schools practice site based management. Therefore, when it comes to deciding what the counselors do on each campus, the principal has the power. Cathy, a DGC, explains the situation like this:

You cannot have a good middle school program if you are not totally aligned with the principal. The principal is the captain of the ship and they have to be made to feel like they're the captain of the ship and so you have to treat them that way. So, you have to train your counselors how to play that role and how to feel very comfortable with that role, and I have to play that role. And so I never pit a counselor against the principal. It's always a very collaborative partnership.

Donna discusses the fact that having a relationship with the principal is important, "I've had jobs where I haven't really bonded well with the principals. That kind of made coming to work not as enjoyable."

Porsche finds this fact unsettling. She discusses how frustrating it is that her coordinator has no power when it comes to what counselors do. Instead, the principals have all the power. She as a counselor is also feeling very powerless. "We have no...I have no say. I have no control. There's not a thing I can [do]."

Gloria, a DGC, expresses her frustration with the fact that she has no power to change the allocation of duties, such as testing and lunch duty, for the counselors because this is solely up to the principal to determine.

They come to me wanting relief from that, and I have no power to change how it looks on their campus. I direct the program as a whole for the district. I see that they have what they need. I provide materials. I provide resources. I do events. But to make a difference of how it looks on their campus, the director has no power to do that; the principal is in charge.

Jo, another DGC, acknowledges that she really has no power. She is an advocate and does express her opinions. "I can't fix everything and they know that, but at least they understand that

I'm trying . . . you know, I don't have any power, I just am a voice for them, you know what I mean?"

Summary. The second theme that emerged when MSCs and DGCs were asked about the causes of stress and burnout was that MSCs often lack validation, support and power. Like Cathy, a DGC, said, "They don't have a classroom," therefore, no one really knows what they are doing. And as Allie, a MSC, said, the general consensus is they have an "easy job." As Nicole says,

We need more—we need administrators in positions that actually know what it's like to be a MSC... they truly don't know what a counselor's job entails and they're not in on the meetings and they're not in—they see it from their perspective, and I wish that they could see it from ours,... they see us sitting in our office and they think, "Oh, they're not doing anything." Well, they don't realize, "No, I'm doing like five things at one time! And a while ago I was counseling a student and sticking labels on invitations for rewards programs while I'm counseling a student because I just cannot get everything done because everything just keeps getting more and more loaded down on the counselors."

All nine counselors made significant statements regarding the fact that no one knows what they do! They are working extremely hard, staying after hours to get their work completed, and no one knows what they do. They begin to feel that they are not valued. Their hard work is not validated. Both Mistie and Rapha verbalize this feeling. Mistie said, "I think that we don't get as much 'you do such a great job' as we need." Additionally, in the focus group when Rapha talks about feeling unvalued, Mistie replies, "Rapha, you said what is on my mind!"

This lack of validation coupled with a lack of administrative support or a bad relationship with an administrator can produce much stress and even cause counselors to give up. Elizabeth

talks about the lack of support from her DGC. She describes her overwhelming number of duties, and then states that when she seeks help, she is told, “Well, get used to it. That’s what you’re going to do.” This lack of support makes Elizabeth feel as though she “has no purpose.”

While not all of the MSCs participants had a poor relationship with their principals or DGCs, the majority of them did. Eight out of the nine had stated that important stakeholders did not know what they did all day as MSCs. Often this person was the principal, but it also was the teachers, students, parents and sometimes the DGCs or central administration staff. DGCs acknowledged that often principals do not know what MSCs do and often they have a negative view of the counselors. Tammie acknowledged the reality of this, “When I first became a director I was amazed at the number of administrators that had a bad attitude towards counselors.” Tammie also discussed how principals not understanding what counselors do has added to their overall stress. She says, “All of our principals have a different theory of what a counselor should do and how they use them. That’s caused a lot of stress.”

The DGCs who were interviewed from the neighboring districts validated these findings. Cathy noted how important the counselor/principal relationship was in her district. She meets with each counselor and principal at the beginning of each year in an effort to help alleviate this type of stress before it begins. She explains the relationship between the counselor and the principal in detail.

You cannot have a good middle school program if you are not totally aligned with the principal. The principal is the captain of the ship and they have to make to feel like they’re the captain of the ship and so you have to treat them that way. So, you have to train your counselors how to play that role and how to feel very comfortable with that

role, and I have to play that role. And so I never pit a counselor against the principal. It's always a very collaborative partnership.

Organizational Factors and Resources: Emerging Themes

Research Question 2. How do MSC and DGC describe organizational factors and resources in place to improve stress management and prevent burnout?

Data analysis of interviews, focus groups, counselor journals and lists of professional development provided revealed the following formulated statements regarding organizational factors and resources and their role in stress management and burnout prevention. All of the following formulated statements were analyzed and pointed to the third emerging theme:

Organizational Factors and Resources Can Reduce Stress. Table 6 depicts the subthemes and themes generated by this broad research question.

Table 6

Formulated Statements and Emerging Themes from Research Question Two

Theme

Formulated Statements

Theme 3. Organizational Factors and Support Can Reduce Stress.

1. Processes and procedures.
 2. Administrative support.
 3. Professional development.
 4. Other stress management resources.
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Theme Three: Organizational Resources and Support Can Reduce Stress

All MSCs acknowledged that several organizational factors were helpful in reducing stress and preventing burnout. Items mentioned that reduced stress were *Processes and*

Procedures, Administrative Support, Professional Development, and Other Stress Management Resources. However, there were organizational barriers that were often mentioned when discussing these factors. These organizational barriers often prevented the MSCs from fully taking advantage of the resources.

Processes and procedures. When asked about processes or procedures that alleviate stress, every MSC commented on their crisis procedures as being helpful in alleviating the stressful nature of a crisis situation. Although some found it difficult to follow all of the steps in the procedures, they all admitted that at the end of the day they felt better because they knew that by following those procedures, they had at least done what they needed to do to keep kids safe.

Allie stated that although the forms were hard to locate on the district website, which created a little stress for her, she still thought that the step by step procedures were helpful.

There are some procedures like a checklist, that's really nice for me because again, I don't know what I'm doing yet. So it's nice to know what the protocol is—I want to follow the rules. I just need to know what the rules are, so that's nice.

Likewise, Porsche agrees that the procedures for crisis intervention are very good and helpful in alleviating stress.

We have some really good procedures in place. We have a very . . . we have specific procedures for a suicide outcry and we have specific procedures that just were given to us this year... We know exactly what we need to do.... So that alleviates a lot of stress.

Rapha's district, South 1, has very strict guidelines for crisis intervention. She states that it helps, but it also causes stress because it is so long and time consuming. In addition to this she is stressed because there is an organizational barrier that prevents her from fully benefiting from this organizational procedure: There is no time for follow up with students who have experienced

crisis. It bothers her that the follow up is not as good as it could be due to limited time and numerous non counseling duties. This causes Rapha additional stress.

Well, it helps. Yes, it does.... it's a lot to do... I have to say that the follow-up on this is so poor... our follow-up is just, "How are you doing?" And just let them know that if they need a place to have five minutes to regroup, then you can come to the counselor. "I can't always talk to you because I may not be here, but this is a place where you can come to. It's a safe place for you."

Donna feels the procedures are helpful because they give you set steps to follow for crisis.

We do have procedures; some that are district; some that are campus; some that we've just decided [to do] in our department, our counseling department: This is how we're going to handle this kind of situation. The procedures help alleviate the stress because you know I have to do X, Y, and Z and I've done what I need to do, because sometimes a situation can be so emotionally overwhelming that you might not remember everything that you need to do and all the bases that you need to touch to make sure that it's taken care of.

Nicole agrees that having a "regimented" system with "specific forms" is helpful and alleviates stress because "it's stressful as it is, but to know exactly what you're supposed to do and what the district and the campus expects you to do... helps alleviate some of that stress..." However, unlike most of the other MSCs, Elizabeth did not find the regimented procedures in her district to be helpful. Instead she found that it just made her "jump through hoops" and undermined the "confidential relationship" between the student and the counselor. She saw this as an organizational barrier to having a confidential relationship with her students.

Mistie also finds that the processes and procedures for dealing with critical events are very helpful in alleviating some of the stress associated with these types of situations because even though you still “worry about a kid...over the weekend...it’s good because it takes out the guessing factor.” However, Mistie does mention overkill when it comes to violent risk assessment:

I’m finding that I do more of them and I’m not sure. I think it’s because the principals are more educated on them. But I also find that they’re doing it to cover their back. And so a lot of times it’s just somebody who punches a locker and you have to do a violent risk assessment. And I can say in all the years I’ve been here, I’ve probably only done two before this year. And now I’ve done at least two and counting.

Bambi finds the set procedures for dealing with crisis helpful. In fact she helped create the procedures in her district.

If a kid comes in and they’re having suicidal thoughts, I can grab a packet and start going through the packet and then I’ll create a red folder and it leads me right exactly through what protocol I need to follow. So ...it’s a beautiful thing.

Kianna states that her “district has a protocol [and] every single counselor in the district follows the same protocol.” She believes the processes and procedures help to alleviate the stress.

I would say it definitely alleviates stress and that it makes me feel like I have done my duty in helping the child. I have fulfilled what I need to fulfill to make sure that that child is safe. It can add to the stress because there are so many steps involved with each situation, but it’s all for the benefit of the child, so it’s necessary in my opinion, to make sure it’s all handled.

Cathy, a DGC, states that they “revisit the counselor crisis manual every year. It’s online, but they like those notebooks.” Likewise, Gloria, a DGC tells,

I have created brochures on what our procedures are for suicide ideation, for CPS reporting, for bullying incidents; we have those procedures in place, and so it’s all in that handbook for counselors....I will stand behind it. It will be me...Because there has to be someone who will say, “I will be the bottom line here.” If there’s a problem with what we’re doing with our suicide ideation steps—that’s on me.

Jo, a DGC, also helps her counselors alleviate stress by providing processes and procedures.

We trained them this year on suicide assessment and some of them are being trained in critical incident stress debriefing and some of that, and we’ve done a flow chart for suicide prevention: If this would happen, this is what you do... Just trying to get them the knowledge basically out there so they feel competent and confident in what they do.

Administrative support. Administrative support was the main organizational factor that emerged as a stress reliever for the MSCs. Those who felt they had support were quick to point out the benefits. Though almost everyone felt supported by their DGC, some did not. And though some felt supported by their principals, others did not. But there were many significant statements made about administrative support and the positive benefits associated with it as far as stress management was concerned.

Allie, a novice MSC, was one of the first to mention that her administration was “amazing.” She noted that they would always offer to help when they were busy with testing... often taking care of counseling duties while the counselors were taking care of administrative tasks. Likewise, Donna, a seasoned MSC, also mentioned her supportive administrative team noting that the support they offered alleviated stress,

We also have a fantastic administrative team here. That's one of the reasons why I love being at this school so much...we're not isolated. I mean we have a good relationship with the people in the office with the principals. That... alleviates a lot of stress.

Though Porsche does not feel she has good support from her building principal and the counselor coordinator in her district has no power or control over her principal, she does feel that she has support from her assistant principal. Each counselor is teamed up with an AP and they work as a team. "I work very closely with my AP, and we are friends. He listens to my [laughter] rantings... he's good, you know, and I trust him. I do have that. We all have a partner."

Elizabeth appreciates the support of her new principal. This is giving her hope for next year. "Something that alleviates stress is a good leader, and we do have a new leader, our principal." However, the district support is lacking or non-existent in her opinion. "But, per the district or per anyone else, I don't see what's alleviating the stress unless we do it ourselves."

Bambi raves about her Counseling Supervisor. "The MSC have a supervisor. And [she] is phenomenal. I've known her for years, and she's incredibly supportive of the counselors."

Kianna also indicated that supportive administration was a plus when it came to stress reduction both on campus and at central office.

We, on our campus, we have incredible administrator support. I don't think I could work for a better administrator, really and truly. It's just—it's amazing! Anything we need for ourselves, for our kids, for the campus, for the teachers, —they do the best they can to take care of it for us...we're very blessed for that. Our director downtown is also amazing. We'll call her if something is going on or if it doesn't feel right or we're not sure about which way to go with a certain situation; she's always there for support and to help us.

The DGCs who were interviewed all conveyed their desire to support the MSCs. And all stated that they were advocates for the counselors. However, while all of the DGCs mentioned the importance of advocating for their MSCs, most mentioned the fact that they really had no power to change things for the MSCs. The DGCs were all considered directors; however, the building principals had control over the MSCs job duties. This lack of power to make changes for counselors was an organizational barrier and a common theme among the DGCs. Some mention that they had to be careful in how they approached issues concerning the MSCs. Some even alluded to the fact that if they made too many waves or tried to change too many things for the MSCs, their own jobs might be on the line.

Dana is concerned about the MSCs being responsible for state standardized testing.

If state-mandated assessment went back to academic deans, principals, and others, and allowed counselors to do what they do best, I think there could be a swift remedy for that.

That would require a budget and probably hiring more administrative staff. That doesn't—that's not quick to happen.

While Dana admits that she has no control over some of the non-guidance tasks the MSCs must attend to, such as testing, she is very clear that the reason MSCs are responsible for these activities is due to a lack of funding and understaffing. In her district, counselor roles are clearly defined based upon state guidelines; yet, Dana still has concern over the non-guidance duties her counselors must attend to.

I think organizationally we have a very clear vision about what's best for students. I feel it comes more from the levels of the state and requirements of compliance from either state or federal that change the role of the counselor. Really organizationally, I think our organization has phenomenal vision and really deep respect for the work that counselors

do and a great appreciation and understanding. It's just meeting all those state and federal guidelines with the personnel that any school district has that sometimes causes the organization to have to use the staff that they have in ways that they may not even want.

Tammy, a DGC, also alludes to this issue as she discusses site-based theory. "Then all of our principals have a different theory of what a counselor should do and how they use them. That's caused a lot of stress" Although she advocates for the counselors, she often is unable to make necessary changes. But Tammy does communicate this with them.

I try to let my middle schools know, "Hey, I get that we need another person or hey, I get that 504 is burdensome. This is what I've talked to people about and this is why right now we can't move forward." They seem to appreciate that a lot more when I just am communicating with them and explaining...

Jo, another DGC, also expresses that communicating with the MSCs seems to help them even though she really has no power. She is an advocate and does express her opinions. But she readily admits that unless her opinions are handled in a positive manner, it could affect her job.

I can't fix everything and they know that, but at least they understand that I'm trying to do some things, and then if we can start toward that, they feel a little encouraged . I think that's one thing that a lot of people and it's not about me, but even the administration this year has said that the counselors have felt more supported than they have in a long time but it's not that... you know, I don't have any power, I just am a voice for them, you know what I mean?

Cathy, summed it very well. She explains the relationship between the counselor and the principal in detail.

You cannot have a good middle school program if you are not totally aligned with the principal. The principal is the captain of the ship and they have to make to feel like they're the captain of the ship and so you have to treat them that way. So, you have to train your counselors how to play that role and how to feel very comfortable with that role, and I have to play that role. And so I never pit a counselor against the principal. It's always a very collaborative partnership. ... You're there with your principal, and you all have to get along.

Professional development. Lists provided by the DGCs coupled with information gained from face to face interviews with the DCGs indicated that there is professional development provided at least in the neighboring districts, but for the most part either counselors did not recognize these as resources to alleviate or manage stress or did not have time to take advantage of the resources. Very few counselors mentioned professional development. But several of them mentioned organizational barriers that prevented them from attending or fully taking advantage of offered Professional Development activities. Several mentioned the fact they could not attend conferences or go to wellness training because they couldn't find the time to get away from campus. And for some of those who did manage to get away, there was no time to practice the self-care they had learned during the wellness training. During the focus group discussions, many counselors indicated that they were not taking advantage of some of the resources, while others conveyed that they would love to have some of the resources offered in other districts. There were statements made by both DGCs and MSCs regarding barriers that prohibited MSCs from accessing some of these resources. Some of these barriers proved to be real and some were simply perceived.

When asked about resources that were offered by her district for stress prevention, Allie was quick to mention a professional development about wellness.

We had a whole half day on wellness, how to take care of ourselves. I know the district as a whole is promoting wellness but I don't know that I see that being modeled a lot, just because as far as getting enough sleep. And I don't know, there are all kinds of things that it feels like are not okay to do. One of the suggestions would be to get up and take a walk, and sometimes I feel like I can't do that. I wouldn't be in my office, and a lot of that is me putting pressure on myself. Nobody has said, "You can't go take a walk." I just feel like I need to be in here, and I can't take care of myself.

Donna also finds trying to fit the wellness resources that are offered by her district into her day a little hard to do. This causes added stress for her. There just doesn't seem to be any time to do those things.

Well, we do have the whole wellness program in [North 2] ISD. Every employee is—we get a discount on our health insurance premiums if we do the wellness stuff. We get our blood drawn so they keep track of how well we're doing. Then they have seminars and all that stuff. They have a lot of stuff. What they don't realize is that all that stuff kind of adds stress to your day if you're trying to fit all that in. Oh, I need to go downtown to do my little diabetes seminar, you know, that kind of thing. Then they come to campus to draw our blood and stuff. You're like oh, I got to get—I've got to make time in my day to go down there and get my blood drawn, anyway.

Donna also attends "counselor conference every year." But she says this adds stress when they want her to advocate for the new "guidance model." She doesn't want to as she enjoys doing many of the things that the new model says she is not supposed to do. She expresses issues with

leaving campus stating that there “always has to be a counselor on campus” and that this prohibits the counselors from attending the yearly conferences. Even if the director is paying, they cannot all attend.

Elizabeth also is discontented about the inability of the counselors to attend the yearly conference.

There always has to be a counselor on campus, so we couldn't even go to the statewide counselor...conference. We could not all go. And then next year our administrator offered to pay for it, but only two of us could go....

Jo, a DGC, recognizes that she needs to offer professional development in the area of self-care. It's been a few years since they had that topic and she thought it was helpful because it allows counselors to realize that they need to care for themselves.

We had a lesson on it probably two or three years ago; it was really good. And at the time I didn't know I was burned out. I was like, “Oh, that's me.” And so I have been thinking about that lately, that we do need to do another lesson in it next year about burn out and how you know the signs because we help people. We're helpers, and we tend to help others, not ourselves. And so to be able recognize those signs in yourself of, “Hey, I need to stop and help myself now.” So we got to teach them to help themselves too.

This sentiment was reflected in what Cathy, a DGC, said about MSCs as well. She recognizes that they need to get away and attend conference.

So I try to make sure that they go to something, some kind of conference during the school year... I try to pay for registration for them just to get them off campus and then give them some training and help them network with other people and just get away. Feel like a real person. You know?

Cathy also offers one-on-one training in the way of role playing to help her counselors advocate for themselves. She recognizes that counselors do not always practice self-care.

So I try to help them talk to their principals. We do—sometimes, we do some role-play so that they can learn to advocate for themselves. Because counselors, as you know, tend to do whatever we're told to do, whenever we're told to do it. We don't know how to say no. We'll hurt somebody's feelings...

Other stress management resources. In Mistie's district, East 2 ISD, there are some programs and resources available for counselors who are experiencing stress and burnout. She states that they have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). But she states that they only give one session now and she doesn't think that's enough to help. She admits that she doesn't utilize it. Mistie also recalls some resources offered at the end of the year. Talking about these, she begins to look forward to the programs.

At the end of the year, the critical lady in charge of critical incidence has a debriefing, and it's really a cool thing that it's not through the school—or we have an outside agency come in.... I think it was last year yeah—that it was really cool that they brought in an art therapy place, and we had that and we had a chair massage and we did yoga. And that was just a really relaxing day. And not many of us partook in it. But the ones when we did it, we were like, “Oh man all this stuff this was ...” you know. And it set your tone for the summer, and that was really neat. So I think they're going to do that again this year.

As Mistie talked about it, she seemed to be looking forward to it.

Porsche also talked about an EAP. She even said that she had contacted them recently and was planning to utilize their services.

We have an employee assistance program. We do have that, and we refer teachers out to it. I do have to say, I did call a couple weeks ago and have not heard back from the person [laughter]. I'm going to try again, but I do know some others that have gone through them and felt supported. That way at least, that's available for that, but... hmmm... other than that..., I can't think of anything.

Kianna did not think that there were any resources for stress management in her district of West 2 ISD. "We use each other a lot, but no, we don't have any official—we don't have someone to go to if we need help or any kind of wellness program or anything like that."

Nicole who is from West 2 ISD also reiterates what was stated by Kianna. "I'm trying to think of any stress management resources that have been made available to us and honestly, I mean, we don't really have any resources available to us in this district."

Bambi is from the same district as Porsche; however, she is unaware of the EAP program that Porsche discusses. When asked about resources to help with stress management she did not believe that there were any in the district. "Well, I don't know if there—I don't know if we really have stress management resources in the district. I think it's—you're kind of on your own."

Rapha also did not feel that there were any stress management resources in her district.

There aren't any. I mean, there's—I've just—I don't think there are any. We have a wonderful family specialist on our campus and she has done like, she's had a YMCA instructor come and do a Zumba after class and a couple of teachers have gotten together and they're doing like a walking video after school.

Elizabeth who is from the same district as Rapha replies in a similar manner. "I don't. I don't use them at all. I don't know if there are any. Oh, there's a workout facility at the district, which is far from my campus, but there's nothing else."

Jo, a DGC, indicates that her counselors do have access to an EAP.

Well, the whole district has six sessions, centers, for children and families if you need counseling sessions. Other than that we just encourage them to take care of themselves.

They are pretty good at letting me know if things are too much.

Dana, a DGC, is aware that sometimes counselors need counseling themselves. When they are exhibiting signs of stress she helps them get counseling through the human resources department.

That's where we would work directly with the person, directly with employee benefits in our human resources department, make referrals to the employee assistance program where counseling for employees is confidential and free.

Summary. The second broad research question in this study concerned organizational factors and how they help to alleviate stress in the MSC. Four main significant formulated statements or subthemes were generated, but the main overarching result of this broad question resulted in the theme that *Organizational Resources and Support Can Reduce Stress* in the MSC. This theme was noted in all MSCs to some extent. However, it is noted that there were often organizational barriers to the MSCs accessing these resources.

All MSCs felt that having strict processes and procedures for critical incidents help to alleviate the “stressful nature of the process.” However, there were a couple of exceptions to this. Elizabeth noted that having a lot of steps to follow seemed to damage the “confidential” relationship she had with her students. She went on to say that she felt she had to “jump through hoops” and this added to the stress rather than alleviated it. And Allie felt that even though it was great to have to the procedures, available, it was often stressful trying to find the forms on the website in the middle of the dilemma. Allie said,

Part of the stress with that is that there are a lot of forms on the website and knowing exactly where to go and what do you do with this once you've got it, once you've filled it out, what do you do with it?

But the overwhelming majority of MSCs appreciated having processes and procedures for critical events. Mistie stated that it “takes out the guessing factor,” and Bambi said, “It’s a beautiful thing.”

Those with less burnout tended to have positive relationships with their administrators, while those with more burnout tended to have negative relationships. Allie and Kianna who are both relatively new counselors showed only mild burnout, and both acknowledged having “amazing” administrative support. But many of the MSCs had a positive administrative support from at least one of the stakeholders that they dealt with. If it wasn’t the principal, then it was the DGC. Sometimes it was simply an assistant principal. Donna said it best.

Then we also have a fantastic administrative team here. That’s one of the reasons why I love being at this school so much. It’s not just— we’re not isolated. I mean we have a good relationship with the people in the office—with the principals. That makes things—that alleviates a lot of stress. I can’t even imagine what it’s like—well, yes, I can. I’ve had jobs where I haven’t really bonded well with the principals. That kind of made coming to work not as enjoyable.

Many of the MSCs reported not having time to attend professional development provided by the district. Those who did attend found it somewhat stressful to practice some of the wellness activities suggested because they felt guilty spending the time and not being available to students. This was one of the prevailing themes regarding professional development. Allie reflects this in her statement when she says the “district as a whole is promoting wellness, but I

don't know that I see that being modeled.” Many of the counselors were not allowed to be off campus at the same time so they could not all attend conferences. Elizabeth talked about this problem. “There always has to be a counselor on campus, so we couldn't even go to the statewide counselor...conference.” But according to the DGCs in the neighboring districts, they were aware of the need and offered professional development related to wellness on a regular basis. They set up wellness professional development and offered to pay for counselors to attend conferences. Cathy noted the importance of the counselors going to conference “yearly” and having the chance to “get away.” Jo discussed the importance of providing training on “self-care.” All in all, some professional development was provided in the area of stress management, but it was not always available to everyone.

Most DGCs made it a point to provide professional development for the counselors pertinent to their level and duties. Often the DGCs stated that they got feedback from the counselors as to their needs and structured professional development around these needs. Gloria explains the process,

At the end of every year, we have the end of the year meetings with elementary, [middle] and high school, and they're separate meetings. And always as part of that meeting, we talk about, “Okay, think about over the year in what you've dealt with, and what are the needs for training?”

Gloria sends her counselors to conference yearly and pays for “chair massages” at the end of the year.

Other stress management resources mentioned by both MSCs and DGCs were access to counseling through an EAP. Most counselors were unaware of these programs. But a handful of counselors had either utilized these services or were considering it. Many of the DGCs talked

about how their districts served counselors through various EAPs or similar programs when they were in need. Dana and Jo's MSCs all had access to these programs. Cathy had agreements set up with outside agencies to help her counselors in need.

Organizational factors that were available to counselors such as structure, administrative support, professional development and EAPs were beneficial; however, when counselors were unable to access these resources, this fact often added to the stressors.

Personal Contributions to Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention: Emerging Themes

Research Question 3. How do DGC and MSC describe their personal contributions to MSC stress management and burnout prevention?

Several themes regarding the DGCs and the MSCs contributions to stress reduction and burnout prevention emerged from the stories of both the DGCs and MSCs during interviews, focus groups and through journals and professional development lists. The following non-overlapping formulated statements were discovered. From these formulated statements, the theme *Dual Responsibility for MSC Stress Reduction* emerged. Formulated statements were formulated into two subthemes: *MSC Personal Coping Strategies* and *DGC Advocacy, Training Support and Resources*. These are depicted in the following table.

Table 7

Emerging Themes from Research Question Three

Themes

Formulated Statements

Theme 4 Dual Responsibility for MSC Stress Reduction

1. MSC Personal Coping Strategies
 2. DGC Advocacy, Training, Support & Resources
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Theme Four: Dual Responsibility for MSC Stress Reduction

MSCs all recognized that they had a personal responsibility when it comes to managing their stress in order to prevent burnout. When asked about how they coped with their stress the majority of the MSCs stated that self-care and humor were keys to stress management. Others described relationships and support from home. Several types of self-care were described including winding down, leaving it at work, venting, debriefing, nutrition and exercise, and boundaries.

DGCs described their contribution to MSC stress reduction and burnout prevention. Not only were they all advocates, but they all provided consultation. All provided resources and professional development to help MSCs cope with their stress and potential burnout. Both MSCs and DGCs expressed responsibility for preventing stress and burnout in the MSC.

MSC personal coping strategies. Allie describes her coping strategies as “setting boundaries.” She also tries to prioritize. Allie does experience some guilt when she tells others that she will get to something as soon as possible, however.

“I will put this on my list, and I’ll get to it as soon as possible.” That’s hard because that’s not what they want to hear. They want you to take care of it immediately. And

sometimes we have multiple crises going on at once, but you have to set priorities or else you kind of fall on everything so ... having a partner in here helps a lot because we're able to bounce ideas off each other and just debrief.

In addition to these coping strategies, she practices self-care. She exercises by walking, she plays soft music, and keeps the lights dim in her office. But she admits that it is difficult for her to get away and go for a walk because she feels she should not do it. "I wouldn't be in my office, and a lot of that is me putting pressure on myself." Guilt keeps Allie from even eating lunch sometimes!

Yeah. I know that we even feel guilty taking a lunch sometimes. And nobody makes us feel that way. Nobody says you can't have a lunch, but it's just part of that. You feel a little selfish taking time out to take a break.

Donna describes her coping mechanisms as "trying to work on how to make things better." She often reflects on her mistakes and tries to learn from them. However, she does admit that as she gets older, she just tells herself that she did the best that she could.

Well, I'll tell you the older I've gotten, the easier it is for me to say I did my best, and that's as good as I did. I mean whatever the job I did was just what it has to be.

Kianna describes how she copes with stress. She finally has learned to "leave it at school." She "winds down" with her family. She says, "I have to practice some of that self-care, or I'm going to be in complete burnout." Kianna also participates in "venting and debriefing" with her co-counselor.

Nicole describes her coping mechanisms as self-care and a "strong support system at home." She says, "I also try to exercise, try to eat well, try to get enough rest and I mean, just

taking care of myself physically is a big factor in trying to cope with ...the stresses that come each day.”

Mistie has several self-care strategies that she utilizes to cope with stress. She uses humor, venting with friends and her director, reading during a quiet lunch away from students and staff, and going into the art room to talk to students and look at art. She also “listen[s] to music on the way home to kind of debrief.” And although she doesn’t take her work home, she finds that she still takes the stress home. “I know mentally and emotionally, I take it home. I take it home a lot.” She also makes a point to stay away from school related drama by staying off of Facebook.

Bambi’s self-care strategies are humor and debriefing.

I... use humor. That’s my coping mechanism. And so, I’m a big jokester, and I like to laugh and make other people laugh. And so, that’s the main thing that I do to cope.... something that alleviates stress for me is that we’re paired up with our administrator. And so, he and I work really well together. And so that helps me to be able to go and bounce things off. So he and I do a lot of bouncing things back and forth.

But Bambi realizes that she is not good with boundaries. She strongly feels that in order to be a successful MSC, one has to be able to set boundaries.

Yeah, just [sigh] just that in order—I don’t know, in my opinion, in order to do this job well, you’ve got to have balance and boundaries, and I’m not very good with that. Like, I don’t—I’m not good about going, “Okay, I’m not going to answer any more of these emails. I’m not going to check the phone before I leave.” And, because that impacts your outside life and there’s got to be a balance... or you’re not effective anywhere, at home or at work.

Porsche utilizes both support systems at home and work. She debriefs and vents with her coworkers. This helps to relieve stress. Porsche compares her setting at the middle school with the one at elementary. At the elementary school she was the only counselor. “And at least here, there are three of us, and we can shut the door and it’s like, ‘OH MY GOSH!’” (laughter).

Elizabeth admits that she doesn’t handle stress very well. But she does what she can to cope. She tries to leave the work at school and she uses humor daily. But somehow, she still is having health issues and has gained weight. She shows me her heart monitor and states that the job has caused her to have arrhythmias. Elizabeth also states that she has gained a lot of weight due to the stress.

I don’t cope very well. Like we discussed, I’m having heart issues. I’ll tell you what. I don’t take it home. I tell myself, “I’m leaving it there.” I don’t talk about it at home. I really—my little girl is too young to hear it. I laugh a lot in the office. I cut up with the kids when I see them, just random things I’ll talk to them about, and it makes the environment fun, carefree... I’ve gained a lot of weight... because I’m a stress eater.

Rapha uses her private practice to de-stress. Feeling unable to utilize her skills in the middle school setting creates a lot of stress for her. But using those skills after hours and on the weekends helps. She also has gained weight and has health issues that she attributes to the constant stress of her job. She is borderline diabetic and slightly overweight. Rapha is working to turn that around with a proper diet and exercise. “And the burnout is bad and unless we’re exercising, eating right, taking our vitamins, boosting that B12, it can really, really affect our health, and I think it has affected my health.”

Like some of the other MSCs, Rapha utilizes humor to get through her stressful days.

But I'll tell you what my stress reliever is, laugh. You've got to laugh at some of the silly stuff that happens on the campus...You can't take stuff so personal and seriously... because I'm sitting here like "This is ridiculous!" I'm just going to laugh it off and just use humor to get through it because you will go insane if you will just absorb all that negative stuff and take it personal. And then you start feeling bad about yourself and you end up in depression and all that.

DGC advocacy, training, support and resources. Tammie, a DGC, listens to her MSCs, keeping the communication lines open. She tries to keep them informed of upcoming changes. Tammie mentors her new counselors for the first two years.

By providing support from the top at the administrative level, and then allowing the counselors to have a voice in areas of concern has helped tremendously with my counselors. Also, I developed a new counselor support that is ongoing the first [two] years a counselors begins. We meet regularly with each other and individually. She also meets with her counselors as groups "to ensure that all counselors feel a part of the process." When asked about her responsibility in MSC stress management, Tammie expressed sincere concern for her MSCs.

I feel extremely responsible for stress management and burnout prevention. I believe that to some extent that is my number one job. If my counselors are stressed they are not able to perform at their best and students suffer. So I try to come up with ways to help prevent that.

Gloria, a DGC, also advocates for her MSCs in the area of stress reduction and burnout prevention. Although she realizes that principals are in control and she has little power to change certain things, she still feels profoundly responsible.

I direct the program as a whole for the district. I see that they have what they need. I provide materials, I provide resources, I do events, but to make a difference of how it looks on their campus, the director has no power to do that; the principal is in charge....

As a director I have to acknowledge the problem and offer support where I can. I have to be willing to fight battles for them with administration. They have to know I have their back.

Jo, a DGC, also feels that she has limited power when it comes to her MSCs; however, she is a strong advocate and is available for the counselors, genuinely listening to their problems and concerns. She seriously wants to make a difference.

And just being supportive, being an ear to let them know that yeah, I understand that and let's see what we can do. I can't fix everything, and they know that, but at least understand that I'm trying to do some things. And then if we can start toward that, they feel a little encouraged.... They know the decisions are really made by people in higher positions, but they trust me to address those issues with supervisors.

Cathy, a DGC, expresses concern about stressed out counselors. She feels deeply that counselors need to be taught strategies in self-care.

We don't teach counselors how to take care of themselves. We teach them how to take care of other people, but we don't teach them those techniques of how to feel okay about taking care of themselves and putting themselves number one... but I think that you could do some first aid training for them, survival first aid for themselves on how to get their job done, some strategies that they could live with.

Dana, a DGC, also feels a strong responsibility when it comes to providing counselors with necessary resources to reduce stress and help to prevent burnout. She sees that they have

materials accessible to them during the year so that they don't have to waste time and energy looking for those resources. She is also available to them for consultation if they have questions or concerns. She feels strongly that others need to be educated about the role of the counselor, and she is an advocate for keeping counselors doing what they were hired and trained to do—guidance and counseling. Dana says,

I feel strongly that they have a right to have in their hand already compiled all the laws, all the regulations, all the resources.... We all care deeply about counselors remaining in the profession and believing that they stand a fighting chance to do the work they are passionate about! We all agree that others need to be educated about the appropriate role of the counselor and to respect that role. ...burnout is on a continuum. We work hard to prevent it, both through wellness activities and opportunities and (more importantly) by keeping non-guidance tasks off the counselor's plate!!

Summary. When asked about their personal responsibility in their stress management the MSCs talked about their coping strategies. Many used humor and venting or debriefing with a colleague. Others tried to prioritize and set boundaries. A few mentioned nutrition and exercise while others talked about separating, compartmentalizing or leaving the work at work. Many talked about the support they received at home or from colleagues or their DGCs. During the interviews and focus groups some seemed to realize that there were resources available that they could be using, but few had taken the time to do so. Some would listen to music, read or step away from their office for a few minutes. The coping strategies were varied, but most mentioned the use of humor, venting, self-care and the need to set boundaries. Most of the MSCs put their needs on the back burner because they are too busy taking care of their students and responsibilities.

DGCs were well aware of their responsibility when it came to stress management. All felt a great responsibility for caring for their counselors. They all mentioned how they were available pretty much all the time for the counselors to contact them and consult. They talked about resource materials and training that they provided. And they talked about advocating for the counselors and just communicating, listening. Jo, a DGC, summed it up pretty well.

We have to listen to the counselors and address their concerns to the best of our abilities.

I have been told repeatedly by our counselors how important it is that I listen. They know the decisions are really made by people in higher positions but they trust me to address those issues with supervisors.

Cathy, a DGC, is well aware that counselors often don't take care of themselves.

We don't teach counselors how to take care of themselves. We teach them how to take care of other people, but we don't teach them those techniques of how to feel okay about taking care of themselves and putting themselves number one.

Personal Descriptions of Burnout

Research Question Four. How do MSC describe their experiences related to burnout?

Data derived during the study revealed three sub themes which included: *Feeling*

Anger/Guilt/Frustration, Experiencing Illness/Exhaustion and Giving up/ Hope for Future.

These subthemes were clustered into Theme Five: *Emotional, Physical and Mental Effects of Burnout*. All of the MSCs stories about their experiences with burnout contained one or all of these effects. Table 8 depicts this theme and subthemes.

Table 8

Formulated Statements and Emerging Themes from Research Question Four

Themes

Formulated Statements

Theme 5. Emotional, Physical and Mental Effects of Burnout.

1. Feeling anger/guilt/frustration.
 2. Experiencing illness/exhaustion.
 3. Giving up/ hope for future.
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Theme Five: Emotional, Physical and Mental Effects of Burnout

One major component of this theme was simply that the MSCs did not know how much longer they could continue in their jobs. There was so much discouragement and exhaustion. MSCs seemed genuinely disillusioned. Many mentioned retirement. Several mentioned changing levels of counseling or campuses. Others mentioned not caring as much, and some had just accepted that this was the way it is, and it wasn't going to change. Most were burdened by the overwhelming responsibilities and endless tasks of which they were responsible for completing. Two of the newer counselors seemed worried that they would get more burned out if they did not take better care of themselves; they had already experienced some of the signs of mild burnout. Some expressed guilt; others expressed anger. Many felt misunderstood. Some blamed themselves; others blamed administration. Several were experiencing physical effects such as illness and weight gain. Many were feeling hopeless, powerless to change the situation. Some admitted that this was not what they signed up for when they went to school to be a counselor. The following themes emerged as the data was analyzed relating to this broad question.

Feeling anger, guilt and frustration. Allie, Donna, Mistie, Elizabeth, Kianna, and Bambi all expressed some feelings of guilt connected with overwhelming duties and competing priorities when asked to describe their experiences with burnout. Allie felt guilty about trying to set boundaries and when attempting to manage her own self-care. Donna felt guilty because she did not enjoy the advisory responsibilities because this was one of her school's "trademarks." However, she felt that this advisory not only competed with her time with students, but that it was just something she did not enjoy doing. Mistie felt angry at herself because she was so burned out this year. She never expected it to happen. Elizabeth felt guilty because she did not feel as interested in her students. Bambi felt guilty because she was unable to be with her own children as much as she felt she should be. Kianna felt guilty because she occasionally felt slightly annoyed by her frequent fliers, kids who came in over and over again with the same problems. When saddled with so many tasks and competing priorities, they all felt the burden.

Both Donna , Kianna and Elizabeth worried about feeling slightly disconnected from their students, and Rapha felt anger because she was blamed for things she did not do, and she had no control over any of it.

Allie discusses the stress of constant interruptions and the responsibility of not making mistakes. Although she understands on one level that she needs to set boundaries by prioritizing tasks, she finds this difficult to do because it makes her feel guilty.

Being interrupted is really hard when you're working on something and you want to drop everything that you're doing and meet with a student because that's what we're here for, but at the same time if there's something you're doing, like testing stuff or counting test booklets or doing things like that then we have—there's a huge amount of room for error if we do drop what we're doing. So, yeah, just forgetting stuff, because we're constantly

interrupted... and then feeling guilty when you do set boundaries; so it's just constant, constant.

Allie says she “even feel[s] guilty when taking a lunch sometimes.” However, she admits to placing that guilt upon herself. “Nobody says you can't have a lunch, but it's just part of that. You feel a little selfish taking time out to take a break.” And even though her district has advised them to practice self-care to avoid burnout, Allie feels guilty doing so. “One of the suggestions would be to get up and take a walk, and sometimes I feel like I can't do that. I wouldn't be in my office, and a lot of that is me putting pressure on myself.”

Donna expresses guilt about not enjoying advisory. She considers herself a team player. “I mean it does take a village to run a school. We all kind of just chip in when we need to.” But she readily admits that she does not enjoy the advisory responsibilities. “We have an advisory here at school, and it's something that I don't particularly enjoy.” Because she wants to be a team player, it makes her feel guilty that she does not buy into her school's advisory program. She is often in the middle of talking to a student about an issue when she has to stop and meet with the advisory kids. She finds this very stressful. Donna feels some level of guilt about not doing a good job.

I don't do my kids the way our principal sees it being done. I mean I just, I don't know.

I don't think I do a very good job, and it bothers me. It bothers me that I don't like it.

It's just not something I enjoy doing.... That really kind of stresses me out on a daily basis to be honest with you.... But it does make me feel guilty, extremely guilty that I don't like it.

Mistie expresses guilt because she feels burned out.

I'm real disappointed, hurt, and angry at myself that I feel burned out.... And I feel like I do a really good job, and I love the kids, and I love what I do, and I always have. But there are so many obstacles.... Another stress, I have a hard time because I never see the kids with their name and their face together. You know that's stressful that I never slowed down enough to catch their name...

Mistie has been given many extra assignments because she helped out last year when the administrative staff was new. Last year she helped with master schedule. Now they just expect for her to continue to do these things. She finds that this is competing with her "get[ting] in the classrooms" and she is not sure how to handle the situation.

So like this year, we turned over the whole principal staff, and I was the only one that knew what was going on. And so I had to do a lot of the paperwork issues or the scheduling issues that weren't my job. And now that I find that spring is coming along, we're getting ready for next year, they're not seeing that the things that I did last year were an exception ... I'm not sure how to do that. I don't get in the classrooms. I find if I don't do my required stuff in the fall, I don't ever get it done unless I can do it in May. And by then, the kids are checked out.

Nicole talks about her competing priorities and overwhelming tasks and how she "cannot get everything done because everything just keeps getting more and more loaded down on the counselors." Nicole continued,

I'll have to say a lot gets put on the counselor's shoulder and it becomes very overwhelming sometimes because you can't always be available for a studentthat is one factor that stresses me when I'm not available for students, and I'm being pulled in too any different directions.... [MSCs] feel overwhelmed, under-appreciated, but also—I

don't know if this is the right word to use, but under-utilized, because we're supposed to be here for the students, not doing paperwork and filing and things...that we need to be available for students, and that's the biggest frustration...

Elizabeth struggles with the fact that she is doing so much paperwork that she does not have time to see kids. And she is beginning to feel disconnected from the students. This bothers her and appears to be causing her some guilt.

When I do see a child, I sometimes rush them out of my office so that I can complete my other task, which I know I have to complete, and that's not fair.... This year I know less of the sixth and seventh graders than I've ever known. I know the eighth graders because when I first got there, I had the opportunity to do a visit with them, but now I don't know any of them and that's hard.... I don't enjoy the children as much as I should anymore.

Rapha also feels that she is not being utilized and that she is not seeing students. She talks about this in the focus group..." feeling ... can't see kids because I have deadlines to meet." In her interview Rapha describes how it feels to not be utilized.

So the stress of not doing the counseling job and having to take up all of the administrative stuff weighs on us because we would rather be counseling kids and working groups and maybe going into the classroom, which none of that is happening.

Kianna is only experiencing very mild burnout; however, she admits that it could be a problem if she does not exercise self-care. One of the things that stresses her out is her frequent flier students. She sometimes doesn't want to deal with these students, and it causes Kinna some guilt.

The one thing that I have to be careful about... is when I have those students who are constantly in the office, constantly have drama or things going on with their friends,

constantly have stuff going on in their classrooms. I find it very exhausting, and I have to be very careful not to let that get the best of me... That is very tough for me.... But, there are situations where you see the kid coming down the office and you just—you have to just take a deep breath and realize that they're just children and help them through it, but they can be exhausting. They really can. So, that's the only thing that I really—I have to watch out for....

Kianna says that she has to practice not being callous when they come in again and again for the same thing because

Unfortunately, they see a lot of that at home and in their classrooms. So I try to always be the positive and be the joy or whatever you want to call it, whenever they come in; I have to try. I have to work really hard on that.

Bambi is feeling guilty about all the time she is spending at work because she is unable to spend time with her sons. Because they only have three counselors in her large school and because they have no additional counseling staff, she is working 12 hours a day on most days completing all of the tasks assigned and seeing all of the students.

I'd like it to be a little more balanced between my family and my work and it's not right now.... I feel bad. I came here, and I've loved being here with my sons. That's been fantastic. And so much more fun than any of the three of us thought it was going to be. But... you know, just feeling like I'm not there for them in the evenings where I have been able to do that in the past.

Bambi recognizes that she needs to have boundaries, but she feels she is unable to do so. Her competing priorities seem to be her students at school and her family at home.

Yeah, just [sigh] just that in order—I don't know, in my opinion, in order to do this job well, you've got to have balance and boundaries and I'm not very good with that. Like, I don't—I'm not good about going, "Okay, I'm not going to answer any more of these emails. I'm not going to check the phone before I leave." And, because that impacts your outside life and there's got to be a balance... or you're not effective anywhere, at home or at work.

When asked to describe her burnout, Rapha expressed "feeling angry for being blamed [for] some things [she] did not do or had no control over." She talks often about all of the overwhelming tasks and responsibilities assigned to the MSC.

And so, we end up getting more and nothing gets taken off of our plate. And so, that's very frustrating. And then also, when you have administrators that you are in the middle of something and they bring students into your office and not asking if this is a good time or can you call the student out later, no, they just bring them into your office and you've got to drop what you're doing and take care of that student. And that is stressful too, because if we're in the middle of something that we have a deadline, that totally messes up our deadline. So that's stressful.

Porsche also describes her frustrations with having too much to do and how it affects her.

Yeah, so you put all that in and there's just some natural stress but when you put all the other stuff in with it, it just makes it become overwhelming. And I think that's the feeling that all of us have. It's this, "I don't even know what to do because I'm just done. I'm overwhelmed."

I think it has to do with more, at least personally, how we're valued and treated and included and- at least to me that causes me much more stress than just purely [the

work]. It would be nice if we didn't have to do testing and we didn't have to do 504 and there are schools too that- my friend, no 504, no ARD meetings, none of the meetings that I have to go to. She sees kids . She helps with testing and helps, that's it. And sees kids and that's in the same district. You've got this wide range of what administration-[has counselors do].

Cathy, a DGC, also acknowledged that MSCs feel that they need to do all things for all people regardless of their own needs. She discusses how they need help dealing with the competing priorities, but admits that often the principal is in control and they just need to learn to balance all of the responsibilities.

Counselors, as you know, tend to do whatever we're told to do, whenever we're told to do it....We don't know how to say "no." We'll hurt somebody's feelings. We have some really good counselors that have overdone that, and they feel putout, put-upon and they feel manipulated. So I think we mainly have those conversations. "So how do you say no? When [do] you back off? When do you prioritize what you need to do?" And I try to help them [to] do that. Unfortunately, to some principals everything is a priority, so they have to learn how to balance that and make that work for them. It's a hard job. I don't know why anybody does it.

Dana also discussed the perils of "competing priorities." She finds this to be the most stressful thing for MSCs.

The state-mandated assessment is something that must be implemented with perfection. There can be zero errors and at the same time when they are so absorbed in all that goes with the state-mandated assessment, there are still parents walking through the door and students walking through the door that need their immediate attention. When the

competing agendas from every angle are all so urgent that nothing can be put to the side, you can't really triage because everything has high, high, high impact. It puts a human being, a professional in a very, very tough situation.

Experiencing exhaustion/illness. Many of the participants in the study mentioned exhaustion and emotional and physical health issues when asked to describe their burnout. This was one of the major emerging subthemes.

Mistie talks about her exhaustion and her inability to change her circumstances. It has taken a toll on her mentally. Mistie is forgetting things and having bad dreams about school.

I've been helping people 30 years and I'm tired; I'm real tired.... I'm not recharging. I'm not recharging.... [I'm] losing things like my driver's license, my keys, where I put my phone, I'm always losing my phone.... I find that when I'm stressed out that at night I have dreams about school. When I'm stressed, I seemed to have the same kinds of dreams. I'm running late, speeding.

Rapha discusses her burnout and the effects it has had on her health.

And the burnout is bad and unless we're exercising, eating right, taking our vitamins, boosting that B12, it can really, really affect our health. And I think it has affected my health because I just had blood work done and I'm borderline diabetic.... I really do feel that the stress of the job has taken a toll in my health.

The stress of the job has also taken a toll on Rapha both physically and mentally. She describes this in detail.

So I was on antidepressants for a little while, but these past, I would say three to four years, I had to go back on them because of the job. Because I would be coming home

crying, shaking, stressed out, just very anxious... I've been on [antidepressants] for a while now... the burnout has really messed up my health.

Elizabeth also describes her burnout as taking a toll on her physical and mental health.

Well, I'm having arrhythmias. I've gained a lot of weight and I—because I'm a stress eater. I'm not as happy as a person. I don't—what's the word? I don't enjoy the children as much as I should anymore.... So it's had physical effects on me, mental ... definitely, emotional, sometimes I cry to myself inside my heart...

Kianna, talks about her experiences with burnout and what she finds exhausting.

When I have those students who are constantly in the office, constantly have drama or things going on with their friends, constantly have stuff going on in their classrooms, I find it very exhausting, and I have to be very careful not to let that get the best of me.

Porsche briefly describes her issues with burnout and how she has attempted to seek help from the Employee Assistance Program in her district.

We have an employee assistance program. We do have that, and we refer teachers out to it. I do have to say, I did call a couple weeks ago and have not heard back from the person [nervous laughter]. I'm going to try again...

Bambi discusses her exhaustion, "I feel like I'm giving—expending all of my emotional and physical energy during the day and there's not much left for my family." She states that she is tired and not getting enough sleep.

Giving up/Hope for future. One of the most prevailing emerging themes found during the MSCs' discussion of burnout was that they were done. Not only were they exhausted and overwhelmed, but for many of the MSCs, the burnout was severe enough that they were questioning if they were in the right position, if they should leave, whether they should retire,

change campuses. Sadly most of the MSCs did not see an immediate way out of their situation. Interestingly, though after they had time for reflection, either via the face to face interviews or during the focus groups, many of them felt more hopeful, realizing that they needed more self-care or that simply each summer, they had time to refresh and start the new year over. Donna wondered if perhaps she was in the right profession because she enjoys a lot of the administrative work. She really doesn't want to be solely a "complaint department." She enjoys the administrative tasks such as master schedule because she says that feeds her "creative side." She says that if she had to strictly do counseling as she is sometimes told at her conferences, she would not be happy and would probably look elsewhere.

The counselors most affected by the burnout appeared to be Mistie, Porsche, Elizabeth, Rapha, Nicole and Bambi. They all expressed a need for a change. And they all readily admitted to being burned out.

During the face to face interview, Mistie expressed strongly that she needs to look for other jobs. After doing this for 30 years, she wants someone to "pick [her] up." She is tired of "picking up other people's messes." But, she also knows that she wants a job with "significance." She says that she is so tired when she gets home that she "can't face doing that." It's as though she is stuck in a rut and unable to move forward, paralyzed by the burnout. Mistie says that she finds herself "gripping" a lot, telling her friends about the situation and that she simply is not "recharging." She readily admits that she is disappointed that she is burned out. "And I'm real disappointed, hurt, and angry at myself that I feel burned out." She also doesn't feel valued.

Mistie does seem to have some hope for the future; however. During the focus group she made several statements that alluded to this. She said, "I guess I tend to forget from year to year

how overwhelming it is...” And she compared the year to vacation and riding in the car. “I always think it is similar to vacation when I was a kid, we have all just been riding in a car too long.” Therefore, it looks as though she has hope for the new school year even though she stated several times during the face to face interview that she was tired and needed to find another job.

Similar to Mistie, Porsche also stated several times during her face to face interview that she was burned out and that she needed to leave. When asked about her experiences with burnout, she says this job has been the “most difficult one.” And she has worked in many different counseling positions over the years in different settings. In her words she states that this stress makes her feel like “I’m just done.” She strongly feels that she has to find a less stressful job. “I just have to find something that’s just less stressful.” Porsche has thought a lot about leaving, about different placements, but she really doesn’t know what to do.

But, there are other counselors too that are in worse situations than I am so there’s—I think it could be worse. But I am checking very carefully to make sure I’m not going out of the frying pan into the fire, moving somewhere else. It’s time and yeah...but I don’t think it’s middle school necessarily per se, I think it has to do with more, at least personally, how we’re valued and treated and included. And at least to me that causes me much more stress than just purely middle school students.

Bambi is also burned out. She readily admits that when asked to describe her personal experiences concerning burnout.

My own personal experience is... [slight laugh]... I am *completely* burned out after this year. I have not worked this hard in the 16 years since I was here before. So, gosh, yeah, I’m just—I was shocked. I thought this would be so much more—I thought it’d be fun to be attached to one campus and it is fun to some degree. I never dreamed that it would

be—I mean I work—I’m here pretty much 12 hours a day. And that’s way more than I bargained for. But, we just—again, we have some really high needs here even though we’re a high socioeconomic school. We have some high needs because we don’t have a lot of that foundational support.

Most of Bambi’s stress comes from the sheer volume of need on the campus. She has a large caseload and no supporting staff such as specialized counselors on her campus. Because she has spent most of her waking hours at school, she has not been able to give her own family the time that they deserve, and she is not happy about that. She admits that her boundaries are not good as she has a hard time saying “no” and leaving work unless everything is done. “You’ve got to have balance and boundaries, and I’m not very good with that.” But it sounds as though she is hopeful for next year as she discusses that they are getting a therapist on their campus next year who will take “30 of their most challenging cases.” She hopes that this will help.

Nicole also talks about leaving her position. She says that her friend is experiencing burnout and is “considering leaving the profession and that [this] has even occurred to [her], as well.” She also talks about possibly teaching again.

Nicole is so “burned out.” She admits that “it’s definitely a problem” and is “very rampant among MSCs.” She goes on to say that “being a MSC is extremely difficult.” She feels that administrators should have experience as counselors before they are able to supervise counselors. She thinks that would “help immensely” because they would then “see the whole picture.”

Like the other burned out counselors, Elizabeth cannot see how she can possibly continue in this profession. She is totally burned out, suffering from health issues and totally disillusioned. She says she “cries to [herself] inside [her] heart.” And she has to ask herself,

“How on earth can I do this 20 years longer?” She feels like she is at a “dead-end because [she’s] lost [her] purpose.”

Rapha, also is burned out. She wants to change jobs and is waiting for retirement. She has applied for different positions within the district, but has not had any luck.

The burnout has really messed up my health and to the point ... where I don’t want to do this anymore. I don’t want to do this anymore. I mean, I’m just waiting three more years so I can get my retirement.... The morale and the cohesiveness on the campus is not good. And so, who wants to go to a job like that?

She continues to apply for different positions, dreading next year when she will have to do testing. She looks forward to three more years when she can retire and just work in her “private practice.”

Summary. All nine of the MSC expressed some form of anger, guilt, or frustration when describing their experiences with burnout. Allie felt guilty because she needed to prioritize and set boundaries. Donna was frustrated with advisory and herself for feeling that way. She unsuccessfully kept trying to find a better system of keeping up with all the tasks and responsibilities thrown at her daily with sticky notes and by asking those who stopped her in the hall for things to send her an email so she wouldn’t forget. She felt guilty about setting those boundaries. Kianna felt frustrated with her frequent fliers who were always in the office for the same thing. She felt guilty about that. Nicole, Elizabeth, Mistie Porsche, and Rapha were both frustrated and angry with the overwhelming tasks. And Bambi was frustrated with herself for not being able to set better boundaries.

Many of the counselors were suffering from physical effect such as exhaustion and illness. Bambi is noticeably exhausted and sleep deprived, yawning during her entire interview,

while apologizing. Rapha has gained weight and is fighting diabetes. Elizabeth is wearing a heart monitor, suffering from arrhythmias and has gained weight. Porsche misses days, but it doesn't help because she then gets further behind in her work. Mistie is so tired. She doesn't want to come to work. Neither does Rapha. Nicole is also tired.

Besides the mental, emotional and physical effects, many of the counselors are giving up. They state that they don't want to come back. They are thinking of changing professions, levels, campuses or simply retiring. Six of the nine counselors are at this stage of burnout. Two of the other three are newer counselors who have great administrative support. The other is an experienced counselor who states that she has accepted that this is the way that it is.

Interestingly most of the MSCs, including the most burned out, started to look to the future. Some thought about the new school year and thought maybe they were just tired. As Mistie says "I always think it is similar to vacation when I was a kid, we have all just been riding in a car too long." Others were looking forward to working with a new principal, hoping the added support would alleviate some of the stress. Elizabeth said that she hoped it would be better next year. "He knows what we have struggled with through the past years and he is there to help us. So that's one thing that I am thinking next year [that] will alleviate some stress." Some admitted that they needed to take better advantage of the resources being offered for wellness. Most seemed to indicate that they thought the next year might be better.

Summary of Emerging Themes

During the analysis of data, 15 significant formulated statements or subthemes were discovered. Each subtheme was thoroughly analyzed and from these subthemes the five overarching themes relating to the four broad research questions emerged. Table 9 depicts the

major formulated statements and themes that emerged from the data analysis, the Research Questions and contributions by MSCs and DGCs.

Table 9

Summary of Emerging Themes and Formulated Statements

Theme	RQ	FS	Formulated Statements	#/MSC	#/DGC
1. Unpredictable Routine, Work Overload, Excessive Tasks and Competing Priorities.	1	1	Unpredictable, Extremely Draining, Chaotic, Stressful Days!	9/9	3/5
		2	I Need To See Kids!	5/9	4/5
		3	We are the Dumping Ground!	9/9	5/5
2. Lack of Validation, Support and Power.	1	4	No One Knows What I Do!	9/9	4/5
		5	We Need Support/ Validation from Administration!	8/9	3/5
		6	I have no power! (The Principal is the Captain of the Ship!)	5/9	5/5
3. Organizational Factors and Support Can Reduce Stress.	2	7	Processes and Procedures.	9/9	5/5
		8	Administrative Support.	7/9	5/5
		9	Professional Development.	2/9	4/5
		10	Other Stress Management.		4/5
4. Dual Responsibility for Middle School Counselor Stress Reduction.	3	11	MSC Personal Coping Strategies.	9/9	
		12	DGC Advocacy, Training, Support & Resources.		5/5
5. Emotional, Mental, Physical Effects of Burnout.	4	13	Feeling Frustrated/Angry/Guilty!	9/9	5/5
		14	Experiencing Exhaustion/Illness!	6/9	5/5
		15	Giving up/ Hope for the Future.	6/9	4/5

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

It is documented in the literature that school counselors often experience stress while employed in the school settings (McCarthy, et al., 2010). Many different factors have been researched and found to cause this stress including large caseload of students, numerous responsibilities and job duties, crisis intervention, role ambiguity, not enough time, conflicts with others and poor working relationships with supervisors (Butler, 2005; Landrum et al., 2012; Lee, 2008; Moyer, 2011; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006; Willingham, 2009). Chao (2011) found that counselors who were supported were less stressed.

Wilkerson (2009) found that a person's approach to coping was a factor in predicting burnout. The review of the literature also suggested that a lack of counselor supervision and performing non-guidance activities was a stressor for school counselors (Moyer, 2011).

This study sought to gain a greater understanding of the factors and variables related to school counselor stress and burnout by listening to the voices of those experiencing the phenomenon. Nine MSC from urban school districts across five regions of Texas, along with five DGCs from neighboring districts were studied to gain a comprehensive understanding of factors relating to the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout. A discussion of the results of this study along with implications and recommendations for future research will be discussed in this chapter.

Summary of the Findings

The data which included face to face interviews, focus groups, MSC journals and DGCs' lists of professional development provided was gathered over a course of three months and was reduced and analyzed as discussed in Chapter Three. The data was further analyzed and reduced

with spreadsheets, and this process resulted in several subthemes or significant formulated statements which were then clustered into emerging themes based on each broad research question of the study. That reduction and analysis revealed five broad themes and 15 significant formulated statements or subthemes relating to the four broad research questions. The research question topics, the emerging themes and subthemes are as follows:

Causes of MSC Stress and Burnout: Emerging Themes from Research Question 1

1. Unpredictable Routine, Work Overload, Excessive Tasks, and Competing Priorities.
 - a. Unpredictable, extremely draining, chaotic, stressful days.
 - b. I need to see kids!
 - c. We are the dumping ground!
2. Lack of Validation, Support and Power.
 - a. No one knows what I do!
 - b. We need support from administration!
 - c. I have no power! (Principal is the captain of the ship.)

Organizational Factors and Resources: Emerging Themes from Research Question 2

3. Organizational Resources and Support Can Reduce Stress.
 - a. Processes and procedures.
 - b. Administrative support.
 - c. Professional development.
 - d. Other stress management resources.

Personal Contributions to Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention: Emerging Themes from Research Question 3

4. Dual Responsibility for MSC Stress Reduction.

- a. MSC personal coping strategies.
- b. DGC advocacy, training, support and resources.

Personal Descriptions of Burnout: Emerging Themes from Research Question 4

- 5. Emotional, mental, and physical effects of burnout.
 - a. Feeling anger, guilt and frustration.
 - b. Experiencing exhaustion/Physical and mental health issues.
 - c. Giving up/Hope for the future.

A rich textural description of each broad theme was written at the end of each section in Chapter Four. That textural description is based upon the experiences of the MSCs as described to the researcher during this study. Data obtained from the DGCs validate and enrich the MSCs stories. The following discussion, implications and recommendations for future research are based solely upon these findings.

Discussion and Implications in Light of the Relevant Literature and Theory

The first theme that emerged in this study in relation to what causes MSC stress and burnout was that the counselors were experiencing *Unpredictable Routine, Work Overload, Excessive Tasks and Competing Priorities*. This particular theme was prominent in all of the MSCs data. Every MSC mentioned this in the course of their interview. Not only were they asked to do their regular counseling duties, but they were also assigned a multitude of extra administrative duties, including coordinating 504 meetings, ARD meetings, state mandated testing, and LPAC meetings. In addition to that they were assigned the role of coordinating the registration and enrollment of incoming and outgoing students, extravagant end of the year awards ceremonies, data entry of all students' choice sheets, and master schedule design and input. In the midst of this, they were also supposed to continue with their regular duties of

advising students, meeting with parents, counseling students, conducting classroom guidance lessons and responding and following up on critical incidents such as suicide ideation and cutting on their campus. Finally, the MSCs were expected to perform all of these tasks and duties while constantly being interrupted.

The subtheme *Unpredictable, Extremely Draining, Chaotic, Stressful Days* was a stressor that was described in various ways by the MSCs. At the drop of a hat the day's agenda changed according to who walked through the door or what came up. Days were described as unpredictable, chaotic, draining, exhausting and stressful. This apparent lack of control over their day's agenda prevented the school counselor from having a routine in which they could plan and get the numerous and varied tasks assigned completed. This caused the counselors much stress. This is a finding that was not noted in any of the previous literature. Interestingly never knowing what to expect when one walked through the door and having to stop and start their tasks was mentioned by all of the counselors and several of the directors.

In addition to the unpredictable chaotic routines, all counselors mentioned some aspect of the theme *We are the Dumping Ground!* Laden down with paperwork, meetings, multiple tasks and responsibilities already, MSCs found it very stressful when more responsibilities were continually added to their already huge workload. Not having enough time to meet these obligations was a major contributor to their stress. Additionally, it was noted that many of the tasks assigned were detail oriented tasks, where no room was allowed for error. These tasks included state-mandated testing coordination, master-scheduling, and formal end of the year awards ceremonies. Alone, these tasks would be very stressful. However, when combined with the constant interruptions and unpredictable routine, the situation becomes very stressful. Having too much to do in the time allotted is mentioned as a factor in burnout (Maslach et al.,

2001); however, when the huge, often detail oriented workload is coupled with the unpredictable nature of their job, the constant pressure and inability to get things done in the time allotted is most definitely a contributing factor in their burnout. Not having enough time was mentioned many times. Many of these findings are consistent with the literature about school counselor stressors (Kolodinsky, 2009; McCarthy, et al., 2010); they are also consistent with the literature regarding burnout theories (Maslach et al., 2001). Having more work to do than time allowed is a major cause of exhaustion which leads to burnout (Maslach, 2003). However, this study reveals that it is more than just simple work overload, and more than not having enough time to complete tasks; instead it is these factors coupled with the unpredictable routine that creates the extreme exhaustion; this puts the MSC at a very high risk for burnout. This appears to be a new finding not noted in the previous literature.

The majority of the MSCs were also frustrated because they were not able to see students due to the work overload, excessive paperwork and competing priorities. The subtheme *I Need to See Kids!* was a major concern that kept surfacing throughout the interviews and focus groups. Trained to be counselors, these MSCs went into the profession to make a difference and help kids with their issues. MSCs were frustrated, angry, disillusioned and discontented, mentioning that all they did was paperwork, coordination and meetings. This is consistent with the findings of Kolodinsky, et al. (2009) who found that counselors were frustrated because an overabundance of non-counseling tasks kept them from seeing students. This conflict between what the counselor values and what the principal values is contributing to the stress of the counselor. This is one of the prominent factors associated with burnout (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009).

The second theme that emerged from the data concerning the Research Question One regarding the cause of MSC stress and burnout was the *Lack of Validation, Support and Power*. This theme had three subthemes: *No One Knows What I Do!*; *We Need Support from Administration*, and *I Have No Power (The Principal is the Captain of the Ship!)*. These subthemes had sufficient overlap to cluster them into one main theme.

All nine counselors in the study mentioned some variation of the theme. Some MSCs found that their principals did not know what they did. Others found that teachers did not understand what they do. Still others found that parents did not understand their role. Amazingly, some of the counselors could not really explain their own role. This seemed to cause them all a significant amount of stress, especially when their jobs were seen as easy or when people thought they did not have enough to do.

According to the DGCs, many principals do not understand what the MSC does; therefore, the principals, who have control over what the counselors do on their campuses due to site-based management, continue to add tasks and duties to the counselors. This lack of understanding, lack of validation, and lack of control coupled with the overwhelming job demands made on the MSCs left most of them feeling angry and unvalued. This was contributing to their stress and burnout.

This lack of role identify is consistent with literature as being related to emotional exhaustion (Lee, 2008). Emotional exhaustion is one of the key factors in Maslach's (2003) burnout theory. In addition to this Rayle (2006) found that if counselors felt they mattered they were more satisfied with their job. Feeling that no one in the building or community understands what they do, they may very well begin to feel that they do not matter. This could affect their feeling that they are not a part of the campus community. According to Maslow's (1954) *Theory*

of *Basic Needs*, this could be *belongingness* or *esteem*. According to his motivation theory, those who do not have these needs met may become depressed, or anxious.

Lack of Administrative Support and Validation is another subtheme that was clustered into the theme *Lack of Validation, Support, and Power* during the data reduction stage. The majority of the MSCs mentioned having a negative relationship with their principals. Five out of the nine participants felt unsupported by their administrators. This lack of principal support was a major theme when MSCs were discussing causes of MSC stress and burnout. Even those who currently did not have a negative relationship with their principal remembered times when they did; a poor relationship with a principal made it difficult to enjoy their work. Counselors overwhelmingly mentioned feeling undervalued and underutilized. They felt that their principals did not understand their job functions or their roles. They felt their opinions were not valued. Lee (2008) found that as perceived support from a principal decreased, emotional exhaustion increased. This is consistent with the findings in this study. And as stated above, increased emotional exhaustion is consistent with burnout theory (Maslach, 2003).

Although the majority of the lack of administrative support was deemed to be a lack of support from campus administration (i.e., the principal), two of the participants perceived a lack of support from central office, (i.e., policy or the DGC) in addition to the lack of principal support. The two counselors who had this situation, Elizabeth and Rapha, were two of the most burned out counselors in the study. They felt they had no one who understood or to advocate for them. According to Gnilka et al. (2012) the counselor's perception of a negative relationship between the counselor and the supervisor decreased the counselor's ability to cope with stress. This is consistent with the findings of this study. In addition, all of the five counselors who perceived lack of support from their principals had the highest scores on the CBI (Lee et al.,

2010) and were considering leaving the profession or at least changing campuses.

Administrative support is positively correlated with job satisfaction (Pyne, 2011); therefore, it is understandable that these MSCs who do not perceive administrative support are very unhappy with their jobs and wanting to leave. This is also consistent with a study by Yildirim (2008) which found that those who perceived a lack of principal support were more likely to experience burnout. Dollarhide et al (2008) also found that counselors who perceived lack of administrative support often felt alone and were prone to feelings of anxiety and pressure. The results of this study are consistent with this finding.

The second research question in this study regarded organizational factors that helped to alleviate stress and prevent burnout in MSCs. Four subthemes emerged from the data:

Processes and procedures, Administrative Support, Professional Development, and Other Stress Management. All of these themes were clustered together into one emerging theme, *Organizational Resources and Support Can Reduce Stress.*

The MSCs readily agreed that processes and procedures in place to help them deal with critical events relieved stress. The MSCs stated that this took the “guess work” out. They all agreed that having set processes and procedures that were well documented and easy to access were helpful in alleviating stress. This finding is consistent with the findings of Somody (2008). One potential cause of burnout is the exposure to the intense nature of crisis (Fong, 2005). Therefore, providing resources and support for MSCs in this area is a significant factor in preventing stress and burnout (Wachter et al., 2008). This finding also supports leadership theory which states that supportive leadership helps to increase confidence; this confidence gives way to competency when stressful tasks are encountered (Hackman & Johnson, 2009).

The second subtheme under this clustered theme was *Administrative Support*. All but one of our participants reported having some positive administrative support from at least either their principals, DGCs, or an assistant principal. Only one reported having no support from any administrator. Four MSCs reported having support from their building principals, assistant principals, and their DGCs. Three of these were relatively new counselors, all having less than 5 years' experience as a MSC. These counselors were Allie, Kianna, and Bambi. These three counselors showed the least burnout. Donna, who also reported having support from all three administrative types was an experienced counselor who had been counseling for over 10 years. Her CBI score indicated a high level of burnout in all dimensions including negative work environment. Her years of experience may have accounted for this difference. However, overall these findings are consistent with the research. Counselors who indicated having stronger bonds with their supervisors reported less overall stress (Gnilka et al., 2012).

The MSCs in the study who reported a positive relationship with those other than their campus principal, reported more stress. These were Elizabeth, Mistie, and Porsche. They all mentioned how the DGC had no real say on their campus since they really work for the building principal. Therefore, even though they may have felt supported by their DGCs, since they have no authority over how their workload is distributed on campus, this did not seem to alleviate their stress or improve their burnout. Not having control over what their role was on the campus seemed to be the cause of most of these MSCs stress. According to Gnilka et al. (2012), this coupled with a lack of administrative support is a major cause of stress. In this study it appears that only those perceiving administrative support from the principals (who had a say in what their role was) were the ones who were less stressed.

Professional Development was the third subtheme clustered under the overall theme of *Organizational Resources Can Reduce Stress*. Counselors addressed this question from the standpoint of professional development that had to do with stress reduction, i.e., wellness. Most of the counselors did not know of any wellness program offered by their district that helped to reduce stress. Although, a few of the counselors had attended such professional development, they did not seem to think that it had any bearing on their stress or burnout. While talking, they generally stressed that in theory the wellness programs seemed good, but that in reality, they just didn't have time to do any of those things.

Another type of professional development that was mentioned was that of counselor conferences. Only one of these counselors had attended a yearly counselor conference and they all either did not have the time, funding, or were not allowed to leave campus for this type of professional development. For those who discussed it, it seemed to be a frustration that they could not attend. So while they had it available, the fact that it was not a resource that they could access was adding to their stress and possibly to their burnout. While the DGCs mentioned providing ample opportunity for professional development in their districts, these burned out counselors either did not have the same opportunities or they did not take advantage of them because they did not have the time. When counselors' demands are greater than their resources, their stress and burnout increase (McCarthy et al., 2010). According to leadership theory, providing training to ensure that challenging tasks are within ones skill level can help to reduce stress (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

The fourth subtheme to be clustered under *Organizational Resources Can Reduce Stress* is the subtheme *Other Stress Management*. Other stress management resources mentioned by both MSCs and DGCs were access to counseling through an EAP, chair massages at the end of

the year, just getting away for a meal with the DGC. Most counselors were unaware of the EAP programs. But a few of the counselors had either utilized these services or were looking into it.

Many of the DGCs discussed offering services to their counselors via EAPs or similar programs when they were in need. Dana and Jo's MSCs had access to EAP programs. Cathy had agreements set up with outside counseling agencies to ensure confidentiality for her counselors in need. Cathy stated that often counselors were the last to utilize these services.

The MSCs who had access to the extra stress management services such as chair massages in their district seemed to like them; the MSCs who heard about them in the focus group were quick to say they would love to have them. Organizational resources that are utilized, such as stress management resources, do seem to have a positive effect on stress; this is consistent with the literature. However, having easy access and knowledge of these opportunities, especially when one is limited for time is a challenge. It is critical that counselors have access to professional support services in order to alleviate serious stress and burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

The third research question asked about MSCs and DGCs perception of their personal contribution to stress reduction and burnout prevention in MSCs. The first subtheme that emerged was *MSCs Coping Strategies* which was clustered into the theme *Dual Responsibility for Middle School Counselor Stress Reduction*. Most organizations are quick to blame the person who is burned out rather than the organization (Maslach & Lieter, 1997). Indeed many of the participants blamed themselves. Mistie stated that she was "angry" at herself for becoming burned out. Bambi stated that she just was not able to set "boundaries" pointing the blame for her inability to get her work done within the regular school day on herself. Allie felt guilty when she took time to practice self-care or set boundaries. She said it made her feel

“selfish.” Elizabeth said that her “heart cries” because she is unable to work with students who need her. Porsche stated that other counselors seemed to manage the workload, but that she could not.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) noted that it is inevitable that humans will experience stress; however, it is coping that makes the big difference in outcome. There were varying types of coping strategies employed by these MSCs in an effort to reduce their stress. When queried about their personal responsibility regarding stress management the MSCs discussed their personal coping strategies. Many utilized humor and venting. Some debriefed with a colleague. Several talked about trying to prioritize and others mentioned setting boundaries. Still others mentioned nutrition and exercise. One mentioned separating mentally from the stressful situation by compartmentalizing. And a portion of the MSCs mentioned not taking the work stress home. Many mentioned having supportive people in their lives at home or school. These included families, children, colleagues, and DGCs.

More than once during the interviews and focus groups, the MSC would realize that they had access to stress management resources, either as they thought about it or as they heard others discuss it. A few mentioned that they would listen to music, read or step away from their office for a few minutes. Others mentioned overeating, while some mentioned eating well and exercising. One popular strategy was to “play hard!” This was mentioned by Rapha during one of the online focus groups. Others quickly chimed in with approval. The coping strategies were varied, but most mentioned the use of humor and venting. Coping is influenced by available resources. Health, positive self-esteem, problem solving abilities, social skills, social support and material sources such as money, are all examples of possible resources that may be available to people to help them cope with their stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

DGCs participants seemed very aware of their responsibility when it came to stress management. All mentioned feeling great responsibility for keeping their counselors healthy and stress free. They all mentioned how they made themselves available to the MSCs by answering their own phones when counselors needed to contact them or consult. They talked about compiling necessary resource materials and setting up training as requested by counselors at the end of the year via feedback forms. They talked in detail about advocating for their counselors. They all seemed to understand the job stress and demands. They also talked about how important it was for the counselors to feel that they were heard. These findings were consistent with the limited literature found regarding DGCs role in reducing MSC stress. A DGCs role is to support counselors so that they can address challenges and concerns in an effort to reduce stress and function more fully in their role as school counselor (Cicero, 2009).

Additionally, DGCs were all willing to work with their counselors who were experiencing signs of burnout. Their first line of support was direct support. Next would be a referral for counseling. However, most indicated that they were not afraid to have a direct talk with counselors who were having issues with burnout or who were referred by principals. And they stated that if necessary, they would work with the counselor and principals to move a counselor to another campus. They also said if the burnout is so severe that the counselor could not serve students, they would refer them to HR or collaborate with the counselor to let them out of their contract if requested. Impaired counselors first are offered supervision and services, but the ultimate goal is to have healthy counselors to serve students (Somody et al., 2008).

However, one finding that was prevalent but not noted in the literature was that the DGC has no real power to make any changes because the decisions to make changes rests with the MSC principals. Based upon site based management, the principal is as Cathy said, “The captain

of the ship.” All DGCs were knowledgeable about burnout and the importance of preventive care. They seemed dedicated to preventing burnout. However, although the DGCs seemed to know the importance of supporting their counselors and all DGCs seemed to have their counselors’ best interests at heart, the lack of power to really make any changes when it comes to the MSCs working conditions and duties appears to be a factor in MSC stress and burnout. The one person in leadership who understands the counselor is basically powerless to step in and make changes to help them. This finding in conjunction with the other findings regarding causes of MSC stress may help to explain the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout.

The fourth and final research question regarded having participants describe their experiences with burnout. The first subtheme that emerged was *Feeling Anger/Guilt/Frustration* which was clustered under the main theme of *Emotional, Mental Physical Effects of Burnout*. All nine of the MSCs experienced some form of anger, guilt or frustration when asked to describe their experiences with burnout. Some were simply angry at themselves because they allowed themselves to burnout. Some felt the pressure of all the large workload and competing priorities and felt they needed to prioritize; however, they were unable to do so due to the multitude of duties that were all high priority.

Others felt frustration because they were asked to do so many non-counseling duties that they were beginning to feel like a “dumping ground.” Some felt frustrated because they had extra duties and were upset with themselves for feeling frustrated. Most felt angry because they were being asked to do so many assignments, tasks and duties they were unable to keep up with them. Others felt frustrated with students who wasted their time with inconsequential needs; then they felt guilty for feeling this way. Others felt frustrated by students who came to their office just to get out of class. Some felt frustrated with students who were not changing even

though they had been counseled several times during the school year. Many were angry because they were not being utilized for their expertise as counselors but were instead being used as “paper pushers.”

According to burnout theory exhaustion is defined as feeling exhausted and overextended, not only mentally, but physically, as well (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Upon awakening in the morning, the person is fatigued; they have no desire to begin projects or deal with people. They feel completely used up and drained. This is the first reaction to the stress of job demands. Many of the MSCs were experiencing physical effects from the stress and burnout such as exhaustion, illness and depression. Some had gained weight. Some of the physical illnesses were heart arrhythmias and borderline diabetes. Two of the MSCs mentioned not being able to remember things such as student’s names or tasks that they were asked to complete. Some were forgetting where they put their car keys and phone on a regular basis. One mentioned having bad dreams. Another couldn’t sleep. But all of the counselors expressed that they were tired or exhausted. If a person remains in a persistent state of stress, mental cognition and health may be affected in a negative manner (Gwartz, 2008; Mayo Clinic, 2011).

Several of the MSCs expressed that they were giving up. These were the most burned out counselors. Most of these counselors had been practicing for several years. They talked about “having no purpose,” and “retiring.” Some mentioned going back into teaching or changing professions altogether. One was trying to get a job elsewhere in the district. Several said they were “just done.” One said she was “not recharging.” One said she was “totally burned out.” Six of the nine counselors were already at the stage of leaving. Two of the others are newer counselors with amazing administrative support. The other counselor has

several years' experience and good support from her administrator, but she says she has just accepted that this is the way that things are.

These MSCs are in varying stages of burnout. However, they are all still functioning as best as possible. They are all still able to provide counseling services for their students. Most had what Lee et al (2010) deemed as the "W" cluster typology, which meant they were burned out in several areas, but still functioning. He called them "persevering counselors."

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First of all, the study was limited to urban cities in the state of Texas. Therefore, results may not be pertinent to other states that do not have site-based management. Second, the MSCs self-identified as being burned out based upon the findings of the CBI (Lee, 2007). This instrument appeared to identify MSCs who were experiencing burnout. However, the CBI was completed during a time of high stress for MSCs in the Spring of the year. Because of this, participation was possibly lower than if it had been mailed at a less stressful time. Those counselors who were struggling with all of their demands were very likely to not have the time to complete the CBI. Therefore, it is possible that many who were suffering from burnout were not included. Additionally, completing the survey during this stressful time may have also influenced some of the results, especially if the MSCs were feeling very stressed when they completed the survey.

Another limitation of the study was the self-identification of counselors who are exhibiting signs of burnout. By nature of their profession, counselors are supposed to be able to solve problems and are expected to be stable and functional. Therefore, counselors may not have been willing to admit that they were experiencing symptoms of stress and burnout. By sending out preliminary surveys with a recruitment letter explaining how this research study was being

done to provide awareness and to help MSCs cope with stress and burnout, and by offering a possible monetary incentive for those who completed the preliminary survey and inventory, it was hoped that the stressed out MSCs would be more willing to participate. By sending this information to many MSCs in selected urban cities in five regions of Texas, the researcher was able to locate candidates from each region who were willing to participate who fit the criteria of experiencing at least some symptoms of burnout.

Another limitation was that the participants were identified via their school websites. Contacting these individuals with the preliminary information before sending them the online survey and demographic information proved to be somewhat difficult as they were very busy and often did not answer their phone or their emails. Ultimately, the researcher was able to make contact and send out the CBI and demographic questionnaire via the SurveyMonkey.com link, but this often was only accomplished after several tries. The researcher believed that this initial contact was important; however, it is unknown as to whether it truly limited or enhanced the resulting sample of MSCs who completed the preliminary survey and CBI.

To preserve anonymity and confidentiality for the MSCs, the DGCs were recruited from neighboring districts. Therefore, their input, though valuable, may have been lessened since they were not the DGCs of these particular MSCs. Ideally, these recruits would have been from the same district as the MSCs. This would have provided more information in relation to the actual burned out counselors; however, this was not deemed to be possible in lieu of the supervisory relationship and the researcher's desire to ensure as much anonymity as possible to the MSCs.

Implications of the Study

Implications for this study are many. One of the main implications of the study is that MSCs' roles are ambiguous and often misunderstood by many. Often their job is thought to be

easy. This misconception often leads to an overload of added duties to the already full plate that MSCs already have. This misconception coupled with the added duties, especially non-guidance duties, could leave counselors physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. And this exhaustion coupled with the increasing demands and load of the job causes stress and burnout for the MSC. Therefore, ultimately this can be considered a causative factor in the MSC's reduced ability and lack of service to students. It could also be a causative factor in MSCs burning out and leaving the profession.

Administrative support, particularly at the campus level is essential for the MSC to complete their duties in a functional manner. More education for principals as it pertains to a MSCs role is an essential need. In addition to this MSCs need to be supervised by personnel who understand the role that they serve. Central DGCs need to have more authority over the MSCs role. Although housed on the campuses, MSCs should be supervised by experienced DGCs instead of building principals.

The DGC, the MSC, and the building principal should sit down together at least twice yearly to discuss the role and the expectations of the MSC on their campus. More personnel such as administrators and clerical staff should be hired on campuses to perform the non-guidance duties that MSCs are currently assigned. Many districts do not have a DGC. In this case, they should perhaps form a coop so that the MSCs have guidance.

MSCs need to have time to collaborate and attend professional development. DGCs need to develop a plan for providing conferences and wellness training at times that are accessible for school counselors. Substitute counselors should be provided for MSCs when they are not in attendance so that students can be served, just as they are for other personnel such as teachers and principals.

EAPs should be provided for counselors on a regular basis where they can access counseling for themselves when needed in a confidential manner. As the keepers of the secrets they should not have to be stigmatized for seeking counseling to debrief. MSCs would benefit from confidential access to counseling when they feel they need it.

Finally, counselors should be taught in their counselor education classes to better advocate for themselves. This would include practicing setting boundaries and keeping data logs of their daily activities. The data logs would be especially helpful to the DGC or to the MSC when negotiating changes to the MSCs duties on the campus.

Recommendations for Future Research

Valuable information was obtained from this study. Listening to the voices of the MSCs rather than taking information from a Likert type survey was priceless in understanding the complexities of the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout. However, additional qualitative studies that include the actual building principal and the actual DGC of the MSC would be beneficial in truly understanding the phenomenon. Case studies of multiple campuses which include the principal, counselor and director of guidance and counseling would provide additional information as to what might add or detract from MSC stress and burnout. This might prove to be especially helpful in determining organizational factors that either contribute to or help to alleviate stress and burnout in the MSC. Online focus groups composed of principals, counselors and DGCs could be utilized so that more sites could be studied. The principal is an integral part of the equation when it comes to counselor roles and duties. Therefore, including principals in a future study would be beneficial in understanding this phenomenon.

Another recommendation for future studies would be a longitudinal study of MSCs over the entire year; this would add valuable information. Stressors may change according to the

workload or duties assigned during the year. As legislative changes are made that affect school counselors, more research will need to be done to understand how these changes affect counselor stress and burnout. Utilizing both face to face interviews, online focus groups followed up by technology based interviews such as Skype or iPhone interviews would make this easier to complete. This would allow a researcher to interview more people over a larger area while saving time and expense. This might be especially useful in qualitative studies that are longitudinal, thus allowing the researcher to interview the counselors multiple times during the study.

Quantitative studies regarding the principal's understanding and perception of the MSC role would be beneficial, especially in areas where site-based management is practiced. It would be interesting to see how their perception relates to MSC stress and burnout. A study designed to link both the principal perception with the MSC's degree of burnout would be an interesting component to help understand this phenomenon.

Studies of MSCs who are not stressed and not burned out are also recommended. Combined case studies of both stressed and unstressed counselors within different or same sites, and making comparisons on the organizational structures, including the principal and DGCs would also be helpful in fully understanding the phenomenon.

Summary

This research study was broad in scope and covered a wide variety of topics related to MSC stress and burnout. The researcher not only interviewed the MSCs, but the DGCs as well. These interviews along with three separate online focus groups, counselor logs and lists of professional development provided ample data to help the researcher understand the cause of stress and burnout in the MSC. The voices of the MSCs were very powerful in relating the

phenomenon. The voices of the DGCs were significant in understanding the organizational structure in place and the support available for the MSCs when it comes to stress and burnout. This research helped to fill a gap in the research regarding DGCs perception of the stress and burnout in the MSC. While many of the findings were consistent with the previous research and literature, there were some interesting findings that had not been noted in the literature.

Some interesting findings based upon the DGCs perceptions were that having set processes and procedures in order to address critical events such as suicide was helpful in reducing stress. According to the MSCs, as long as those processes and procedures were not extremely lengthy and if they did not detract greatly from the confidential relationship of the counselor and student, the MSCs also saw them as beneficial to reducing stress. They were especially beneficial to the novice counselors; however, all MSCs noted the benefit of utilizing the forms provided by district for critical events.

Another interesting factor that stood out regarding the perceptions of the DGC was simply that they had limited power to change the duties or circumstances of the MSC. Instead this was left up to the principal. Although the DGCs provided support in the way of resources and materials, most of the DGCs admitted that they had no say so in how the principals utilized the counselors on each campus. They stated they were only a “voice” for the counselors, but many admitted that in advocating for the MSCs, they had to tread lightly. MSCs were aware of this lack of power and control, and this definitely seemed to add to their level of frustration and stress with the situations on their campus. The only person in central office who really understood what they did was literally powerless to make changes in their workload or duties.

Having a poor relationship with the principal also appeared to contribute to the MSCs stress and burnout. Without administrative support, the MSC felt powerless to make changes.

Feeling misunderstood, undervalued, overworked and exhausted, the MSCs feel hopeless without this support. When the values of the MSCs were not aligned with the values of the principals, (such as putting kids first above paperwork) the MSCs experienced great stress; these counselors were the ones who expressed the desire to retire, quit, or change professions.

Similar to prior findings in previous research, it was found that there were multiple causes of MSC stress and burnout. Among these findings were work overload, ambiguous roles, lack of identity, large caseload, and lack of support. However, based upon the data collected it was apparent that there is another factor that is prevalent in all the participants in this study regarding MSC stress and burnout. That factor is the unpredictable routine of the MSC. This study found that the MSCs unpredictable routine coupled with the other factors such as lack of administrative support, overload, and having different values than the principal played a major factor in MSC stress and burnout. This is a factor that has not been mentioned in the previous studies.

It is important to note that most of these participants attempted to cope with their stress utilizing humor and venting. Most understood that they needed to set boundaries, but were unable to do so due to guilt. As the DGCs noted, counselors are not accustomed to taking care of themselves. They do not know how to say “no.” Because of this finding, it is imperative that school counselors have time and funding set aside to attend conferences and wellness activities.

It appears evident that even though ASCA has indicated that school counselor’s role is to attend to the developmental needs of every student via a comprehensive school counseling program which addresses the academic, career and social growth of all students, many MSCs are still spending the majority of their time pushing paper, attending to non-counseling duties. In fact as most of the counselors stated, they are not counselors, instead they are paper pushers,

quasi-administrators, taking care of all the extra duties as assigned. This study reflects that in at least five large urban districts across Texas this is still taking place. It is apparent that in these districts as long as the principal has the final say in what counselors do, they will continue to not only try to serve students, but serve the principal as well, by taking care of all the duties that no one else is available to handle. As long as site based management prevails, the DGCs will only be able to advocate for the counselor, but ultimately, the counselor and the counselor's duties are decided by the captain of the ship, the principal.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: CBI

Counselor Burnout Inventory

Counselor Education Program, Korea University

Instructions: This questionnaire is designed to measure the counselor's burnout level.

There are no right or wrong answers. Try to be as honest as you can. Beside each statement, circle the number that best describes how you feel.

	1 Never True	2 Rarely True	3 Sometimes True	4 Often True	5 Always True
1. Due to my job as a counselor, I feel tired most of the time.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel I am an incompetent counselor.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am treated unfairly in my workplace.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am not interested in my clients and their problems.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My relationships with family members have been negatively impacted by my work as a counselor.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel exhausted due to my work as a counselor.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel frustrated by my effectiveness as a counselor.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel negative energy from my supervisor.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I have become callous toward clients.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I feel like I do not have enough time to engage in personal interests.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Due to my job as a counselor, I feel overstressed.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am not confident in my counseling skills.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I feel bogged down by the system in my workplace.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I have little empathy for my clients.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I feel I do not have enough time to spend with my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Due to my job as a counselor, I feel tightness in my back and shoulders.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I do not feel like I am making a change in my clients.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I feel frustrated with the system in my workplace.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am no longer concerned about the welfare of my clients.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I feel I have poor boundaries between work and my personal life.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B: Scoring for CBI
Preliminary Scoring Information for the Counselor Burnout Inventory

This inventory is designed to assess the five dimensions of counselor burnout.

Dimension 1 = Exhaustion

Item 1, Item 6, Item 11, Item 16

Dimension 2 = Incompetence

Item 2, Item 7, Item 12, Item 17

Dimension 3 = Negative Work Environment

Item 3, Item 8, Item 13, Item 18,

Dimension 4 = Devaluing Client

Item 4, Item 9, Item 14, Item 19

Dimension 5 = Deterioration in Personal Life

Item 5, Item 10, Item 15, Item 20

APPENDIX C: Permission to Use and Reproduce CBI

Re: Requesting permission to use the CBI in my study.

이상민 <leesang0603@naver.com>

Mon 11/3/2014 6:13 PM

To: Hurt, Janice <jhurt@liberty.edu>;

Yes, you have my permission to include CBI in your appendix.

Sang Min.

Sent from my iPhone

2014. 11. 4. 오전 9:01 Hurt, Janice <jhurt@liberty.edu> 작성:

> Dr. Lee,

> I have completed my dissertation. I did utilize your CBI to identify my participants who were experiencing burnout. I include your CBI and the scoring guide in my appendix. However, I need your permission to publish it in the appendix. Will you give your permission for me to do this?

> Thank you for your help.

> Janice Hurt

RE: Requesting permission to use the CBI in my study.

이상민 [leesang0603@naver.com]

Sent: Sunday, July 01, 2012 9:03 PM

To: Hurt, Janice

Attachments:MECD2007_final.pdf (6 MB) ; final.pdf (871 KB) ; Counselor Burnout Inventory.doc (62 KB)

You have my permission to use CBI.

Sincerely,

Sang Min Lee.

-----Original Message-----

From: "Hurt, Janice" <jhurt@liberty.edu>

To: "leesang@korea.ac.kr" <leesang@korea.ac.kr>;

Cc:

Sent: 2012-07-02 (월) 05:26:59

Subject: Requesting permission to use the CBI in my study.

Dr. Lee,

I am a doctoral candidate with Liberty University in Virginia and am writing a dissertation on counselor burnout. I would like your permission to use your instrument (CBI) for my study. Would you be able to grant that permission?

If this is possible, how do I get a copy of the instrument? Also, where can I find information relating to the reliability and validity of the instrument, if any?

Thank you for your help. I look forward to hearing from you.

Janice Hurt, M.A., LPC

Doctoral Candidate

Liberty University

APPENDIX D: Demographic Survey

Link to Demographic Survey: <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/umi-uncg-1060.pdf>

Demographic survey used in its entirety with the permission of Julie P. Stephan, Ph.D.

APPENDIX E: Permission to Use Demographic Survey

Re: Requesting permission to use your demographic survey questionnaire

Hurt, Janice

Sent: Monday, July 02, 2012 1:12 PM

To: Julie Stephan [jstephan@sulross.edu]

Thank you, Dr. Stephan! I really appreciate your help.

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 2, 2012, at 10:13 AM, "Julie Stephan" <jstephan@sulross.edu> wrote:

Dear Janice:

Congratulations on your progress through the program! You have permission to use my demographic survey questionnaire for your research. I hope it goes very well and wish you the very best.

Sincerely,

Julie

Julie Stephan, PhD, NCC
Assistant Professor
Counselor Education
Sul Ross State University

From: Hurt, Janice [jhurt@liberty.edu]

Sent: Sunday, July 01, 2012 1:14 PM

To: Julie Stephan

Subject: Requesting permission to use your demographic survey questionnaire

Dr. Stephan,

I am a doctoral candidate from Liberty University and am working on a dissertation concerning school counselor burnout. I have read your dissertation, School Environment and Coping Resources: A predictive Model of School Counselor Burnout.

I would like to use the School Counselor Demographic Survey in Appendix A, specifically.

Could you possibly grant me this permission?

Thank you,

Janice Hurt, M.A., LPC

Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX F: Script for Recruiting Director of Guidance and Counseling Participants

11516 Owling Way
Manor, Texas 78653

Janice Lee Hurt
jhurt@liberty.edu

C: (512)658-8298
W: (512)278-4875

Hello,

My name is Janice Hurt, and I am a doctoral candidate. I attend Liberty University, and I am writing my dissertation on middle school counselors; specifically, I am researching the phenomenon of stress and burnout in middle school counselors who work in urban school districts in Texas.

Because you are a Director of Guidance and Counselor in an urban city in Texas, I would like to invite you to participate.

Participating in this study may benefit all middle school counselors as it is hoped that the results of the study will raise awareness about middle school counselor stress and provide a better understanding through education of the needs of the middle school counselor. If you agree to participate in the actual study, you would be asked to participate in the following additional data collection activities: 1) A 90 minute audio recorded face to face interview with the researcher; 2) an online focus group with 10 middle school counselors and five Directors of Guidance and Counseling from other urban cities in Texas (less than two hours). This online focus group will be text based. Your responses will be transcribed via the Qualtrics online focus group platform and downloaded to the researcher's computer; and 3) finally, you will be asked provide a list of wellness activities, professional development or programs available to your middle school counselors this year that might help them cope with or prevent stress. The 90 minute interview, the online focus group and writing out the list of available activities should take approximately four hours total of your time. If you agree to participate in this study, no identifying information will be used in any publication that could tie you back to any data. In any publication, pseudonyms for all participants and all cities, districts and regions will be used. In addition to this, you will be given an opportunity to review any data collected from you, for accuracy, making any changes necessary prior to publication of the dissertation. You may also decide to exclude parts of the data collected via your interviews, focus group, or provided lists from the final publication. Finally, you can choose to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research and for any reason. If you do choose to withdraw, you may do so by notifying the researcher by phone, email or by mail of your wish to do so. If you withdraw from the study, none of the information collected will be used in the final data analysis nor will it be published in any publication.

Do you have any questions about the study or what will be required if you decide to participate?
[Answer all questions asked by the participant].

Would you be willing to participate in this study?

[If no, thank the person for their time. If yes, proceed as follows]: I will need you to sign an Informed Consent form before the 90 minute audiotaped interview can take place. We will also need to set up a time and place for the 90 minute face to face interview to be conducted. Is there

a place where you would prefer to meet where we can go over the consent form and conduct the interview? What date and time would be convenient for you to participate in the interview? [Set up a time and place to meet for the 90 minute face- to-face interview.] [Get any contact information necessary and volunteer to email the consent form to the participant before the meeting so that the participant can read over the document before the meeting]. I would like to send you a copy of the consent form before we meet so that you can go over it and ask any additional questions you may have before we meet for the interview. Where would you like me to email the consent form? You may email me with any questions at jhurt@liberty.edu or call me at (512)658-8298. Thank you so much for volunteering to participate in this study regarding middle school counselor stress and burnout. Your contribution may be crucial to the reduction of middle school counselor stress and the prevention of burnout. I will call you the day before our scheduled meeting to confirm our appointment.

Again, thank you so much for your help with this study and for caring about middle school counselors enough to invest your time in this study that may be very helpful to middle school counselors and the students they serve!

APPENDIX G: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND DIRECTORS OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING: COLLABORATING TO UNDERSTAND STRESS AND PREVENT BURNOUT

Dissertation
Janice Hurt
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding MSC stress and burnout. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a MSC in an urban area in Texas. It is important that you understand the purpose of the study and what you will be asked to do during the study. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be a potential participant of the study.

This study is being conducted by: Janice Hurt, Liberty University, School of Education.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is gain a fuller understanding of MSC stress, stress management, and burnout through the voices of the MSCs and the Directors of Guidance and Counseling. Counselors are often assigned various tasks and duties that they perform daily in their role as a MSC. In some cases, they perform these duties which may or may not be common to counselors with little or no support from administrators. Urban MSCs are thought to be faced with more ethical dilemmas and may work with populations who have greater needs than those in other settings. The numerous tasks and high need populations could cause greater exhaustion in the MSC. This exhaustion could potentially manifest itself as burnout. There is little qualitative research in the area of stress and burnout among MSCs.

Procedures:

The expected amount of time that you will be asked to contribute to this study is approximately 5 hours. This includes the following:

- a preliminary Monkey Survey consisting of 15 minutes one survey and one 15 minutes CBI;
- one 90 minute interview;
- one 90 minute focus group;
- and one follow-up interview in which you will be asked to verify accuracy of the data you have provided which should take approximately 15 -20 minutes;
- less than 60 minutes keeping a list or journal

Counselors Participants:

If you agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Complete the pre-survey packet which consists of a demographic survey and a short Counselor Burnout Inventory, and return it to me along with this consent via the Survey Monkey Link provided in this email.

If selected for additional participation based upon data from the pre-survey, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Participate in an initial 90 minute face to face interview to discuss your background, job stress, stress management, and burnout.
- Participate in an online focus group with four to five Directors of Guidance and Counseling and 8-9 MSCs from different districts in Texas (not from your district). This focus group will last no more than two hours.
- Keep journals of your job stress for one month total (before and after the interviews) and share this with the researcher.
- Participate in a brief telephone interview to reflect on your experience with the research and check for accuracy of transcripts.

Directors of Guidance and Counseling Participants:

- Furnish the researcher with a list of stress management resources or activities you have offered your counselors in the last year.
- Participate in one 90 minute face to face interview where you will be asked questions regarding educational level, your credentials, and practices and procedures regarding MSC supervision, supports in place for MSCs stress management and your observations of the phenomenon of MSC stress and burnout.
- Participate in an online focus group with four other district supervisors and 10 MSCs from other selected urban cities to discuss MSC stress and burnout, including best practices for coping, needs for professional development as well as resources available for support pertaining to stress and wellness. None of the counselors or other Directors in the focus group will be from your district.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The risks associated with this study are as follows:

- You may be uncomfortable discussing issues about your feelings of stress.
- You may experience additional stress due to these discussions.
- You may feel uncomfortable discussing these issues with Directors of Guidance and Counseling.

The possible benefits to participation are:

- Awareness may be raised for needs of the MSCs as it relates to job stress and burnout prevention.
- Strategies and information acquired may be useful to novice counselors who are just starting out and to other counselors or districts supervisors who may be having issues with counselor burnout.
- Students may be better served with counselors who are not burned out.

Compensation:

One MSC will be chosen at random from among the returned preliminary Survey Monkey surveys and CBI to receive a \$100 Visa Gift Card. We know that your time is valuable and although we are unable to pay you, this is an effort to encourage you to take the time to contribute to the body of research about MSCs' stress and burnout.

Participation in the actual study is strictly voluntary; however, each of the five Directors of Guidance and Counseling and the 10 MSCs who are selected from those who complete the preliminary survey and CBI, and who agree to participate will receive a \$25 dollar gift certificate to Starbucks as a token of appreciation for their time. The true benefit will arise from knowing that you have contributed to the body of research regarding MSCs and their stress and burnout prevention.

Confidentiality:

The records regarding the identity of the participants of this study will be kept private. The data gathered will be used to write a dissertation. In any report published, no identifiable information will be included that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

All counselors will be assigned a code. Their responses will be assigned coded categories as well. In the reports, the counselors will be assigned pseudo-names.

All counselors will be assigned a code known only to the researcher to log into the focus group; therefore, no other counselor or supervisor will know which counselor or which director is logged in. The website will be a secure website and no one will be able to access it except for members in the study and the researcher.

All cities, campuses and school districts will be assigned pseudo names.

Counselor programs and supports will be noted, but not from which school. At least one other school will have similar demographics; therefore, it will not be possible to decide which District has which support program or which counselors are from what district. There will be at most two counselors from each of five districts and five district supervisors from neighboring districts. This should furnish each counselor and each supervisor with some level of anonymity.

Tapes of interviews will be kept in locked storage. They will only be listened to by researchers, the professional transcriptionist (who will sign a letter of confidentiality) and the dissertation committee (if requested). The audio tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. Data gathered from the transcripts will be coded.

The transcripts of the interviews and the data gathered from the transcripts will be stored on removable disks and kept in separate locked cabinets. The data will be destroyed three years after the study is published as required by law.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Janice Hurt. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 11516 Owling Way, Manor, Texas 78653. Phone: (512)658-8298, email: jhurt@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX H: Focus Group Questions/Discussion Items

1. *Describe your perception of the causes of stress and burnout in middle school counselors?*
 - a. Discussion: After reading over others' answers to the question, please choose at least one, but not more than three respondents to discuss answers with. You may ask clarifying questions, make suggestions, clarify your answer, and/ or expand on your original answer. The guidelines for this part of the focus group is that you stay focused on the topic and remain respectful of one another.
2. *How would you describe organizational factors and resources that help to alleviate stress and prevent burnout or contribute to it?*
 - a. Discussion: After reading over others' answers to the question, please choose at least one, but not more than three respondents to discuss answers with. You may ask clarifying questions, make suggestions, clarify your answer, and/ or expand on your original answer. The guidelines for this part of the focus group is that you stay focused on the topic and remain respectful of one another.
3. *How would you describe your personal responsibility when it comes to middle school counselor stress management and burnout prevention?*
 - a. Discussion: After reading over others' answers to the question, please choose at least one, but not more than three respondents to discuss answers with. You may ask clarifying questions, make suggestions, clarify your answer, and/ or expand on your original answer. The guidelines for this part of the focus group is that you stay focused on the topic and remain respectful of one another.

4. *How would you describe your experiences related to burnout in the middle school counselor?*

a. Discussion: After reading over others' answers to the question, please choose at least one, but not more than three respondents to discuss answers with. You may ask clarifying questions, make suggestions, clarify your answer, and/ or expand on your original answer. The guidelines for this part of the focus group is that you stay focused on the topic and remain respectful of one another.

b. During the last 10 minutes, please add any additional thoughts that you may have regarding the topic of stress and burnout in middle school counselors.

Specifically, what have you learned from this group and what might you do differently (if anything) in the future to help prevent stress and burnout in middle school counselors?

APPENDIX I: Institutional Review Board Approval

March 4, 2014

Janice Hurt

IRB Approval 1797.030414: A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Counselors and Directors of Guidance and Counseling: Collaborating to Understand Counselor Stress and Prevent Burnout

Dear Janice,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

Professor, IRB Chair

Counseling

(434) 592-4054

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX J: Script for Initial Screening for Participants

11516 Owling Way
Manor, Texas 78653

Janice Lee Hurt
jhurt@liberty.edu

C: (512)658-8298
W: (512)278-4875

Hello,

My name is Janice Hurt and I am a doctoral candidate. I attend Liberty University, and I am writing my dissertation on MSCs; specifically, I am researching the phenomenon of stress and burnout in MSCs who work in urban school districts in Texas.

I am contacting you because you are listed on your school website as a MSC in an Urban School District, [Name of District]. I am asking MSCs in your area and similar areas across Texas to complete a short inventory regarding their personal experiences with work stress and to answer a short demographic survey. The work stress inventory consists of 20 multiple choice questions and is intended to measure work related stress. The demographic survey consists of 14 questions, including years of service, years in current position, educational level, age, gender, ethnicity, professional organizations, a few demographics about your campus including current enrollment, % of minority and % of economically disadvantaged.

Participating in this screening may benefit all MSCs as it is hoped that the results of the study will raise awareness about MSC stress and provide a better understanding through education of the needs of the MSC. In addition to that, because I understand that you are very busy this time of year, all MSCs who complete the screening survey within 48 hours of the receipt of it will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 dollar gift certificate. And just to clarify, based upon this initial screening, you may be asked to participate in the actual study. However, you are under no obligation to do so. The information provided in this inventory and survey will be kept entirely confidential and will only be used to identify potential participants.

If you are chosen to participate in the study, based upon the prescreening information, I will contact you with details of the study by telephone or email. At that time you may decide whether or not you would like to participate in the study. Once again, completing this prescreening inventory and survey in no way obligates you to complete in the study and all of your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

This screening survey should only take approximately 15 minutes or less to complete and will be delivered via a secure version of Survey Monkey. Would you be willing to participate in this initial screening and if chosen would you consider participating in a study to help raise awareness and possibly help to provide a better understanding of the needs of the MSC? If so, would you like for me to send the survey to your work email or your personal email address?

Thank you so much for your help with this study and for caring about your profession enough to take a few minutes to make a difference!

APPENDIX K: Counselor Interview Questions

Interview Questions *for the MSC*

1. How did you come to be a MSC?
2. How would you describe your typical day as a MSC?
3. Describe factors that create or alleviate stress in your role as a school counselor?
4. Describe how you cope with the stress that you encounter as a school counselor?
5. Describe procedures in place on your campus or district to deal with critical events, such as suicide or reporting an outcry of child abuse. How do these processes or procedures add to or help to alleviate the stressful nature of this process?
6. Describe your experience with counselor support from administrators in your district.
7. Describe how you utilize stress management resources in your district?
8. Describe your experiences with counselor burnout?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to add or that you would like me to know about your experience with stress or burnout as a MSC?

APPENDIX L: Director of Guidance and Counseling Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your education, certificates, licenses and experience that led you to the position of Director of Guidance and Counseling?
2. What are your roles and responsibilities?
3. In your time as a director of guidance and counseling, what would you say are the most stressful events or times for your MSCs? What makes you feel this way?
4. How would you describe organizational factors that might cause your MSCs stress?
5. Describe the processes or procedures currently in place to assist your MSCs in their job duties?
6. Describe how you support your MSCs when it comes to stress reduction and burnout prevention?
7. Describe how and when meetings, workshops, and professional development are designed and placed on the school calendar?
8. What would you say the most significant signs of stress and burnout might be and how do you think that might affect your MSCs or the people for whom they advocate?
9. What resources do you offer your MSCs such as training, professional development, supplies, collaboration, consultation and how often do they utilize those resources offered?
10. How often do you meet with your MSCs and how is the agenda developed?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss about MSC stress and how you perceive the phenomenon?

APPENDIX M: Informed Consent for Pilot Study

Consent Form

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND DIRECTORS OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING: COLLABORATING TO UNDERSTAND STRESS AND PREVENT BURNOUT

Dissertation
Janice Hurt
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to participate in a pilot study regarding middle school counselor stress and burnout. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a middle school counselor or a Director of Guidance and Counseling in an urban area in Texas. It is important that you understand the purpose of the study and what you will be asked to do during the pilot study. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be a participant of the pilot study.

This study is being conducted by: Janice Hurt, Liberty University, School of Education.
Background Information

The purpose of this research study is gain a fuller understanding of middle school counselor stress, stress management, and burnout through the voices of the middle school counselors and the Directors of Guidance and Counseling. Counselors are often assigned various tasks and duties that they perform daily in their role as a middle school counselor. In some cases, they perform these duties which may or may not be common to counselors with little or no support from administrators. Urban middle school counselors are thought to be faced with more ethical dilemmas and may work with populations who have greater needs than those in other settings. The numerous tasks and high need populations could cause greater exhaustion in the middle school counselor. This exhaustion could potentially manifest itself as burnout. There is little qualitative research in the area of stress and burnout among middle school counselors.

The purpose of the pilot study is simply to test the methods and procedures that will be used in the actual study. Testing the interview questions with a volunteer and testing the software that will be used during the study is an important component of the study.

Counselor Participants:

If you agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Complete the pre-survey packet which consists of a demographic survey and a short Counselor Burnout Inventory, and return it to me along with this consent via the Survey Monkey Link provided in this email.
- Sign this Informed Consent Form
- Participate in an initial 90 minute face to face interview to discuss your background, job stress, stress management, and burnout. This interview will be audio recorded.

- Participate in an online focus group with one Director of Guidance and Counseling from a different district in Texas (not from your district). This focus group will last no more than two hours and will be transcribed from the typed text.
- Keep journals of your job stress for one week total (before and after the interviews) and share this with the researcher.
- Participate in a brief telephone interview to reflect on your experience with the research and check for accuracy of transcripts. This interview should last no more than 15 minutes.

Directors of Guidance and Counseling Participants:

- Furnish the researcher with a list of stress management resources or professional development activities you have offered your counselors in the past month.
- Participate in one 90 minute face to face interview where you will be asked questions regarding educational level, your credentials, and practices and procedures regarding middle school counselor supervision, supports in place for middle school counselors stress management and your observations of the phenomenon of middle school counselor stress and burnout This interview will be audio recorded.
- Participate in an online focus group with one middle school counselors from one other urban city to discuss middle school counselor stress and burnout, including best practices for coping, needs for professional development as well as resources available for support pertaining to stress and wellness. The Director of Guidance and Counseling in the focus group will not be from your district. This focus group will last no more than two hours and be transcribed verbatim from the typed text.
- Participate in a brief telephone interview to reflect on your experience with the research and check for accuracy of transcripts. This interview should last no more than 15 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The risks associated with this study are as follows:

- You may be uncomfortable discussing issues about your feelings of stress.
- You may experience additional stress due to these discussions.
- You may feel uncomfortable discussing these issues with Directors of Guidance and Counseling

If at any time you do experience any discomfort or stress from discussing these issues or if you feel uncomfortable discussing issues with the Directors of Guidance and Counseling, you may withdraw from the study. You are under no obligation to continue should you feel discomfort. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you would be able to do so, by contacting the researcher either by phone, email or mail. Contact information for the researcher is listed in the section below entitled “How to Withdraw from the Study.”

There are no real benefits to the individual participant; however, the following benefits to society could include:

- Awareness may be raised for needs of the middle school counselors as it relates to job stress and burnout prevention.

- Strategies and information acquired may be useful to novice counselors who are just starting out and to other counselors or districts supervisors who may be having issues with counselor burnout.
- Students may be better served with counselors who are not burned out.

Compensation:

Participation in the actual study is strictly voluntary; however, the Directors of Guidance and Counseling and the middle school counselor who participate in the study, will receive a \$25 dollar gift certificate to Starbucks as a token of appreciation for their time. The true benefit will arise from knowing that you have contributed valuable information regarding the methods used in this pilot study. This will aid the researcher in the development and completion of the final study which will contribute to the body of research regarding middle school counselors and their stress and burnout prevention.

Confidentiality:

The records regarding the identity of the participants of this study will be kept private. The data gathered will be used to test methods and questions used in the actual study. In any report published, no identifiable information will be included that will make it possible to identify a subject. The actual results of the research will not be published; however, information obtained will be used in a review of the methods. Research records and data will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

The middle school counselor pilot study volunteer will be assigned a code. Responses to questions and interviews will be assigned coded categories as well. In the reports, the counselors will be assigned pseudo-names.

All counselors will be assigned a code known only to the researcher to log into the focus group; therefore, no supervisor will know who is logged in. The website will be a secure website and no one will be able to access it except for members in the study and the researcher.

All cities, campuses and school districts in the study will be assigned pseudo names. These pseudonyms will be used in any published reports.

Again, none of the actual data collected in the Pilot Study will be used in any publish report. Instead, only information based upon the pilot study regarding changes to methods, techniques or questions will be published. .

Tapes of interviews will be kept in locked storage. They will only be listened to by researchers, the professional transcriptionist (who will sign a letter of confidentiality) and the dissertation committee (if requested). The audio tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and once permission is received from the chair. Data gathered from the transcripts will be coded. The transcripts of the interviews and the data gathered from the transcripts will be stored on removable disks and kept in separate locked cabinets. The data will be destroyed three years after the study is published as required by law.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw From the Study:

At any point in the study, the participant may decide to withdraw from the study for any reason. If the participant decides to withdraw, the participant simply needs to contact the researcher, advising the researcher of the decision to withdraw from the study. The researcher may be contacted by mail, telephone or email. Contact information is listed below.

If the participant decides to withdraw, none of the data collected will be used in any reports or publications. Instead all data will be destroyed as follows: A separate audio tape will be utilized in the one-to one interviews. Therefore if the participant withdraws, their tape will be erased and destroyed. In the online focus group, any information with their code in the transcriptions will be deleted. Any transcripts of the participant who withdraws will be deleted. All journals or lists of that participant will also be destroyed or deleted if on the computer.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this pilot study is: Janice Hurt. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 11516 Owling Way, Manor, Texas 78653. Phone: (512)658-8298, email: jhurt@liberty.edu. The faculty advisor is Dr. Mark Lamport. Contact Information for Dr. Lamport is as follows: email:

malamport@liberty.edu.

Phone: (616)238-2532.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this pilot study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

- ☐ I agree to be audio recorded during the face to face interviews.
- ☐ I agree that the text that I type in the online focus group will be transcribed verbatim and downloaded to the researcher's computer via a secure software interface.
- ☐ I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX N: Script for Recruiting Director of Guidance and Counseling Participant for Pilot Study

11516 Owling Way
Manor, Texas 78653

Janice Lee Hurt
jhurt@liberty.edu

C: (512)658-8298
W: (512)278-4875

Hello,

My name is Janice Hurt, and I am a doctoral candidate. I attend Liberty University, and I am writing my dissertation on middle school counselors; specifically, I am researching the phenomenon of stress and burnout in middle school counselors who work in urban school districts in Texas.

Because you are a Director of Guidance and Counselor in an urban city in Texas, I would like to invite you to participate in the pilot study.

Participating in this pilot study will help the researcher test her protocol along with her interview questions and any software that may be used in the study. This may benefit all middle school counselors as it is hoped that the results of the actual study will raise awareness about middle school counselor stress and provide a better understanding through education of the needs of the middle school counselor. If you agree to participate in the pilot study, you would be asked to participate in the following activities: 1) A 90 minute audio recorded face to face interview with the researcher; 2) an online focus group with one middle school counselors another city in Texas (less than two hours). This online focus group will be text based. Your responses will be transcribed via the Qualtrics online focus group platform and downloaded to the researcher's computer; and 3) finally, you will be asked provide a list of wellness activities, professional development or programs available to your middle school counselors this month that might help them cope with or prevent stress. The 90 minute interview, the online focus group and writing out the list of available activities should take approximately four hours total of your time. If you agree to participate in the pilot study, no identifying information will be used in any publication that could tie you back to any data collected. Actual data from this pilot study will not be used in the publication. Only information about the methods and questions discovered during the pilot study along with changes that were made to improve upon the study may be published. In any publication, pseudonyms for all participants and all cities, districts and regions will be used. In addition to this, you will be given an opportunity to review any data collected from you, for accuracy, making any changes necessary. Finally, you can choose to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research and for any reason. If you do choose to withdraw, you may do so by notifying the researcher by phone, email or by mail of your wish to do so. If you withdraw from the study, none of the information collected will be used in the final data analysis nor will it be published in any publication.

Do you have any questions about the pilot study or what will be required if you decide to participate?

[Answer all questions asked by the participant].

Would you be willing to participate in this pilot study?

[If no, thank the person for their time. If yes, proceed as follows]: I will need you to sign an Informed Consent form before the 90 minute audiotaped interview can take place. We will also need to set up a time and place for the 90 minute face to face interview to be conducted. Is there a place where you would prefer to meet where we can go over the consent form and conduct the interview? What date and time would be convenient for you to participate in the interview? [Set up a time and place to meet for the 90 minute face- to face interview.] [Get any contact information necessary and volunteer to email the consent form to the participant before the meeting so that the participant can read over the document before the meeting]. I would like to send you a copy of the consent form before we meet so that you can go over it and ask any additional questions you may have before we meet for the interview. Where would you like me to email the consent form? You may email me with any questions at jhurt@liberty.edu or call me at (512)658-8298. Thank you so much for volunteering to participate in this pilot study regarding middle school counselor stress and burnout. Your contribution may be crucial to the reduction of middle school counselor stress and the prevention of burnout. I will call you the day before our scheduled meeting to confirm our appointment.

Again, thank you so much for your help with this study and for caring about middle school counselors enough to invest your time in this study that may be very helpful to middle school counselors and the students they serve!

APPENDIX O: Script for Recruiting Pilot Middle School Participant

11516 Owling Way
Manor, Texas 78653

Janice Lee Hurt
jhurt@liberty.edu

C: (512)658-8298
W: (512)278-4875

Hello,

My name is Janice Hurt, and I am a doctoral candidate. I attend Liberty University, and I am writing my dissertation on middle school counselors; specifically, I am researching the phenomenon of stress and burnout in middle school counselors who work in urban school districts in Texas. I would like to invite you to participate in a pilot study.

Participating in this pilot study will benefit the researcher as it will help her to test her questions and processes before beginning the actual study. The actual study may benefit all middle school counselors as it is hoped that the results of the actual study will raise awareness about middle school counselor stress and provide a better understanding through education of the needs of the middle school counselor. If you agree to participate in the actual study, you would be asked to participate in the following activities: 1) Complete the Informed Consent form for the Pilot Study 1) a preliminary demographic survey and a counselor burnout inventory on Survey Monkey; 2) A 90 minute audio recorded face to face interview with the researcher; 2) an online focus group with one Director of Guidance and Counseling from an urban city in Texas (less than two hours). This online focus group will be text based. Your responses will be transcribed via the Qualtrics online focus group platform and downloaded to the researcher's computer; and 3) finally, you will be asked to keep a journal of job related stress and stress management activities (over a period of one week). The 90 minute interview, the online focus group and recording in the journal should take approximately four hours total of your time. If you agree to participate in this study, the information provided in the preliminary results from the survey monkey demographic survey and burnout inventory will NOT be used in the analysis of the data. Only issues related to methods, techniques or questions will be noted in the publication. In addition, no identifying information will be used in any publication that could tie you back to any data. In any publication, pseudonyms for all participants and all cities, districts and regions will be used. In addition to this, you will be given an opportunity to review any data collected from you, for accuracy, making any changes necessary. You may also decide to exclude anything related to your participation in the pilot study in the final publication. Finally, you can choose to withdraw from the pilot study at any stage of the research and for any reason. If you do choose to withdraw, you may do so by notifying the researcher by phone, email or by mail of your wish to do so. If you withdraw from the study, none of the information collected will be used in the final data analysis nor will it be published in any publication.

Participation in the actual study is strictly voluntary; however, the middle school counselor who participates in the pilot study will receive a \$25 dollar gift certificate to Starbucks as a token of appreciation for their time.

Do you have any questions about the pilot study or what will be required if you decide to participate?

[Answer all questions asked by the participant].

Would you be willing to participate in this study?

[If no, thank the person for their time. If yes, proceed as follows]: I will need you to sign an Informed Consent form before the 90 minute audiotaped interview can take place. We will also need to set up a time and place for the 90 minute face to face interview to be conducted. Is there a place where you would prefer to meet where we can go over the consent form and conduct the interview? What date and time would be convenient for you to participate in the interview? [Set up a time and place to meet for the 90 minute face- to face interview.] [Get any contact information necessary and volunteer to email the consent form to the participant before the meeting so that the participant can read over the document before the meeting]. I would like to send you a copy of the consent form for the pilot study before we meet so that you can go over it and ask any additional questions you may have before we meet for the interview. Where would you like me to email the consent form? You may email me with any questions at jhurt@liberty.edu or call me at (512)658-8298. Thank you so much for volunteering to participate in this pilot study regarding middle school counselor stress and burnout. Your contribution may be crucial to the reduction of middle school counselor stress and the prevention of burnout. I will call you the day before our scheduled meeting to confirm our appointment.

Again, thank you so much for your help with this study and for caring about your profession enough to try to make a difference!

APPENDIX P: Letter of Confidentiality



NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT (Capital Typing, Inc.): CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

This Non-Disclosure Agreement (the "Agreement") is entered into on this **16th** day of **April, 2014** between **Capital Typing, Inc.**, located at 37 Pritchard Farm Lane, Bluffton, South Carolina, 29910, herein referred to as Receiving Party, and Janice Hurt herein referred to as the Disclosing Party, for the purpose of preventing the unauthorized disclosure of Confidential Information as defined below. The parties agree to enter into a confidential relationship with respect to the disclosure of certain proprietary and confidential information ("Confidential Information").

1. Definition of Confidential Information. For purposes of this Agreement, "Confidential Information" shall include all information or material that has or could have commercial value or other utility in the business in which Disclosing Party or Disclosing Party's clients or affiliates are engaged, including but not limited to the following: information concerning secret processes, components, inventions, creations, systems, designs, materials, software, improvements, ideas, specifications, or arts relating to products and services, as well as financial projections, financing plans, inquiry lists, customer lists, and other business information related to present and prospective business activities of the company. All information, and all documents, audio files, records, notebooks, drawings, photographs, and any repositories or representations of such information are hereinafter referred to as Confidential Information.

2. Exclusions from Confidential Information. Receiving Party's obligations under this Agreement do not extend to information that is: (a) publicly known at the time of disclosure or subsequently becomes publicly known through no fault of the Receiving Party; (b) discovered or created by the Receiving Party before disclosure by Disclosing Party; (c) learned by the Receiving Party through legitimate means other than from the Disclosing Party or Disclosing Party's representatives.

3. Obligations of Receiving Party. Receiving Party shall hold and maintain the Confidential Information in strictest confidence for the sole and exclusive benefit of the Disclosing Party. Receiving Party shall carefully restrict access to Confidential Information to employees, contractors and third parties as is reasonably required and shall require those persons to sign nondisclosure restrictions at least as protective as those in this Agreement. Receiving Party shall not, without prior written approval of Disclosing Party, use for Receiving Party's own benefit, publish, copy, or otherwise disclose to others, or permit the use by others for their benefit or to the detriment of Disclosing Party, any Confidential Information. Receiving Party shall return to Disclosing Party any and all records, notes, and other written, printed, or tangible materials in its possession pertaining to Confidential Information immediately if Disclosing Party requests it in writing.

4. Time Periods. The nondisclosure provisions of this Agreement shall survive the termination of this Agreement and Receiving Party's duty to hold Confidential Information in confidence shall remain in effect until the Confidential Information no longer qualifies as a trade secret or until Disclosing Party sends Receiving Party written notice releasing Receiving Party from this Agreement, whichever occurs first.

5. Relationships. Nothing contained in this Agreement shall be deemed to constitute either party a partner, joint venturer or employee of the other party for any purpose.

6. Severability. If a court finds any provision of this Agreement invalid or unenforceable, the remainder of this Agreement shall be interpreted so as best to affect the intent of the parties.

7. Integration. This Agreement expresses the complete understanding of the parties with respect to the subject matter and supersedes all prior proposals, agreements, representations and understandings. This Agreement may not be amended except in a writing signed by both parties.

8. Waiver. The failure to exercise any right provided in this Agreement shall not be a waiver of prior or subsequent rights.

This Agreement and each party's obligations shall be binding on the representatives, assigns and successors of such party. Each party has signed this Agreement through its authorized representative.

David Jonas

Capital Typing, Inc.

4/18/2014

Signature of Receiving Party:

Date:

Name of Disclosing Party

Signature of Disclosing Party:

Date: 4/18/2014