SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DECISION MAKING:

A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

by

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(Under the Direction of Dr. Jolie Daigle)

ABSTRACT

School counselors have voiced a desire for more training and professional development, specifically in the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs, college and career advisement, addressing mental health needs, and crisis response and management. School counseling professional competencies and code of ethics describe the need for and obligation to professional development. While opportunities for professional development are likely available, there is little literature describing school counselors' involvement in professional development.

The purpose of this study is to generate a new theory, grounded in the collected qualitative data, of how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development. The intent of this study is to use the resulting theory to offer insight, enhance understanding, and contribute to the literature regarding school counselors' professional development decision making. Therefore, the research question guiding this endeavor was, "What factors explain

school counselors' decision making regarding professional development?" Semi-structured interviews were conducted and data was collected and analyzed using Constructivist Grounded Theory methods (Charmaz, 2014).

Four themes emerged from data analysis and were used to create a three-circle Venn diagram which visually represents the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model.* The four themes were (a) *Lifelong Learner Foundation,* (b) *Logistics*, (c) *Interest*, and (d) *Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program.* Sub-factors within each theme provided further explanation on the decision-making process of school counselors regarding professional development. The first theme represented how enrollment in a "Transforming School Counseling Initiative" school counseling program laid a foundation of lifelong learning for school counselors and thus influenced the value placed on professional development. It is with a foundation in lifelong learning and at the intersection of the three remaining themes that professional development decisions are made. The findings of this study were presented through the lens of three developmental perspectives: (a) role identity theories, (b) Super's Life-Span Life-Space theory of career development, and (c) Ronnestad and Skovholt's Model of Therapist Development.

INDEX WORDS: Professional Development, School Counselors, School Counseling,

Decision Making

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Benjamin W. Spaulding, Jr., and to my daughter, Ella Reneé Sewell.

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It is hard to believe that my doctoral journey is almost complete. This process has definitely been a challenge, but has allowed me to grow both personally and professionally. There are many who supported me throughout this process that I want to acknowledge. First, I want to thank my husband, Fred, for his daily support and encouragement. He never once complained about the demands of the doctoral program or my writing process. His faith in my ability to succeed helped me to believe a little stronger in myself. I would like to thank my mom for emotional support throughout this process and my mother-in-law for providing me with at least one study day a week.

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and I am so honored to have gotten to know you and learn from you. Dr. Haskins, your arrival to the program shook things up for my cohort. However, we learned pretty quickly that you indeed offered both challenge and support. Thank you for both!

Writing a dissertation can be a tedious process and just when I felt defeated, I joined Dr. Corey Johnson's writing retreats! This was such a great experience and I truly felt like a writer. Thank you, Corey, for providing this alternative writing structure, for your expertise and feedback, and for spreading your enthusiasm and love for qualitative writing!

I must acknowledge Starbucks on Atlanta Hwy, also known as my office. I began to recognize that I had been spending too much time at Starbucks when these incidences occurred within the same week:

1. After picking up a coffee from the drive-thru window, Barista Tommy casually says, "See you in the morning!" I realized that Tommy knew my schedule better than I did and that I would in fact be there the next morning.

2. The following morning, I arrived at Starbucks, walked to the counter to place my order and the cashier asks, "Would you like your usual Grande dark in a mug?"

3. Later that week, I was sitting in a different seat from where I typically like to sit. Another frequent customer jokes, "You must not have paid rent for your seat this month."

While I'm sure Starbucks has no idea that it played a role in my successfully completing this journey, this establishment provided the backdrop for my dissertation work and ensured my caffeine levels were appropriate at all times!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people to learn.

- *Peter Drucker*

School counselors desire professional development, yet little is known about school counselors' current involvement in professional development activities or how school counselors make decisions about engagement in professional development. As the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) describes them, school counselors are "uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and personal/social development needs" (ASCA, ND). However, the researcher's experience suggests that the commonly used phrase, "uniquely qualified," reflects school counselors' knowledge base as broad but lacking depth.

School counselors are placed in an unrealistic position of "all things to all people" (Paisley & McMahon, 2001, pg 107). School counselors are educational leaders (Burnham, Dahir, & Stone, 2008), mental health providers (Walley & Grothaus, 2013), student support personnel, group process facilitators, social justice workers (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010), advocates (Dixon, Tucker, & Clark, 2010), college and career advisors (Coogan & Delucia-Waack, 2007), consultants and collaborators. In addition, school counselors are expected to be experts in child and adolescent growth and development (Paisley & McMahon, 2001); mental health conditions, diagnosis, medications, and treatments (Paisley & McMahon, 2001); data collection and analysis; character education (Paisley & McMahon, 2001); behavior modification and classroom management; learning disorders, assessments,

accommodations, and modifications; and much more. While every school counselor may not enact all of these roles, the reality is that most school counselors must perform roles in which extensive training was not provided, but simply introduced.

Neither personal nor professional development ends after graduation (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Paisley & Benshoff, 1996). This study addresses the lack of literature regarding school counselors' professional development, specifically examining how school counselors make decisions regarding engagement in professional development activities. To better understand the need for continuous involvement in professional development, the history of the profession must first be reviewed. The following sections include a background of the problem, statement of the problem, rationale for this study, and the purpose and significance of this study.

Background of the Problem

Vocational Guidance.

An historical examination of the school counseling profession demonstrates the current need for continued professional development due to school counselors' ever changing roles within the profession. The school counseling profession was originally called Vocational Guidance in the early 1990s and looked very similar to what career counseling looks like now, with a focus on the transition from school to work (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Frank Parsons, known as the Father of Vocational Guidance, believed that schools were not preparing students with the technical and vocational skills needed to obtain work (Herr, 2013). Therefore, Parsons developed a three-step approach of vocational guidance, now known as the trait and factor approach (Erford, 2007). During this time the role of vocational guidance counselors was to provide guidance in career decision making, specifically for those students entering the

working class (Herr, 2013). At that time, vocational guidance counselors were no more than teachers required to perform additional guidance tasks (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

Promoting Student Development.

In the early 1900s John Dewey (1909) suggested that the purpose of school was to provide students with experiences that would promote cognitive, personal, social, and moral development (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). As a result of this new developmental outlook, teachers working as vocational guidance counselors implemented a guidance curriculum to support student development (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Even as early as the 1920s, concerns about the varying roles of vocational guidance counselors was expressed, that with no agreed-upon structure for program and curricular implementation, vocational guidance counselors would become a victim of "other duties as assigned" (Brewer, 1922; Meyers, 1923; & Fitch, 1936). Varying duties of school counselors is still a concern today and contributes to the ongoing role confusion between school counselors and other stakeholders, discussed later in chapter 2.

Defining Identity.

School counselors' identity began to take shape in the 1950s and 1960s with a variety of facilitating events. Teacher-counselors were replaced by full time guidance counselors (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). In 1952 the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) was founded, and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) collaborated with ASCA to develop counselor preparation programs at land grant colleges and universities (Erford, 2007). Carl Rogers' *Counseling and Psychotherapy* (1942) also contributed to the changing identity of school counselors, particularly elementary school counselors, through an emphasis on nondirective helping relationships (Thompson, 1968).

Comprehensive Programs.

Norman Gysbers, later an advocate of comprehensive school guidance programs (Good, Fischer, Johnston, Jr. & Heppner, 1994) stated that the mental health perspective was becoming more popular among school counselors and that school counselors were neglecting students' career guidance and development. ASCA leaders began supporting the idea that school counselors were both counselors, who attend to students' developmental and personal/social needs, as well as educators, who impact student achievement. Wrenn (1962) also asserted that school counseling should emphasize students' holistic development and recommended that counselors develop multiple approaches to address the comprehensive developmental needs of students, thus introducing another shift in the school counseling profession--comprehensive school counseling programs.

Transforming School Counseling.

Influenced by the Education Trust's National Center for Transforming School Counseling (NCTSC) and the 1990s' School Reform initiatives to address educational inequities (Perkins, Oescher, & Ballard, 2010), ASCA published the *ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (2003). The ASCA National Model is a framework which guides school counselors in the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program aimed at directly and systematically impacting student achievement. Therefore, the role of school counselors shifted in focus from services directed primarily towards a small percentage of individual students to working systematically to serve all students (Foster, Young, and Hermann, 2005). The ASCA National Model was initially released in 2003 and was revised in 2005 and again in 2012 (ASCA, 2012a).

NCTSC focused its efforts on training and retraining school counselors to serve as advocates, researchers, and data collectors (Ed Trust, 2003) by providing grants to six universities with a goal of incorporating the following into school counselor preparation programs: the selection of diverse counseling candidates, altering training curriculum, enhancing field experience and practice, ongoing professional development for faculty, and partnerships between universities and school districts, and universities and departments of education. This collaboration with the Education Trust and ASCA resulted in infused themes of advocacy, leadership, and systemic change in the *ASCA National Model* (ASCA, 2003) and school counseling training programs. One NCTSC partner university, The University of Georgia, and its revamped school counseling training program is described below.

The University of Georgia.

The University of Georgia, one of six universities provided with a grant from the National Center for Transforming School Counseling, worked to revamp its school counseling preparation program to align with the new direction of school counseling. In a 2002 article, Hayes and Paisley described the resulting structure of their school counseling master's program. UGA's desire was to train school counselors to be effective social change agents, enhance the lives of every child in school, and to improve the world community (Hayes & Paisley, 2002). To transform school counselor preparation, new content was added and emphasis was placed for students to become lifelong learners who recognized that current knowledge is only temporary knowledge (Paisley & Hayes, 2003).

Five basic assumptions were foundational to the transforming of the preparation program: (a) human development is the basic framework for counseling theory and practice, (b) experiential learning is the only way to learn, (c) group work facilitates personal development

and encourages social construction of learning, (d) psychological concepts are taught as means to promote human development, and (e) technology is vital to learning and thriving. The cohort model allowed students to enroll in the program and to proceed through the program together, allowing students to develop learning communities and negotiate interpersonal and organizational issues over a sustained period of time. The revised program sought potential students that were passionate and effective social change agents for students, were flexible, tolerant of ambiguity, comfortable with a wide range of emotions, open-minded, self-directed yet collaborative, and enthusiastic learners. The potential students must trust themselves and others in new learning situations and seek the best in every relationship. Lastly, potential students must embrace diversity and can be critical as well as creative thinkers.

While The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards were guidelines for basic content of both school and community counseling cohorts, ASCA standards are used to guide specific content in UGA's revised school counseling programs (Foundations of School Counseling, Professional Development Seminar, Practicum, and Internship). UGA's curriculum was designed to be delivered over six semesters, two academic years, and was sequenced to allow the cohort to experience typical group developmental processes including building group cohesion, resolving conflict, and developing cooperative skills in group tasks. The program evaluation process was multifaceted and required exiting students to complete a comprehensive exam evaluating mastery of program content, a quantitative survey of satisfaction using a Likert scale to assess adequacy of the program, and an exit interview conducted by doctoral students which was then coded for themes. Program evaluation was ongoing and used to inform both the process and content of the program.

Classic City Counselors Collaborative[1].

A unique component of UGA's school counseling training program, which contributed to the Education Trust's selection of UGA as a Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) university, was the Classic City Counselors Collaborative (the Collaborative), an organization comprised of UGA school counselor educators, local practicing school counselors, and school counseling graduate students. The goal of this organization was to provide mutual support and professional development for school counselors and counselor educators in the county.

In 1997, the School Counseling Program at UGA and the Clarke County School District received the TSCI $65,000 planning grant followed by a $450,000 implementation grant to transform the preparation and practice of school counselors. These planning and implementation grants from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund allowed the Collaborative to extend its work that had begun in 1991. Funds from the TSCI grant helped the Collaborative to implement or strengthen the following key components: (a) monthly meetings of counselors, counselor educators, and graduate students, (b) annual conferences for local counselors, graduate students, and alumni to provide updates on professional issues and provide opportunities for sharing from the field, (c) annual summer professional development opportunities for partnership counselors, graduate students, and program faculty members on topics related to the new roles for school counselors, (d) annual gatherings of Collaborative members, other school and university personnel, and community leaders to consider issues facing children and adolescents, and (e) development of a Counseling and Performance Assessment Lab to provide technological support for school counselors. Many of these initiatives continued beyond the end of the funding period.

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[1] Information in this section was obtained from a historical document entitled "Classic City Counselors Collaborative" with no author or date and provided as a hardcopy by personal contact.

Through the Collaborative, UGA program faculty, local counselors, and graduate students have published and presented together, have received substantial grant funding, and have conducted research studies to improve the educational experiences of local Pre-kindergarten through 12th grade (P-12) students. Other accomplishments of the Collaborative include an improved curriculum at the university, challenging the practice of counseling in the local school district, providing a model of counselor preparation and university/community collaboration within the state and nation, advocating for maintaining a commitment to school counseling in the midst of difficult economic times, creating a community of professionals whose work lives are enriched by their work together, enhancing the quality of UGA's school counselor preparation programs, and improved services to P-12 students through comprehensive school counseling programming. Because of this unique and innovative structure, other school districts have implemented similar support and professional development groups modeled after the Collaborative.

College and Career Readiness.

The most recent shift in school counselors' role is the focus on students' college and career readiness, bringing the profession full circle and back to its roots in vocational guidance. Championed by First Lady Michelle Obama and her Reach Higher Initiative (whitehouse.gov/reach-higher), school counselors are called upon to be leaders in the college and career readiness movement. It has even been suggested that drastic changes occur, such as revising job descriptions of school counselors to focus on equity in preparing all students for college and career, modifying school counseling training programs to center on equity in college and career readiness, aligning school counseling credentials to reflect college and career ready counseling, requiring school counselors to deliver professional development to faculty on

developing strong college and career readiness programs, and aligning school counselors' evaluation to measures of college and career readiness (Hines & Lemons, 2011).

This brief history of the profession illustrates the ever-changing nature of school counseling and the need to stay up to date on changes in the field. For example, given that the ASCA National Model is only 12 years old, veteran school counselors trained prior to 2003, without opportunities for professional development, may not have had training in developing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling program nor possess an understanding of advocacy, leadership, and systemic change. Likewise, current school counselors must begin to understand the college and career readiness movement and determine what new knowledge and skills are needed. Without ongoing engagement in professional development activities, it becomes difficult for school counselors to remain abreast of changes in knowledge, current practices, and shifts in the field.

Role Confusion and Professional Development.

It is evident that over the past century of school counseling, various areas of foci have driven the profession at any given time. While some components of school counseling have remained the same, other components are markedly different. Unfortunately, the result of the profession's evolution is often role confusion and a pertinent need to define our roles in schools. Equally important are school counselors' need, ability, and desire to obtain the skills needed to evolve with the profession. However, professional development of school counselors is an underdeveloped area of study (Konstam, Cook, Tomek, Mahdavi, Garcia, & Bayne, 2015) and there is little literature that describes school counselors' engagement in professional development activities. As this study sought to explore how school counselors make decisions about professional development, there was an underlying assumption that one's understanding of their

professional role influences the decision-making process regarding the professional development activities sought out.

Problem Statement

As illustrated above, school counselors' roles and duties are plentiful and role ambiguity is prevalent throughout the school counseling profession (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Relevant literature acknowledges that defining the role of school counselors is critically important (Sparks, 2003) and that professional growth is complicated by the multifaceted roles and responsibilities of school counselors (Konstam et al ., 2015). However, literature regarding the professional development of school counselors is unclear, difficult to access, or unavailable (Remley & Herlihy, 2010).

School counselors have voiced a desire for more training and professional development, specifically in the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs (Poynton, Schumacher, & Wilczenski, 2008), college and career advisement (Anctil, Smith, Schenck, & Dahir, 2012), addressing mental health needs (Carson & Kees, 2013; Husky, Miller, McGuire, Flynn, & Olfson, 2011; Roberts, Alegria, Roberts, & Chen, 2005; Thompson & May, 2006), and crisis response and management (McAdams, Shillingfod, & Trice-Black, 2011). School counseling professional competencies and code of ethics describe the need for and obligation to professional development (Konstam et al ., 2015). While opportunities for professional development (supervision, school or district based professional development opportunities or requirements, and professional organization options) are likely available, there is little literature describing school counselors' involvement in professional development; thus, there is a lack of understanding of how these decisions are made.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to generate a new theory, grounded in the collected qualitative data, of how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development. The intent of this study is to use the resulting theory to offer insight, enhance understanding, and contribute to the literature regarding school counselors' involvement in professional development. Therefore, the research question guiding this endeavor is, "What factors explain school counselors' decision making regarding professional development?" Semi-structured interviews were conducted and data was collected and analyzed using Constructivist Grounded Theory methods (Charmaz, 2014).

Overview of Methodology

As the answers to the research question will result in an explanation, in the form of a new theory of how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development, Grounded Theory methodology is used. Constructivism epistemology most closely aligns with the researcher's ontological worldview. The interpretivism paradigm argues that people actively make sense of their own world and themselves, and that researchers cannot understand people, events, and phenomena without understanding the distinctive thoughts, feelings, actions and characteristics of the culture investigated. Charmaz (1990) introduced an approach to Grounded Theory research from the constructivist and interpretivist lens and identified it as a contemporary version of the classic Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967). With attention to the ontological worldview of the researcher, this study uses the Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology as described by Charmaz (2006).

Significance of the Study

Heightened attention placed on the school counseling profession by First Lady Michelle Obama's Reach Higher initiative, which endorses school counselors as the mitigating factor in the successful college enrollment and matriculation of high school students, positions this research at a time of increased stakeholder interest in the profession. In addition, the documented need for professional development, coupled with the often ambiguous role of school counselors, highlights the significance of this study.

The responsibility for meeting the professional development needs for school counselors must be shared by school counselors, counselor educators, and local school systems (Paisley & Benshoff 1996), all of which are among the groups most likely impacted by this study. As a result of this study, school leaders will recognize the importance of counseling – specific professional development and, therefore, may increase opportunities and support for professional development within and outside of the school district. Counselor educators strive to instruct counselors-in-training on how to successfully apply the theories of the field into real world settings. This includes instilling a commitment to lifelong learning. Hence, counselor educators will be able to provide guidance to counselors-in-training on how to obtain and engage in relevant and needed professional development once in the field. School counselors will gain insight into the importance of professional development and will increase their awareness of the factors that may contribute to or hinder their engagement in professional development activities. Finally, students will obtain the greatest benefit from this study through the greater impact of school counselors who engage in more frequent and relevant professional development.

Adding to the limited literature on professional development of school counselors, this study will not only describe how school counselors engage in professional development, but will

offer an explanation of the influences that impact school counselors' decisions about professional development. With this new knowledge and resulting theory, school counselors and relevant stakeholders will have a tool available to better understand how to provide professional development that is meaningful to school counselors.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined according to their use in this study and are organized in alphabetical order.

Professional Development

For the purpose of this study, professional development refers to formal activities that enhance and upgrade professional knowledge and skills. These activities may include, but are not limited to, seminars, workshops, conferences, webinars, presentation, supervision, and advance graduate or postgraduate courses that directly pertain to school counseling.

Professional Organization

Professional organizations are a body of persons engaged in the same profession, usually a nonprofit organization, formed to maintain standards, represent the profession and the interests of individuals engaged in that profession, and to further the profession.

School Counselors

ASCA describes school counselors as certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and personal/ social development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success. Professional school counselors are employed in elementary, middle/junior high and high schools (ASCA, ND).

School Counselor Preparation Programs

School counselor preparation programs are "facilitated by counselor educators who have the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to prepare school counselors to promote the academic, career and personal/social development of all school counseling students" (ASCA, 2014a, p.2).

School District

School district, or district, refers to an organization of schools where a school board, board of education, or similar body provides administrative government and leadership.

Supervision

Supervision is an "intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior member of that same profession" (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009, p. 7) that is evaluative and hierarchical, extends over time, and has the purpose of enhancing professional functioning, monitoring the quality of services offered to the client, and serves as a gatekeeping process for the profession.

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Chapter Summary

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This chapter presented preliminary information regarding the focus of this qualitative research study. Relevant background information related to the history of the school counseling profession was presented as well as a statement about the impact of an evolving profession and role ambiguity on school counselors' need for professional development. The significance of the study was described and proposed methodology introduced. The following chapters will discuss literature as it relates to the current state of school counseling, the need for professional development, professional development opportunities for school counselors, counselor identity, and a discussion of different perspectives that might offer insight into school counseling professional development decision-making. Additionally, the methodology will be outlined.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature related to school counselors' engagement in professional development activities. In this chapter, the current state of school counseling and the need for professional development are discussed, followed by a description of the professional development options for school counselors. The conceptual framework utilizing role identity is described. The researcher aims to generate a new theory, grounded in the collected qualitative data, of how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development. Specifically, the research question guiding this study is, "What factors explain school counselors' decision making regarding professional development?" Additionally, the intent of this study is to use the developed theory to inform the profession and add to relevant literature of how to best engage school counselors in ongoing professional development.

The Current State of School Counseling

As described in Chapter 1, the school counseling profession originally focused on the vocational development of students and the transition from school to the workplace (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Since then, the role of school counselors has been in constant evolution. The Industrial Revolution prompted an expansion of services offered by school counselors. The formation of professional organizations, school reform, and the Transforming School Counseling Initiative worked in an effort to provide a clear role for school counselors; yet, the shifting focus of school counselors has resulted in role ambiguity within the profession.

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity is prevalent throughout the school counseling profession and school counselors often have different perceptions of their roles in the schools (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). One reason for this role confusion is that students, administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders (Paisley & McMahon, 2001) often define the school counselor's role within the school, not the school counselor. In a study that aimed to learn how students define the role of school counselors, Lambie and Williamson (2004) found that overwhelmingly, students believed the most important role of school counselors was to help with college selection. In addition to college decision making, students identified scheduling and grades among the list of the most important roles for school counselors. The students identified roles of school counselors that more closely align with the original role of the vocational guidance counselors and roles that do not reflect the unique set of skills school counselors possess (Coogan & Delucia-Waack, 2007).

A similar survey of school counselors, elementary school administrators, and elementary teachers found that attending to students' social/emotional needs was the role most valued by stakeholders and that school counselors' involvement in academic achievement was less valued (Perkins, Oescher, & Ballard, 2010). This is another example of how the role of school counselors within a school setting can be influenced by the perceptions of stakeholders.

There is growing evidence, however, that stakeholders are gaining a clearer understanding of school counselors' roles. When principals-in-training received information on the role of school counselors as described by ASCA, they were able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate tasks of school counselors (Bringman, Mueller, & Lee, 2010). Therefore, it is likely that more recently trained administrators that received information

regarding the appropriate role of school counselors may have a clearer understanding of the specific and unique role of school counselors in schools.

While role ambiguity holds a significant place in school counseling history, and with society changing more rapidly than ever, school counselors must accept that their roles will continue to change over time and make a commitment to continued development (Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

Delivery of Services

As discussed, defining the role of school counselors is critically important for the collective identity of the profession (Sparks, 2003). The role of school counselors was made clearer with the development of the ASCA National Model (2003, 2005, 2012a), a framework which guides school counselors in the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program aimed at directly and systematically impacting student achievement. The ASCA National Model (2012a) calls for school counselors to make a shift from an isolated role of providing individual counseling services to students, to move towards implementing a program that services all students through collaboration with faculty, staff, administrators, and stakeholders (ASCA, 2003, 2005, 2012a). School counseling programs that incorporate the ASCA National Model (2012a) are comprehensive, developmental, and promote student achievement, career planning, and personal and social development for all students (ASCA, 2003, 2005, 2012a; Burnham, Dahir, & Stone, 2008).

The ASCA National Model recommends that school counselors deliver a core counseling curriculum, provide individual student planning, and offer responsive services. Delivery of the core counseling curriculum consists of developmentally and systematically teaching the ASCA Mindsets and Behavior (ASCA, 2014b) standards in K-12 classrooms and through group

activities. Individual student planning consists of those activities designed to assist students in meeting personal goals and developing plans for the future. Responsive services include responding to students' immediate needs through counseling, consultation, referral, providing information, or peer support.

In addition to these services, school counselors are required to be accountable for and efficiently manage the counseling program. Thus, school counselors must engage in accountability efforts to monitor and improve the quality of the counseling program and to provide evidence of the effectiveness of services (Fairchild, 1994, ASCA, 2012a). School counselor management and accountability measures include the use of calendars, an advisory council, creating and implementing actions plans, completing and disseminating results reports, and conducting program audits.

A study of professional school counselors found that those who implemented a comprehensive school counseling program reported higher levels of job satisfaction (Pyne, 2011). One school counselor described that implementing a comprehensive school counseling program helped her to better understand her role as a "manager of a program" versus just being a "counselor" who works in a school (Scarborough & Luke, 2008). Another study found that elementary students attending a school with an implemented comprehensive school counseling program performed better on achievement measures than peers enrolled in schools without a comprehensive school counseling program (Sink & Stroh, 2003). Likewise, teachers, counselors, and community members all reported favorable responses to the implementation of a comprehensive school counselor program in a rural school (Bergin & Miller, 1990).

Not all scholars in the field believed that a comprehensive school counseling program can account for academic achievements. Brown & Trusty (2005) reason that counselors are being

held more accountable as a result of comprehensive school counseling programs, but are not doing the necessary research to determine a causal relationship between the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program and increased student achievement. Simply, the only results that can be drawn from the data collected from the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs is that there has been a noted increase in indirect services such as consultation and collaboration and a decrease in direct services such as individual counseling and crisis management (Walsh, Barrett, & DePaul, 2007). While comprehensive school counseling programs seem to deliver positive results, historically school counselors have not been trained to engage in the kind of research needed to state a causal relationship between the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program and student achievement. School counselors are not provided the appropriate training to successfully implement, monitor, and determine the effectiveness of such programs in relation to student success.

The Need for Professional Development

As a result of high caseloads, high demand, and the crucial role of school counselors, with a lack of confidence, training, and poor professional development, many counselors feel emotional exhaustion in their jobs (Wilkerson, 2009). A national survey (College Board, 2015) of 2,890 school counselors found that about 30% of school counselors believe that their training, both in graduate school and through ongoing professional development, has not prepared them well for their job, and more than half stated that they were only somewhat well trained. The study also found a strong correlation between counselor preparation, both during graduate school and through ongoing professional development, and students' academic outcomes. A majority of the school counselors surveyed said they needed further training and greater resource support.

While there is scant literature that describes the desire for professional development among school counselors, even less research has been conducted that describes school counselors' current involvement in professional development. School counselors have identified specific topics in which professional development is needed, including implementation and evaluation of comprehensive school counseling programs, college and career readiness, child and adolescent behavioral and mental health needs, and crisis and school violence response, which are described below.

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

The Education Trust, with the goal to promote academic achievement for marginalized students, in collaboration with the DeWitt Wallace Fund (national philanthropy with the mission to foster improvements in learning for disadvantaged children) began to study how school counselors were trained and found that improvements were needed (Perkins, Oescher, & Ballard, 2010). For example, school counselors in Massachusetts expressed concern about their ability to implement a comprehensive school counseling program because of their lack of training to evaluate program outcomes (Poynton, Schumacher, & Wilczenski, 2008). Similarly, the Alabama Department of Education sought to measure how well the school counselors were implementing comprehensive school counseling programs (Burnham, Dahir, & Stone, 2008). Burnham, Dahir, and Stone (2008) concluded that Alabama counselors lacked the necessary skills to form partnerships with school administrators and teachers and needed additional professional development in leadership, advocacy, use of data, and collaboration.

Furthermore, in a grounded theory study aimed at identifying the factors of a successful comprehensive school counseling program, Scarborough and Luke (2008) found that specific skills were necessary for program implementation: "people skills," counseling skills, writing

skills, communication skills, and organizational skills. The development of these skills is rarely the focus of literature regarding the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs. It would behoove school counselors to receive professional development in these areas to effectively implement comprehensive school counseling programs.

College and Career Readiness

The College Board conducted a survey in 2012 and found that a majority of school counselors acknowledged needing further training to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready and prepared for college and career. First Lady Michelle Obama launched the Reach Higher Initiative with a goal to increase the number of students enrolling in and obtaining post-secondary training. With heightened emphasis on college and career readiness, about 75% of school counselors reported needing more training to help students develop career goals, and 82% of school counselors surveyed reported seeking out professional development opportunities related to college and career readiness (Anctil, Smith, Schenck, & Dahir, 2012). While the desire for professional development is evident, how school counselors obtain this training is missing from the relevant literature.

Behavioral Health Needs

Multiple research studies have demonstrated that the behavioral health needs of children and adolescents go unattended (Carson & Kees, 2013; Husky, Kaplan, McGuire, Flynn, Chrostowski, & Olfson, 2011; Roberts, Alegria, Roberts, & Chen, 2005; Thompson & May, 2006). Howell and colleagues (2007) surveyed school counselors in Minnesota who identified specific topics desired for professional development including mental health issues such as suicide, eating disorders, and anxiety (Howell, et al., 2007). School counselors must be able to recognize and respond to mental health issues in order to effectively advocate for and support

students (Walley & Grothaus, 2013). Children who do not receive mental health treatment often struggle in school, as mental health is strongly related to academic performance (Hill, Ohmstead, Mims, 2012). School counselors would also benefit from additional training on specific mental health disorders so they may effectively provide direct and indirect services to students (Kaffenberger & O'Rorke-Trigiani, 2013).

Crisis and School Violence

School violence and crisis response is another area of professional development needed by school counselors. McAdams, Shillingfod, and Trice-Black (2011) found that school counselors had little knowledge of the advances in violence prevention and intervention in schools and, as a result, in an attempt to intervene, may potentially exacerbate the crisis instead of resolving it. Additionally, the researchers report participants' desires for more thorough and current knowledge regarding work with violent students that is more proactive and less reactive.

Ethical Decision Making

Ethical standards within the profession also offer guidance regarding the professional development of school counselors. The ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2010) state that school counselors must function within the boundaries of their competences, stay abreast of current research, and maintain professional competence. The ethical standards also call school counselors to participate in and facilitate professional development for self and others through attending conferences, reading *Professional School Counselor*, attending workshops and presentations, and seeking supervision. Therefore, professional ethical standards explicitly summon school counselors to engage in meaningful professional development. As ethical standards require school counselors to be competent practitioners, the responsibility ultimately

remains with individual school counselors to seek out professional development opportunities and to maintain professional competency (Konstam et al., 2015).

With each of the previously mentioned professional development topics, school counselors report and literature supports the need for professional development in these areas. However, little literature can be found that describes the professional development opportunities that are available to school counselors, the degree to which school counselors are taking advantage of these opportunities, and how such decisions are made.

Professional Competencies

The ASCA School Counselor Competencies (ASCA, 2012b) provides a list that outlines the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes school counselors should hold. These competencies include program evaluation, technology use, research analysis, consultation, counseling theories and techniques, and crisis prevention and response, goal setting, classroom management, instructional strategies, career planning and college admissions, and program implementation. Other competencies include lesson planning, small group facilitation, advocacy, systems change, data collection and disaggregation, organizational theory, ethical and legal decision making, learning theories, and leadership principles and theories. Many of these competencies are not explicitly taught in school counseling preparation programs, yet school counselors must demonstrate expertise in each of these content areas (ASCA, 2012b). The ASCA School Counselor Competencies provide a clear image of the wide array of tasks school counselors must perform and even more clearly demonstrate the need for ongoing professional development.

The relevant school counselor literature describes areas of professional development necessary for school counselors to be effective in their roles as ASCA model program managers. Also, research studies indicate that mental health issues and crisis response are areas for needed

professional development. Not only does the literature suggest areas of professional development, but the national school counseling professional organization (ASCA) details the areas in which school counselors need to be competent practitioners. While there is limited literature that describes professional development among school counselors (Brott & Myers, 1999), there are several methods of professional development that may be available to school counselors including: supervision, school-based/district-provided professional development, and professional associations. These professional development opportunities are described in the next section.

<center>**Professional Development Opportunities**</center>

Supervision

Supervision is a structure that offers guidance and support to practicing school counselors. Supervision is defined as an "intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior member of that same profession" (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009, p. 7). It is evaluative and hierarchical, extends over time, and has the purpose of enhancing professional functioning, monitoring the quality of services offered to the client, and serves as a gatekeeping process for the profession. School counselors often receive little or no supervision after completion of their training programs (Cashwell & Dooley, 2001). Novice and veteran school counselors alike often experience feelings of isolation (McMahon & Patton, 2000) and lack of peer support when working in small departments or when working alone (Loveless, 2010).

Loveless (2010) found that supervision helped to ameliorate some of the stress experienced by new counselors. Through supervision, both novice and veteran school counselors have reported increased feelings of accountability, skill development, and personal development, as well as opportunities for debriefing after traumatic or significant events that otherwise may not

be available (McMahon & Patton, 2000). Without supervision, counselors are unable to adequately reflect on their practice and develop skills beyond those obtained in their preparation programs (McMahon & Patton, 2000). Supervision provides the opportunity to integrate theory, skills, and practice while providing structure, feedback, and support that enhance the professional growth of the counselor (Cashwell & Dooley, 2001) and maintains client welfare (McMahon & Patton, 2000).

While the importance of supervision has been documented in the academic literature, supervision is a professional development option most employed by those seeking licensure and is not a highly utilized professional development option among school counselors.

School or district based professional development.

Opportunities for professional development activities are limited when obtained through local school districts (West, 2011). Most school or district based professional development opportunities are often directed towards teachers and administrators (Howell et al., 2007), are top down, one-size fits all, and are overly prescriptive (Bernhardt, 2015). There is minimal literature that describes school or district provided professional development opportunities specifically for school counselors. Professional learning communities is a model of professional development that is considered an emerging best practice in the development of educators, and is a model adopted by school districts across the country (Stewart, 2014).

Professional learning communities are characterized by teachers within the same school, or who teach similar content, selecting their own learning objectives, learning how to work collaboratively, and using student data to monitor progress and determine effective strategies to facilitate learning (Stewart, 2014). This model of professional development does not align with the roles and needs of school counselors. However, Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe

(2015) state that the model of professional development is not a significant factor in the outcomes of professional development, but that participants' motivation to attend is among the top factors contributing to valuable professional development experiences.

School districts provide limited opportunities for professional development that relate specifically to the roles and needs of school counselors, therefore resulting in low motivation to attend district and school based professional development (Howell et al., 2007). Professional development activities must allow school counselors to keep up with new ideas and practices within the field and need to be directly related to their practice (Bernhardt, 2015).

As an action step of the Reach Higher Initiative and to address the gap in professional development related to college and career readiness, First Lady Obama offered guidance to school superintendents and principals on how to create professional development options for school counselors. She also provided suggestions of how to use existing budgets and how to find federal funding to support the professional development of school counselors (ASCA, 2015a). At this time, school superintendents and principals' adherence to these suggestions is unknown.

Howell and colleagues' 2007 survey identified barriers to continued professional development: the relevance of professional development offered, cost, or lack of funding to attend professional development opportunities, lack of time for professional development, a desire for dual or university credit, and a desire for better quality professional development. To alleviate some of these barriers, Smith et al. (2015) recommend that school districts allow more time for well-designed professional development, offer educators greater decision making, provide more financial support, and grant release time to engage in professional development.

Professional Associations

Professional associations are an important factor in the continued professional development and growth of school counselors. It is through professional association sponsored

events that school counselors can seek consultation from others, learn more about specific topics, and stay current with best practices, emerging issues, and new initiatives within the field (Escoffery, Kenzig, & Hyden, 2015). Bauman (2008) sought to determine the factors that contributed to school counselors joining professional organizations. One school counselor stated, "I need to belong to school counselor organizations to learn my craft. My master's degree programs offered little to prepare me for the school counselor role" (pg. 170). While this study provides insight into why school counselors choose to join professional organizations, it does not detail if school counselors engage in the professional development activities that are offered by the professional association (Bauman, 2008), yet another demonstration of the limited literature regarding professional development of school counselors.

ASCA, as the staple professional association for school counselors and school counselor educators, is in a position to provide leadership for the field, create and shape professional development opportunities, advocate for the profession, and provide resources to the field (Berger, 2014). A review of the ASCA website (www.schoolcounselor.org) revealed the methods by which and the topics for which professional development is provided.

The ASCA website describes four methods of professional development provided by the organization, which are (1) ASCA U, (2) full-day, on-site training opportunities, (3) webinar series, and (4) the annual conference. ASCA U provides four online courses that provide specialty certificates upon completion. The courses offered include: School Counselor Leadership Specialist, School Counselor Data Specialist, School Counselor Bully Prevention Specialist, and School Counselor Legal and Ethical Specialist.

ASCA-sponsored full-day on-site training is provided to school districts upon request, according to the website. Currently, 12 trainings are listed on the ASCA website with the

majority of training topics focused on data and technology. Additionally, webinars are offered on topics related to developing a counseling program or implementing the ASCA National Model. ASCA professional development opportunities are offered only to those that are members of ASCA and require one to actively seek out these professional development opportunities.

A recent inquiry of ASCA's membership online directory indicated that there are 44,050 total members. When this list was filtered by school counselors only, 19,646 school counselors were listed. Yet, only 2,100 members (roughly 10% of ASCA's school counselor members) attended the 2014 annual conference. Further, not all school counselors are members of ASCA, meaning that less than 10% of the country's school counselors participated in professional development provided by ASCA at a national level.

There are 51 state chartered divisions of ASCA (ASCA, 2015b) and while membership in ASCA is not required for state association membership, both national and local memberships are encouraged. Of the 51 ASCA-affiliated state school counselor associations, 45 advertise professional development opportunities, including webinars, conferences, and continuing education units. While there may be more participation in conferences and professional development opportunities at the local level, there is no consistent method for reviewing conference attendance or participation for the 51 local school counselor associations.

Data collected and published by professional associations is the most useful and available literature regarding school counselors' involvement in professional development activities. Yet, this data is incomplete and does not accurately show the full scope or extent to which school counselors are involved in professional development or how decisions are made regarding in which professional development activities they engage. Ultimately, participation in professional

association-sponsored activities is the responsibility of the individual (Paisley & Benshoff, 1996); therefore, the next section presents several perspectives to understand how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development.

Developmental Perspectives on Professional Development

"Professional development is not something that happens during graduate school; in fact, graduate school is just a beginning. Becoming a master school counselor is a lifelong process" (Paisley & McMahon, 2011, pg. 111). This quote suggests that professional growth is a developmental process. Lerner (1986) describes professional development as a progressive change in functioning that consists of three assumptions: (1) there is change, (2) change is organized systematically, and (3) change involves succession over time. This section describes three developmental perspectives that when applied to school counseling may offer greater understanding in how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development. Thus, Stryker's (1968) and McCall and Simmons' (1996) Role Identity Theories, Super's Life Span Life Stage Theory of career development, and Ronnestad and Skovholt's (1993) Life-Span Theory of Therapist Development will be presented, followed by an explanation of how these perspectives could be applied to school counselor professional development decision making. Lastly, access to and participation in professional development will be discussed as an issue of social justice.

Stryker's Identity Theory

Stryker (1968) defines identity as a social position that one possesses and assumes as her own. According to Stryker, identity begins to develop when an individual adopts a position and accepts the roles expected of a person within that position. Therefore, a person's behaviors are based on what is generally accepted of someone in that position. Stryker's theory highlights two

concepts: the salience hierarchy and role commitment. The salience hierarchy refers to the degree to which a person has committed to a particular role. The higher the identity is on the hierarchy, the more likely that identity is evoked in social interactions. Role commitment is the degree to which a person's relationship to others depends on the acting out of a particular role. If the relationship is highly dependent on the execution of a particular role, the more that person will be committed to that identity and the higher the identity is on the salience hierarchy.

Audience evaluation is also a pertinent construct of Stryker's theory (1968) as audience feedback impacts role salience and commitment. The belief is that when a person enacts a particular role and receives positive feedback, this results in a stronger commitment to the identity and a higher place on the salience hierarchy. Additionally, a person with positive feedback will experience an enhanced self-esteem, which further increases the commitment to that particular role. This increased self-esteem and stronger commitment also lead to a higher placement on the salience hierarchy and a repeat performance of that role. People often seek opportunities to play out identities that are high in the hierarchy. So, as congruence between identity and behavior increases, so does the commitment to the identity and placement on the hierarchy. Contrarily, when commitments to identity diminish, people adopt new identities and those identities in turn then move higher on the hierarchy.

Consider, for example, Ms. Woods, a recent graduate from her school counseling preparation program. While interviewing for her first school counseling job, Ms. Woods determines quickly that the principal at Labor Creek Elementary School values a school counselor with a highly salient mental health counselor identity. Eager to obtain a job, Ms. Woods accepts the job offer and spends her summer reviewing counseling theory and running groups at a children's and adolescent mental health facility. When school begins in the fall, Ms.

Woods is confident that she is able to enact the role expected of her by the school. While in consultation with a teacher, Ms. Woods agrees to work with a student on reframing his thinking regarding some irrational beliefs. After four weeks of meeting with the student individually, the teacher comments on the positive changes she sees in the student. The positive teacher feedback further reinforces and increases the salience and commitment of Ms. Woods' mental health counselor role identity.

McCall and Simmons' Identity Theory

McCall and Simmons (1966) also offer a theory on identity development that centers on the roles people play. Roles are an idealistic view of oneself in a social position. Therefore, a person's role is not only conventional (based on what is generally done) but also idiosyncratic (based on one's individualistic perception of that role). The goal of human behavior is to legitimize one's idealistic identity in the eyes of others, to find congruence between an ideal identity and how others perceive an identity. Accordingly, people evaluate themselves through role performances. Similar to Stryker's (1968) theory, audience feedback is valuable. The audience must approve the role performance. So, while the individual devises the role, the audience must approve and support the manner in which the role was enacted.

Contrary to Ms. Woods, Ms. Murphy has always viewed herself as an advocate! Even as a school counselor, she believed that her role calls for her to ensure that all students' needs are met and that all students have access to an education. Last semester, Ms. Murphy noticed that Shelby, typically a straight-A student, who is well-liked among faculty and her peers, was falling behind in math. After meeting with Shelby, Ms. Murphy suggested to the registrar that Shelby's schedule be changed so that study hall would be her new first period class instead of math. The

registrar initially declined the request but after several conversations with Ms. Murphy, she obliged.

You see, since Shelby's father was laid off, she has had to work an evening job to help financially support her family. Getting to first period math class every morning after getting off work late and often falling asleep trying to complete her homework, left Shelby frazzled. This switch in her schedule would allow Shelby time in the morning to complete her homework and be better prepared for the rest of the school day, therefore offering Shelby a greater chance at success. The next week, Shelby's math teacher thanked Ms. Murphy for helping Shelby to be successful at school. Shelby and her father adamantly thanked Ms. Murphy for her support and her recognition of their family's unique needs. The math teacher, Shelby, and her father all offered approval and support for how Ms. Murphy enacted the advocate role. Through this role performance, Ms. Murphy's ideal role as an advocate was congruent with how the audience perceived her role, furthering her commitment to that role.

McCall and Simmons (1966) describe mechanisms for obtaining and maintaining role support from audiences. One such mechanism is the banking of earned credit from positively supported interactions. Banked credit is drawn upon during interactions with less audience support. For example, Ms. Murphy may "bank" her experience with Shelby and draw on that experience when a staff member suggests that her methods are too abrasive. Other mechanisms for obtaining and maintaining role support include an individual choosing to only see audience cues that confirm their role identity (Shelby's and her father's gratitude) or choosing to inaccurately interpret cues so they support the role identity (interpreting the school registrar's compliance as audience support for her advocate role). Additionally, individuals may choose not to engage in interactions that don't support their role identity, switch to a new identity, blame the

audience for causing discrepancy, deny responsibility for a poor performance, or reject and express disapproval of an audience that withholds support. These mechanisms for maintaining role support result in individuals using caution when committing to a particular role in front of certain audiences.

Similar to Stryker (1968), role depends on the person's position within a social structure, and a person may suppress an identity when not supported by some audiences. Ultimately, the individual has many identities that are evoked and enacted within the perimeters of the current social structure.

Role Theory and School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making

Stryker's (1968) theory of role identity centers on enacting expected roles. This is true for school counselors who work within a setting where other stakeholders define their role and position within the schools. McCall and Simmons' (1966) theory of role identity is based on an individual enacting their ideal role, perhaps as taught in counselor preparation programs. Integrating these two ideas, this researcher posits that both of these actions happen concurrently. School counselors must navigate a delicate balance of serving in the roles expected of them by their school and by their profession, while also navigating the balance of serving roles that are congruent with their personal identity and professional identity. Audience support for each of these enactments either supports or discourages the salience and commitment to these roles.

Applying these role identity theories to school counseling would suggest that school counselors develop an identity based on both the expectations of the social structure (Stryker, 1968) in which they work and based on the idealistic view of oneself (McCall & Simmons, 1966) as a school counselor. Therefore, it could be implied that decision making is a behavior

that is impacted by how a school counselor views her role. Thus, school counselors' role identity impacts and is reflected in professional development decisions.

To seek or to dismiss professional development opportunities and decisions regarding which opportunities to engage in are all influenced by the social structure, audience feedback and evaluation, definition of and salience of the school counselor role identity. Applied to school counselors, Stryker's (1968) and McCall and Simmons' (1966)s role identity theories may help understand how role impacts decision making regarding professional development.

Super's Life-Span Life-Space Theory

Super (1980) introduced a segmented theory of career development that incorporates life stage and role theory and can also offer insight into how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development. According to Super's (1980) Life-Span Life-Space theory of Career Development and similar to role identity theories (Stryker, 1968; McCall & Simmons, 1966), role is significant in career development. Super posits that people play a variety of roles as they mature throughout the lifespan (child, student, leisurite, citizen, worker, spouse, homemaker, parent and pensioner; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005; & Super, 1980) within the context of four theatres (home, community, school and workplace; Super, 1980). A person may play a single role or multiple roles at any given time; and not all people play all roles, in all settings, or in a prescribed order. Roles change as social positions change; yet differing roles impact one another. Further, roles may increase or decrease in importance, and playing multiples roles simultaneously may result in role conflict (Super, 1980).

Super expounded on some of the theory's concepts in an interview with Freeman (1993) where he states that there is no such thing as one overarching self-concept; that role self-concepts are what are important. He further explains that each person has a constellation of positive and

negative self-concepts (Freeman, 1993). Career development is the process of developing and implementing occupational self-concepts and the degree of work satisfaction depends on the ability to implement self-concepts (Super, 1980).

Super's theory not only describes the significance of role, but outlines the stages of career development in their typical sequence: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). Growth begins in childhood and typically occurs between the ages of 4 and 13. At this stage, the career development tasks include developing a sense of self and a basic understanding of the world-of-work (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). The exploration stage describes the task of adolescents, ages 14-24, which begin to plan for their future that involves clarifying the type of work they would enjoy and understanding that some occupation choices require further training and education (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). Getting established in a career field (establishment stage) begins immediately after entering an occupation and occurs from around the age range of 25-45. During establishment, one determines whether or not he possesses the skills and interests necessary for success and then focuses on becoming dependable and developing a positive reputation (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). The maintenance stage is characterized by workers confronted with the choices of keeping up with the advancements in their field in order to maintain or improve their level of performance, or opting for changing occupation fields. Workers who decide to stay but not to update their skills often become poor performers and stagnant in their work (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). Lastly, disengagement occurs as the physical capacities decline and interests wane. Thus, workers become more focused on planning for retirement--specifically the physical, spiritual, and financial considerations of retirement living (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). Not all people experience the career development

stages consecutively or within the given age parameters; rather, people recycle through the stages (Freeman, 1993).

Super's (1980) model describes decision making as central to career development. Opportunities for decision making, decision points occur before taking a new role, at the time of taking a new role, giving up an old role, and making significant changes in the nature of an existing role (Super, 1980). A variety of personal and situational determinants impact any and all decision points: social structure, economic conditions, historical change, socioeconomic organizations, employment, school, community, family, situational awareness, self-awareness, attitudes, interests, values, needs, academic achievement, specific aptitude, intelligence, and biological heritage (Super, 1980).

Super's Theory and School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making

Super's (1980) theory of career development offers a stage theory, describing the process of career development. The maintenance stage best describes how school counselors might make decisions regarding professional development. The maintenance stage is characterized by either remaining stagnant or keeping up with the advancements of the profession. Also during this stage, workers seek occupational mobility, advancement, and pursuit of professional goals. Accordingly, school counselors in this stage focus on improving necessary skills and learning the current best practices of the profession, thus seeking out and engaging in professional development activities. However, this stage is also characterized by verification of occupational choice. School counselors that may be questioning or have already decided to disengage from the school counseling profession, according to Super's theory, may also choose not to seek out or to disengage from professional development activities.

Super also discusses competing roles. For some school counselors, the decision whether or not to engage in professional development activities may be based on the presence of other more salient roles or competing roles, such as the parent or child roles. While the school counselor may be fully committed to their professional role during work hours, the competing role may hold priority after hours, therefore limiting the professional development opportunities in which the school counselor is willing to engage. Applied to school counselors, Super's theory offers a clear model that connects career development theory to professional development decision making.

Ronnestad and Skovholt's Model of Therapist Development

In the supervision literature, Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) offer a model of therapist/counselor development to provide context for the supervisory relationship. While this model is not specific to school counseling, it may offer perspective on the school counselor's development through the professional life span, which in turn can help understand professional development decision making. This model describes six phases of development and 14 themes.

    Phases and themes of therapist/counselor development.

The first phase of counselor development is the lay helper phase which describes the experiences of helping others prior to professional training. In various roles like friend, colleague, or family member, the lay helper offers support and advice based on their own experience, may become overly involved, and often expresses sympathy rather than empathy. The beginning student is the next phase and represents the start of professional training. This stage is characterized by feelings of anxiety, lacking confidence, and distress as students begin to learn methods, approaches and skills of the profession. Ronnestad & Skovholt (2003, pg.13) note that during this stage "an open attitude facilitates professional development, while a

restricted or closed attitude fosters professional stagnation." The advanced student is able to function at a basic professional level, yet may still feel vulnerable and insecure and actively seek confirmation and feedback from others.

The first years after graduation comprise the novice professional phase. The novice counselor seeks to confirm the validity of training yet experiences disillusionment with the gaps in training and feelings of inadequacy. It is at this phase where an interest in learning specific counseling techniques is renewed. Experienced professionals have years of experience with a wide variety of clients in different work settings. Finding authenticity in one's working style that is congruent in values, interests, and personality is the task of this phase. Techniques are flexible and personalized rather than rigid and conformed. The experienced professional learns through reflection on experiences and only incorporates new knowledge when confronted with situations in which experience is limited. The final phase is labeled the senior professional. This counselor has worked for many years and may be nearing retirement. Many counselors in this phase grieve the anticipation of loss, as well as current and past losses. For example, they may grieve the loss of colleagues that have left the profession but are also no longer alive, the loss of physical ability, and the loss of fading professional opportunities.

While Ronnestad & Skovholt (2003) presented 14 themes of therapist/counselor development, five themes are presented here due to their direct application to professional development. Summarized, these five themes state that professional development is a lifelong process that is long, slow, and erratic. Self-reflection is a prerequisite for optimal learning and professional development, and the enthusiasm for professional growth tends not to diminish with time. Lastly, interpersonal influences (clients, supervisor, own therapists, and personal relationships) drive professional development. In further describing the presented phases and

themes, Ronnestad & Skovholt (2003) explain that an attitude of openness is a central element for professional development and that stagnation occurs if the counselor is not engaging in a self-reflective process.

Ronnestad and Skovholt's Theory and School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making.

Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) theory provides a framework for understanding therapists' and counselors' development throughout the professional life-span. When applied to school counseling, this theory suggests that school counselors seek professional development opportunities only if they engage in a process of self-reflection and maintain an attitude of openness. Additionally, optimal professional experiences occur when both skill level and challenge are high and school counselors that do not engage in professional development activities must be stagnant and struggle to meet the challenges of the profession.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) suggest that professional development is influenced by the school counselor's phase of development. For example, consider a novice school counselor and a more experienced school counselor. Ms. Hill has been working as a school counselor for two years. Excited to begin her third year, she has spent the past two years learning more about herself as a counselor. She has also been identifying gaps in her training. Therefore, Ms. Hill eagerly seeks out professional development opportunities that will fill some of those holes. Dr. Lott, however, is a school counselor with 23 years of experience, all at the high school level and within the same school district. He is less compelled to engage in professional development activities, as few new professional challenges are presented, and his prior experience has provided him with the appropriate skills to meet those familiar challenges. These examples demonstrate how, when applied to school counselors, Ronnestad and Skovholt's theory offers a

developmental model that connects therapist/counselor development to professional development decision making.

Social Justice Considerations

People's career development is strongly influenced by the social systems that surround them (Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009). Most of the professional development literature, as it relates to social justice, describes the need for counselors to engage in professional development to obtain the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to provide competent and effective services (Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009). However, the focus of this section is to address the social justice issues inherent in the structure of how professional development opportunities are presented.

Bell (1997) states that the goal of social justice is "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p. 3). While this may be the goal, the reality is that the inequitable distribution of resources and social, economic, and political barriers impact people's career development (Arthur, Collins, Marshall, & McMahon, 2013). Issues of gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, social class, ability, religion (Arthur, 2005), and documentation status are all barriers that may hinder personal growth and development (Butler, 2012). Therefore, one must recognize each individual's unique intersections of culture and identity and the resulting unique systemic barriers that impact access and participation in professional development (Arthur, 2005).

The individuals and groups most in need of career development intervention are often disadvantaged financially (Arthur, 2005). For example, many new professionals encounter economic barriers to professional development, which prevent them from attending national conferences and accessing vital educational opportunities (Barrett, 2011). This requires

acknowledging the role of dominant cultural values in shaping concepts of career, professional development, and access to career resources (Arthur, 2005).

Chapter Summary

The role of the school counselor is ever changing. Role ambiguity still plagues the school counseling profession, and school counselors and other stakeholders often have different perceptions of school counselors' roles in schools. While that may be, school counselors, teachers, and administrators all believe that attending to students' social/emotional needs is the most valued role of school counselors. The creation of the ASCA National Model (2012a) has helped to more consistently define school counselors' roles in schools. However, school counselors continue to express concern over their ability to implement a comprehensive school counseling program because of inadequate skills. School counselors believe that their training has not prepared them well for the realities of their job. While there is documented need for continued professional development for school counselors, there are limited professional development opportunities; supervision, school or district based professional development, and professional organization sponsored opportunities. The significance of this study is found at the intersection of the strong need for continued professional development and the ambiguous role identity within the school counseling profession.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to generate a new theory explanation of how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development. Not all professional development activities are voluntary, yet it was assumed that school counselors have some degree of choice in whether or not to pursue professional development opportunities. How school counselors make those decisions was the focus of this study. The research question guiding this study was, "What factors explain school counselors' decision making regarding professional development?" This chapter discusses the rationale for the use of qualitative research, specifically, Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology, and describes specific methods and procedures for sampling, data collection, data analysis, and ensuring trustworthiness.

Research Design

Qualitative Research

Denzin & Lincoln (2013) acknowledged that qualitative research does not have a simple definition due to the complexities, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surrounding this field of inquiry. Considering the purpose of any research is to produce knowledge, qualitative research is distinguished by the approach used to generate knowledge and the chosen approach depends on the question asked and the context of the phenomenon studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Common characteristics of qualitative research include inductive and abductive analysis, naturalistic and experimental settings, an emphasis on the importance of

context, acknowledgement of the humanness of research, the use of purposive sampling and thick descriptions, and a flexible research design (Hays & Singh, 2012). While this list of common qualitative characteristics is not exclusive to qualitative research, this list is also not inclusive of all qualitative methods or strategies (Hammersley, 2013).

The researcher's theoretical research perspective served as the rationale for the use of qualitative research methods in this study. Constructivism epistemology most closely aligns with this researcher's ontological worldview; that is, that a world exists outside of consciousness, yet one cannot fully measure or understand it. Therefore, knowledge acquisition is limitless as each person uniquely experiences the world, resulting in multiple truths (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Funneling from the Constructivism epistemology, the interpretivism paradigm argues that people actively make sense of their own world and themselves, and that researchers cannot understand people, events, and phenomena without understanding the distinctive thoughts, feelings, actions and characteristics of the culture investigated. Consequently, qualitative researchers must take an exploratory stance. Thus, to gain a rich understanding of how school counselors make sense of their professional development engagement and decision-making, a qualitative approach was used in this study.

Grounded Theory was the better methodology for this study, in contrast to Phenomenology, another qualitative methodology that also shares a descriptive approach. Grounded Theory moves past a description of lived experiences of phenomena to explaining phenomena by the discovery of a theory (Sayre, 2001). To simply describe how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development will not provide the depth of understanding needed in the relevant literature to fully explain this phenomenon. A new theory explaining this phenomenon allows school counseling professionals, counselor educators, and

school districts to better address the professional development needs of practicing school counselors. Therefore, Grounded Theory methodology was used for this study and is described in more detail below.

Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded Theory was first introduced by Bernard Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1967 book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory, Strategies for Qualitative Research*. While Grounded Theory is most often associated with qualitative research, Glaser (2010), Strauss and Corbin (1998), and Charmaz (2014) point out that Grounded Theory is a general methodology and can be used with any type of data, including quantitative data as described in the book, *Doing Quantitative Grounded Theory* (Glaser, 2008). However, this generation-of-theory method of scientific inquiry is in contrast to typical quantitative research where validation of theory is the goal. Although several approaches to Grounded Theory have been presented (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) since its inception, an understanding of the preliminary ideas is necessary before reviewing any derivative methods of Grounded Theory.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally developed a model of systematic theory generation through ongoing data collection, coding, analyzing, and theoretical categorizing. According to Glaser and Strauss, after initial data collection and analysis begin, additional data is continuously sought and compared to emerging categories until saturation occurs. This process is referred to as a constant comparative method of data analysis. Grounded Theorist researchers are called to practice theoretical sensitivity, meaning to enter into the research field without preexisting hypotheses and biases, allowing for an increased sensitivity to the data (Glaser, 1978). Other components of Glaser and Strauss' Grounded Theory include theoretical pacing, theoretical

sampling, theoretical coding, theoretical memoing, theoretical sorting, theoretical writing, and formal theory generation.

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) work legitimized qualitative research methods and demystified the idea that qualitative research was unmethodological (Hammersley, 2014). In their initial work, the authors described on one hand the "emergence" of theoretical concepts that happens when researchers have no preconceptions, and on the other hand that researchers depend on their previous theoretical knowledge to identify the theoretical concepts. Glaser believed theoretical background knowledge would contaminate the data and the process. Strauss, who later split from Glaser and partnered with Juliet Corbin, introduced axial coding and coding paradigms, which, to Glaser, was too rigid and structured, and forced data to fit the researcher's preconceived ideas instead of allowing the categories to emerge. It is from the attempt to resolve these conflicting ontological views that opposition grew between Glaser and Strauss, ultimately resulting in their split (Kelle, 2005).

Charmaz, a doctoral student of Glaser and Strauss at the University of California, San Diego, introduced another approach to Grounded Theory research from the constructivism epistemological lens and identified it as a contemporary version of the classic Grounded Theory. Charmaz (1990) challenged that there is not one reality and that researchers can neither separate themselves from their research nor be objective about the data. Charmaz argued that ultimately, researchers' findings do not represent a true reality but are an interpretation of multiple realities that are mutually constructed by the researchers and participants through the lens of the researchers' experiences, biases, privileges, positions, and geographical locations. Glaser's (2001) response to Charmaz was "all is data" (p. 145) suggesting that researchers' experiences

do not bias or subjectify the data, but should become additional data for analysis; the researcher becomes another participant (Glaser, 2012).

While Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2014) offer models of Grounded Theory, their differences are not found as much in the methods of the approach, but rather their perspective on the nature of reality. Thus, researchers should attend to their own worldviews when choosing an approach to Grounded Theory methodology (Hammersley, 2014).

With attention to the ontological worldview of this researcher that believes each individual shapes their own reality from social interactions and that researchers cannot be completely objective in data collection and analysis, this study uses the Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology as described by Charmaz (2006, 2014). All data collection, analysis, sampling, and theory construction are approached given the guidelines provided by Charmaz (2014). The new theory generated from this Grounded Theory study will provide the school counseling profession with a new point of view regarding the task of professional development.

Procedure and Participants

While classic Grounded Theory asserts that the researcher should not conduct a review of literature prior to data collection, analysis, and theory formation to limit preconceptions, Charmaz (2014) presented the idea of sensitizing concepts. Sensitizing concepts allowed the researcher to develop initial concepts, tentative ideas to pursue, and questions to present about the research topic as simply a place to start (Charmaz, 2014). Keeping in line with this strategy, a literature review was conducted to provide the researcher with a starting point for identifying research concepts, research participants, and in developing an initial interview protocol (Appendix A).

The initial sample included current school counselors that have been trained at a TSCI partnership university located in the southeast United States. TSCI partnership universities developed school counseling training programs that align with the ASCA National Model and have placed value on continued professional development of both their faculty and students. This particular university was selected because of the geographic proximity to the researcher and access to faculty that could provide a list of school counseling graduates. Based on Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) counselor development theory, experienced school counselors have had opportunities to understand themselves as school counselors, have had more opportunities to engage in professional development activities, and are more likely to articulate the reason for their professional development choices. Thus, the initial participant selection criterion included school counselors who: (a) were practicing counselors in a public elementary, middle, or high school, (b) had been practicing in the field for at least three years, (c) were graduates of a specific TSCI partnership university, and (d) held no other advanced degrees. Although the number of participants is dependent upon saturation of the data (Charmaz, 2014), $15 - 25$ is the target number of participants. Data saturation occurs when no new insights derive from the data (Charmaz, 2014).

Once IRB approval was granted, potential participants were identified from a list of school counseling master's degree graduates from the targeted TSCI university. A recruitment email (Appendix B) was sent to potential participants. Potential participants were emailed a letter of consent (Appendix C) and asked to indicate their interest in the study and available interview dates and times. Throughout data collection, additional participants were identified through snowball sampling. Interviews were scheduled and conducted via computer software

application Skype, which allows audio and video calling. Demographic information for study participants is found in Table 3.1.

Data Collection

Diverse methods of data may be used for grounded theory inquiry and depends on the research question asked and the researcher's access to participants and data (Charmaz, 2014). For the purpose of this study, data was collected through intensive interviewing (Charmaz, 2014). Intensive interviews are a one-sided conversation focused on the participant and rely on open-ended questions for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and meaning making with the topic. Interview questions were developed from prior knowledge of the professional literature and experience (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide; however, the interview protocol changed with each interview to allow for exploration of emerging themes. Interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and the initial interview guide is provided in Appendix C. Appendix A is entitled Email Recruitment

The participant interviews were recorded on a voice recorder, uploaded onto a personal laptop computer, and stored in a password protected file. Interviews were transcribed and coded as each subsequent interview was completed and prior to conducting the next interview. As an additional measure of confidentiality, each research participant was asked to identify a pseudonym for use during the interview, data analysis, and reporting of data.

Data Analysis

Initial and Focused Coding

In Grounded Theory, researchers must do their own coding (Glaser, 1994). The process of coding allows the researcher to determine what the data are about. Codes are constructed to define, label, and categorize each piece of data. There are two phases of coding: (1) initial

coding, the naming of each word, line or segment of data, and (2) focused coding, selecting the most significant or frequent initial codes to organize data (Charmaz, 2014). After each round of interviews, initial coding was used to begin engaging with and defining the data. In particular, line-by-line coding was used for the first three interviews to define what was happening in the data. At that point, 103 codes had been created. Subsequent interviews were analyzed using focused coding, where the research focused on the most significant and/or frequent codes to direct the remaining analysis and test those codes against the remaining data.

Constant Comparative Analysis

Grounded Theory also uses a process of constant comparative analysis to analyze data (Charmaz, 2014). This process involves comparing data with data to find similarities and differences. This could be comparing data from interviews of participants, data points from within the same interview, or data points from an earlier and a later interview from the same participant. At this stage, researchers also compare major categories with relevant literature.

In Grounded Theory, new insight often appears late in the data collection and analysis process (Glaser & Strauss, 1976). Therefore, as data collection ended and the theory developed, the researcher initiated another review of relevant literature to provide an additional source of data for comparison, offer insight into how the new theory may fill gaps in the literature, expand existing literature, and to provide a critical review of relevant literature (Dunne, 2011). As interviews were conducted, emerging themes were presented to participants in the form of open-ended questions to generate specific data for comparative analysis. Collection and analysis of new data concluded after 12 interviews, when saturation of the data occurred and no new codes or categories were presented (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Memo Writing

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the researcher utilized memo writing (Charmaz, 2014), a specific strategy used in Grounded Theory, as a means of noting emerging hypotheses derived from the data. Writing memos is an analytic step between coding and theory development that allows the researcher to record ideas about codes and their relationships during the coding process. Memo writing occurred after each interview and throughout data analysis. Charmaz (2014) offers several strategies for memo writing. One such strategy is a Methodological Journal. For the purpose of this study, the Methodological Journal served several purposes: memo writing, data analysis, conceptualizations, hypotheses, and initial theory development. The Methodological Journal also provided space to engage in reflexive writing and to record spontaneous thoughts, notes, and ideas.

Theory Development

A theory attempts to answer questions. Particularly, Constructivist Grounded Theorists seek to answer "how." Thornberg and Charmaz (2012, p.41) provide a constructivist definition, "A theory states relationships between abstract concepts and may aim for either explanation or understanding." This definition of theory guides the theory development in this study. Therefore, through data analysis, an explanation of how school counselors make professional development decisions will be presented.

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Trustworthiness

</div>

Several methods were utilized to decrease researcher bias and ensure the trustworthiness of the research process, data collection, and data analysis. Reflections, thoughts, and feelings were recorded throughout the study in a methodological journal as described in the data analysis, memo writing section. This journal provided a forum to recognize and address any biases. Member checking was also used to ensure trustworthiness of the data (Seidman, 2013). Member

checking, which involves the researcher providing the proposed themes and developing theory to participants for feedback, was utilized through data collection and analysis. An additional method of ensuring trustworthiness was the use of a research team for peer debriefing, and the review of the data, codes, and themes (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007). The research team consisted of two doctoral candidates.

As Grounded Theory researchers attempt to generate an explanation as to how or why a phenomenon occurs, they are also the tool by which data is collected and analyzed. The researchers' values and interests influence what is seen within the data, and may shape the data collection and analysis processes (Glaser, 1994). Therefore, researcher positionality is an important component of credibility and trustworthiness in Grounded Theory research.

Researcher Positionality Narrative

Overwhelmed with excitement about my first "grown-up" job, yet uncertain about what to expect, I was eager to jump in and be the elementary counselor my preparation program trained me to be. However, the first day was filled with confusion, insecurity, and self-doubt. There existed a significant gap between my ideal role as a school counselor, based on teachings from the past few years, and the expectations the rest of the world held for me. Others would impose their opinions of who I was as a counselor and what my job should entail. Throughout the next three years, those feelings of confusion regarding my role in the school, insecurity about my clinical counseling skills, and doubts of my ability to facilitate systemic change not only remained, but grew stronger.

Enrolling in an Education Specialist program, and ultimately a Ph. D. program, helped me to better understand my role as a counselor and my role in schools. It was then that a reintroduction to theory, supervision, and consultation, offered me a clearer vision of how to

enact that role, and how to continue developing professionally. As a result of these education pursuits, I developed a more secure professional identity and I more purposefully and actively sought professional development opportunities that supported my role as a counselor in schools. I even developed my personal definition of counseling -- the intentional process of developing a relationship, through which change is facilitated (change in thoughts, behaviors, and emotions) that ultimately leads to a more satisfying and productive life. Now, as a 32-year-old African-American, female, doctoral candidate, new mom, and the newly hired lead elementary school counselor for my school district, I am responsible for the professional development, and consequently, the professional growth of all the school district's elementary counselors.

Insight gained through continued educational pursuits and participation in professional activities has created a critical awareness of the professional development needs of school counselors. Understanding the importance of continued professional growth and development prompted me to wonder if other school counselors experienced similar feelings and how they navigated feelings of insecurity, incongruence, and imitation; if professional development is as high a priority for others as it is for me; and if school counselors that adopt a counselor-first identity engage in the same types of professional development as school counselors that adopt an educator-first identity. I also wondered how school counselors define their roles in schools and how those roles impact decisions regarding professional development. Further, I wondered if school counselors allow others to dictate their professional development or if they employ their own agency and make their own decisions.

The accumulation of experience and my curiosity led me to the literature in search of answers to these questions and answers that did not exist. Therefore, when provided the opportunity to engage in research related to my professional interests, the decision was clear.

Finding the answers to these questions is accomplished by generating a new theory through Grounded Theory methodology. Therefore, acknowledgement and monitoring of my experiences, interests, and preconceived ideas are critical to the collection and analysis of the data to ensure that my biases do not impact interpretation of the data.

Chapter Summary

Grounded Theory qualitative methodology is used to answer the research question, "What factors explain school counselors' decision making regarding professional development?" Currently, practicing school counselors with three or more years of experience were the potential participant pool. Twelve participants were recruited through email and were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. Data was collected and analyzed as themes continuously emerged. From the data, a new theory was developed that explains how school counselors make decisions regarding professional development and the factors that influence decision making.

Table 3.1. Participant Demographics

Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Current Level	Location	School Demographic	Adv. Degree(s)/ Additional Credentials
Male	White	7	High	GA	Rural	None
Female	White	14	High	GA	Rural	NCC, Ed.S.
Female	White	7	Elementary	NC	Suburban	LPC, Grounded Yoga
Male	White	13	High	GA	Suburban	Ed.S.
Male	African American	2	Elementary	GA	Suburban	Ed.S. in Curriculum; Certificate in School Leadership
Female	White	3	Elementary	GA	Rural	Ed.S. in process
Female	African American	3	High	GA	Rural turning Suburban	None
Female	African American	3	Middle	GA	Suburban	NCC
Female	White	14	Elementary	GA	Urban	MFT certificate
Female	African American	2	High	GA	Suburban	None
Male	White	2	High	VA	Suburban	NCC
Female	African American	2	High	VA	Suburban	None

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings of a grounded theory study on school counselor decision making in regard to professional development. The research question guiding this inquiry was "What factors explain school counselors' decision making regarding professional development?" The study utilized semi-structured interviews with a total of 12 participants. Participants' experience as school counselors ranged from 2 to 14 years. Seven participants worked in high schools, one in a middle school, and four in elementary schools. At the time of the interviews, 10 of the participants worked in the state of Georgia, one in North Carolina, and one in Virginia. An overview of participants' demographic information is provided in Table 3.1. Each interview was conducted via Skype and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The primary researcher recorded, transcribed, and coded each interview. Each member of the research team reviewed the coded transcripts to address any biases or assumptions.

Four themes emerged from the data. The four themes included (a) Logistics (b) Interest (c) Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program , and (d) Lifelong Learner Foundation. Within each of these themes are factors that further explain the decision making of school counselors regarding professional development. The first theme, *Logistics*, yielded three factors: (a) financial cost, (b) accessibility, and (c) family. The *Interest* theme included four factors: (a) source, (b) opportunity to network, (c) significance, and (d) choice. The third theme was *Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* with three factors: (a) relevance to school, (b) ease of

implementation, and (c) opportunity cost. *Lifelong Learner Foundation,* the final theme, explains the impact of matriculation in a TSCI partnership university on the values placed on professional development.

With a foundation in lifelong learning, no one theme or factor had a greater influence in the decision-making process; rather it is at the intersection of these themes and factors that decisions were made by participants. Therefore, a three-circle Venn diagram is presented to visually represent the resulting *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* (Figure 4.1). Following are descriptions of the four themes and factors that describe the decision making of school counselors regarding professional development.

Theme 1: Logistics

The first theme described in the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* is logistics. Logistics refers to the coordination of details in planning and engaging in professional development activities. Specifically, three factors (financial cost, accessibility, and family) described the logistical processes involved in professional development decision making.

Financial Cost

Financial cost is defined as the monetary contribution necessary to participate in professional development activities. The expected financial cost is often determined by the type of professional development activity, the location of the activity, and the financial resources available through schools and school districts. One participant, Ned, helped illustrate the financial cost of professional development stating that "It's going to cost right around $100, if not more than that, to attend a conference. That adds up over time when you are not being

reimbursed. It costs money to stay in a hotel and to feed yourself." Ned identified those financial costs as "a barrier and a limitation" to engagement in professional development.

However, the financial cost of professional development was not a barrier for all school counselors; yet, financial costs were still a consideration. Matthew stated, "I wouldn't necessarily say money is really a barrier, but it's something that I consider when attending." Another participant, Carol, expressed her willingness to incur the financial cost as long as the professional development was highly valuable. When speaking about her experiences at a state school counseling conference, Carol reflected, "It's great professional development. That is one I definitely have paid for and invested my own time and money in."

The financial support of the school or district was also considered when making decisions about participation in professional development. However, depending on the size of the school or district, the financial support varied greatly. Financially resourceful districts allowed participants to engage in professional development with little financial cost to individual school counselors. For example, Jason described the financial support provided by his school principal, stating, "I can say that any time I wanted to go to any conference, my principal supported me 100%. If I didn't have the money, he would find ways to pay for it."

However, schools and districts with limited financial resources either were unable to support counselors' professional development needs or had to prioritize the allocation of professional development funds, often times at the detriment of school counselors. Amanda described, "In our school district, professional development opportunities for school counselors have always been quite limited. For a long time, I felt I didn't even want to ask for it because I wasn't sure they would approve it."

Some types of financial support were more helpful in the pursuit of professional development than other forms of support. For example, Kiana's school administration provided the school counseling department a budget of about $1,800. Kiana stated, "They give us the freedom to allocate the money however we want. We can use it for professional development if we want to, but then we won't have any staples, or bulletin board paper, or copies, or folders."

Many participants commented that schools offered support in the seeking of professional development by granting time away, yet offered limited financial support. Matthew reflected, "I don't think for a second that my principal would not allow me to go to [the state conference] or something like that, but only if I'm willing to pay for it."

Some participants looked for professional development opportunities that were relevant to the school's needs in an effort to garner financial support from school administration. For example, Jenny described how she was able to attend a professional conference because one of the topics was of particular relevance to the school, citing "The fact that there was a session on PBIS was a big thing that my principal wanted." As evident above, schools and school districts varied greatly in their ability to support participants' professional development needs, leaving school counselors with varying levels of responsibility in seeking out and financing their professional development.

The financial cost, balanced with the available financial support in pursuit of professional development, was a factor considered when deciding whether or not to participate in professional development. The impact of the financial cost was different for each participant; however, cost was a common consideration for school counselors when deciding whether or not to engage in professional development opportunities.

Accessibility

In addition to financial cost, accessibility to professional development opportunities impacts the decision-making process. Accessibility describes the ease or difficulty in obtaining professional development opportunities, including availability of and proximity to professional development. Participants in this study tended to engage in professional development activities that were closer to home and easier to access. Sasha, a middle school counselor, listed professional development activities in which she has participated within proximity, including a college access conference that only required an hour of travel, webinars, district-sponsored meetings and her state association's regional meetings when possible.

Some participants' schools brought professional development directly to school counselors. Sam detailed the professional learning resources and opportunities accessible within his large, resourceful school district: "We do have the resources and the budget where we are able to have national speakers come to us. And I know every system is not that lucky." Saniya, another participant from the same district, shared the following.

> About once per quarter, maybe every three months, we have our school level professional development, we have our district level professional development, and then we may do professional development in our school as a counseling team. We're pulling things from all different places. We're pulling things from each other, we're pulling things that a group of people may have come together to compile, and then we also have access to resources from our county database.

Participants in districts similar to the one presented above did not have the task of seeking out their own professional development because professional development opportunities were provided within their districts and easily accessible.

Some counselors in rural communities and smaller districts experienced difficulty in obtaining professional development due to school or district opportunities and limited local opportunities when compared to larger communities. One participant, Kelly, who recently left a small rural school district for a larger suburban school district, described her experience:

It's not always easy, especially if you're in a smaller county because they don't have the resources available; maybe they don't have the staff available to train people. I'm going from a small rural county that pretty much has no resources to a budding county, which is growing by leaps and bounds daily, that has quite a few resources. And it does make a difference in your professional development when those things are unavailable. It makes it difficult to always be empowered as a professional.

When professional development activities were not easily accessible, more effort was required of participants to seek out professional development on their own, which deterred some from engaging in professional development all together.

Family Logistics

Family logistics also was a factor in negotiating participation in professional development opportunities. Family logistics refers to the coordination required to provide care for a family in order to engage in professional development. One participant, Amanda, stated, "There are family logistics that are involved that are not realistic; I can't be away for three days." The impact of family logistics varied depending on proximity of professional development, family structure, and an available support system.

When considering family logistics, participant caretakers talked about their ability to engage in professional development activities based on the proximity of the activity. Generally, the closer the professional development activity, the more likely counselors with families were to

attend. Professional development activities that were farther away required more planning and coordination, which decreased the likelihood of participation for school counselors with families. Jason, a father of two young girls, described how his family impacted the distance he could travel for professional development activities:

> Before I was married and had kids it was a lot easier, as you could get up and go. You can pick and choose, fly here, fly there, stay after school, or come really early. But now with family and children it's challenging because you're stretched for time, you have to really balance and be very organized and that's something I'm still working on, being organized. Before, I wouldn't mind getting on a plane and traveling to New York or Dallas and now I think about all of the factors that it would take.

Similarly, Carol spoke of having younger children and it "getting harder and harder to get away." Carol specified that she has only participated in professional development activities "where I could drive and come back."

> Even school counselors without immediate families for whom they must provide care acknowledged the impact that having a family could have on a counselor's ability to engage in professional development. Participant, Amanda, stated:

> I don't have to find a babysitter. I don't have to find someone to take the kids to school. So that piece, thankfully, is not a barrier for me. And now is a prime time, honestly, for me to be going and doing stuff. When those factors do become something that I have to consider, I hope I can at least find a way to work around them or deal with them to get that professional development.

As noted by the participants above, school counselors with families were required to consider various logistics when making decisions about participation in professional development.

However, not all school counselor parents experienced this same limitation. For example, the age of dependent family members affected how some school counselors were able to engage in professional development. Holly described increased freedom to participate in professional development activities because of her daughter's age:

My daughter is now 17-and-a-half. I'm grateful that she is the age that she is, because at this point in time it's not so much of an issue for me. [If she were younger], I don't know that I could even effectively and efficiently handle my normal job duties. It would be very difficult, just having to pick her up from school at a certain time, having to do homework late. Yeah, , it would definitely be something to time manage, not only with professional development being kind of encumbering, but just my normal job duties that it would interfere with as well.

The above quotes highlight that family structures are unique and that different family factors impacted participants in various ways. While having a family limited one participant's ability to engage in professional development, having a family was not limiting for all participants.

Available support systems also influenced how school counselors made decisions about engaging in professional development. Having others to assist in providing care or negotiating some of the family logistics increased the likelihood that counselors may participate in professional development. One counselor, Kiana, spoke of her privilege as it relates to the level of support her family receives:

We only have one kid. My mom is retired and [my partner's] parents live [in a nearby city]. I think part of the reason she retired early is so she can support us. I mean, she has his school calendar so she knows when there are days that his school is closed and we have to go to work. And she has already planned for the whole year when she will stay

with us or take him back with her. As far as his other grandparents, they're just so close.

It's nothing to drop him off over there if we have to for a few hours or a few days. [My

partner's] dad works at a factory, so he works 3 days on, 3 days off. Sometimes if things

line up where my father is home, my sons can stay home with him. I feel, like, the level

of privilege that detaches you from reality. I feel that because I don't know what life

would be like without that level of support. That's part of the reason we decided to have

our son so soon because we knew our parents were in a position to help us. We knew

that a lot of those obstacles for other families would not be there for us.

While the level of support encouraged one participant to engage in professional

development, for another participant the lack of a support system limited opportunities for

professional development as Sasha described below:

I think a lot of people here have a lot of family around here, but I have been in a situation

where my family is in [another state]. If I need someone to pick up my daughter, that

network for me is extremely small because everybody that I know is working. It means

that I have to make sure I have balance in my personal life. I have to triage and figure

out what is most important.

Family logistics, in conjunction with accessibility and cost, affected how participants

made decisions regarding participation in professional development. In particular, proximity to

professional development, family structure, and support systems were all factors considered by

school counselors when deciding on engagement in professional development activities.

Theme 2: Interest

The second theme described in the *School Counseling Professional Development

Decision Making Model* is a participant's level of interest in the professional development

activity.   There were four factors that increased participants' interest in professional development: (a) the source of the professional development, (b) opportunities to network with other school counselors, (c) the personal significance of the topic, and (d) the ability to practice choice in the selection of professional development. Each of these factors is defined below.

Source

Throughout data collection, participants described common sources of professional development. A list of sources is provided in Table 4.1. The source of professional development either helped pique participants' interest in or discouraged engagement in specific professional development activities. For instance, professional development activities that featured a well-known or respected presenter sponsored by a reputable organization, or presentation that utilized a unique and engaging delivery style heightened interest of school counselors.

Dr. Brené Brown, at the time of this study, was an American scholar, author, and public speaker, research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, and author of three *#1 New York Times Bestsellers*. Rachel described Dr. Brown as a mentor and sought-after source of professional development.

> Brené Brown comes to mind as a role model because I am very interested in her research.
> I like learning about things that impact self-esteem in people with special needs, what
> impacts resilience, and what creates resilience in children. All of that relates to bullying.
> If you go to the Brené Brown website, she offers amazing opportunities for classes you
> can do online.

This participant quote highlights how a particular figure can entice engagement in professional development.

Similarly, specific organizations encouraged participants to engage in a particular professional development opportunity. Carol shed light on this idea, "When [a local university] offers professional development, I'm more interested in attending because I know the professors or I feel like I want to support them." Another participant, Arthur, spoke in detail of the state school counseling association as an esteemed source of professional development and his life-changing experience as a student attending this conference for the first time:

> I knew that I was in the place with the kind of people that I needed to be with. I was doing what I was learning to do and being able to absorb, like a sponge, all of the information that I was getting from the sessions that I went to and the new folks that I had the opportunity to talk to. I remember just feeling electric from the excitement of it all and just knowing this is it. And, so as a professional, the growth and the development, the maturity, I got from [the conference] helped form me into the person and the school counselor that I am today.

Arthur's description above emphasizes the impact of this particular professional development experience. Arthur continued to share how this experience influenced his decision to continue engagement in professional development opportunities offered by this source.

Additionally, an engaging presentation delivery was a factor that also increased interest in professional development. Some participants spoke about the presenters that were charismatic, inspiring, and motivating. Jenny recalled a professional development workshop that featured a highly likeable presenter which increased her desire for similar presentation styles: "The content was really important, but it was the way she delivered it that really hit home. Instead of it being dry she really put herself into it." However, other participants spoke about professional development that was lackluster or disengaging. Arthur admitted that when

professional development is disengaging, he is unable to focus on the content and becomes distracted, stating, "I'm on social media, just like the kids."

Opportunities to Network

Another factor in deciding whether or not to engage in professional development activities was the opportunity to network and reflect with other school counselors. This factor was explained by participants as a way of connecting professional development activities to daily practices, therefore making the professional development more meaningful. Another participant, Rachel, stated:

> For me, it's not just enough to necessarily read something or study something. I want to talk with my colleagues about it. I want to hear what other people are experiencing in the field. I want to hear if what they are talking about would work in real life. It's all of those conversations, those rich conversations; it's those kinds of things that are really important to me.

Several participants spoke about collaborative meetings as a type of professional development offered within their district, while other participants expressed the desire for such a model. The collaborative model of professional development looked different across the participants' school districts; however, the common components of this model were: (a) regular or interval meetings, (b) attendance by all or a representative group of counselors from within the district, (c) professional development topics that are specific to school counseling, and (d) opportunities to connect professionally with other counselors. One participant, Sasha, advocated for a collaborative model of professional development in her district:

> Last year, I talked to our district curriculum director; she is a former school counselor. We started getting a collaborative meeting together where we could earn PLUs

[Professional Learning Units] and where we could work together and talk about K-2 matters and really make sure we are current with what's going on in school counseling. We met enough to equal 20 hours which is one PLU, so we set it up five times for four hours each time we met. That was great and we are continuing that this year.

Not all collaboration is a structured model of professional development. Jenny described how collaboration and networking can also occur informally and spontaneously, especially at professional conferences by "going out to dinner with other counselors, talking about different topics, and commiserating and talking about how counselors handle different situations. I just like that networking opportunity." A third participant, Rachel, summarized the meaningfulness of collaboration and networking stating that, "Information without connection is meaningless; so unless we are able to make connections, then how is this going to work for us in our counseling journey?"

Personal Significance

The third factor within the *Interest* theme was a personal significance to the professional development topic. Many study participants spoke about specific topics of professional development (Table 4.2) that they sought out or that caught their attention because they held a personal significance. Rachel spoke about how she embraced and sought out personal development activities that aligned with her personal interests:

I had children and discovered that neuropsychology was really interesting to me and how the brain works. Both of my children have special needs and so it became even more important that I understand some of those pieces. It was really interesting to learn more about that area and some of that was a reflection of my personal life.

Likewise, Sasha explained how she was able to integrate personal interests into her professional development: "Some of my professional development is personal, like taking a class in dementia because my grandfather had dementia."

Participants described their conflict in deciding between attending professional development that satisfied a personal interest but not a professional interest. The excerpt below shows Matthew's inner dialogue on this matter:

> It's interesting from a personal point because I want to go into school leadership and I need to know the information, but as a counselor it is not interesting or helpful because I'm sitting for 30 minutes learning how to do something online on a website that has nothing to do with my counseling job.

Personal and professional interests could not always be grouped into discreet and separate categories. Yet, participants described instances where personal interest can be utilized in a professional manner. Holly affirmed that "professional development is just as important as personal development; while you're improving as a professional, you're improving as a person as well, because the things you use professionally can be used personally."

An interest in professional development topics increased the likelihood of participation in professional development. An association with a particular source, having opportunities to network with other professionals, and professional development topics that also aligned with personal interests all increased school counselors' desire to participate in particular professional development activities.

Choice

While this study is largely based on voluntary professional development, many participants spoke of required or mandatory professional development. There was greater

interest and investment in professional learning among participants when a choice of the topic or choice of whether to participate was offered. In many instances, school counselors were required to participate in professional development that was not school counseling specific or was irrelevant to their roles in schools. Also, professional development for school counselors in some cases was dictated by non-school counseling persons and based on a limited understanding of the professional development needs of school counselors. As a result, school counselors became disinterested or disengaged from the professional development activity.

Lisa reflected, "Sometimes we are told we have to do things and we do them, like going to the RTI [Response to Intervention] conferences. [Our] student support services coordinator said we need counselors to go, so we're going." This quote demonstrates the lack of choice many school counselors have in deciding upon their professional development activities. Similarly, Arthur described professional development in his school district this way:

> You are forced into professional development that you have no interest in and it's truly not relevant. That's when it's really tough. I do much better, as any human being, when there is a buffet of options and I can choose , rather than it being one option on the menu and I don't like that meal.

When school counselors were able to determine their own professional development needs or were allowed input in the decision-making process, professional development opportunities became more valuable. Saniya suggested:

> They need to survey the school counselors in the district about different topics before holding professional development because I think it comes from the people at the top talking about it, instead of talking to the people who are in it day to day and asking what are some things you would like to see. At these meetings, I see people on the phone,

answering emails, trying to get whatever they can done, because they don't see the value

in it. But, I think if they had a say in what was being talked about, they would definitely-

-I would definitely--see the value in it and would not dread going to it.

One school district was doing just what Saniya proposed above. As described by Holly,

her school district requires professional development "as a part of being employed there."

However, the counselors have the ability to provide input via a survey on the topics of

professional development they would like to receive. The school district then reviews the

information and develops a professional learning calendar for the school year. Holly further

describes that "some of it is not optional but most of it is very relevant to our practice." And

while school counselors don't have a choice about every professional development activity in

which they are required to participate, Holly stated that she appreciated that the professional

development topics provided by her district where relevant to school counselors and "that I get to

be a better professional and I get to support my students the best way I can because I have the

resources to do that."

Even when professional development was not school counseling-specific but choice was

provided, the learning experience was still more meaningful than when professional development

was mandated or required without any choice. In these cases, counselors were creative in

choosing and finding value in professional development opportunities offered within their

district. As Ned explained:

Presently, I am taking a class that is primarily oriented towards classroom teachers but it

has a lot to do with pedagogy and instructional style in working with English language

learners and right at about 41% of my student population are English learners. In order to

expand my knowledge in working with English learners and thinking about instructional

strategies and working with them in the classroom, which I closely correlate to classroom

guidance and group counseling opportunities, I thought that would be a pretty applicable

training.

Many school counselors preferred to have choice when participating in professional

development. Even when school counseling-specific topics were not available, having choice

allowed counselors to find value in the professional development activities.

Theme 3: Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program

The third theme of the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making*

Model was the impact of the professional development on the school counseling program; that is,

the potential positive or negative effects of attending a specific professional development

activity. In determining the potential impact of a professional development activity, participants

considered the relevance of the topic to the school population, the ease of implementation, and

opportunity cost associated with participation. School counselor participants discussed

balancing the potential negative impact on the school with the potential benefits of attending the

professional development activity.

Relevance to School Population

Relevance to the school population refers to how closely the professional development

topic aligned to the specific needs of the students as well as the roles, duties, and tasks of the

school counselor. When professional development topics were related to the needs of students or

supported the work of the school counselor, participants were more likely to attend, engage in,

and find value in the professional development activity. As such, relevant professional

development topics impacted the school counseling program positively through improved

services to students as a result of the new applicable knowledge or insight gained.

When asked what she looks for in professional development opportunities, Carol stated, "The first thing is how applicable it is to my job." Below, Saniya talked about professional development being reflective of her school demographics:

> I want it to be for high school students. I don't want to go to something and it be for K-5. That's not going to work with my kids. I want it to be for my level, appropriate for my ages that I serve. If it isn't applicable to my population that I work with, it would be pretty much a waste.

Yet another participant, Kiana, described specific professional development topics that were relevant to her school and how relevant topics increased the likelihood that she would choose to engage:

> Recently we started a dual enrollment program. There are so many questions about how those courses transfer to other schools. I would do any [professional development] that's related; that was our biggest project. RTI and 504s are a big thing right now. And then of course, just being at a career academy, anything related to the pathways that we have that are experiencing changes. I go to those.

Attending professional development activities that focus on school counseling-specific topics was also seen as relevant and meaningful among participants. However, schools or school districts rarely offered professional development for their counseling staff that was relevant to the role of school counselors. Most professional development provided by schools or districts was geared towards teachers, leaving counselors to participate in irrelevant professional development. Participants attempted to make irrelevant professional development topics more meaningful. For example, Matthew shared:

We are asked to be in some trainings and then you start to look around and say, how does

the new math curriculum apply to school counselors? There is no connection. When it's

a content-oriented, content-focused professional development, we're wasting our time.

We have a lot of work to do as school counselors than to listen to someone talk about the

new math curriculum or new language arts approach. I try to be open minded and think,

how I can tie this into school counseling. There is staff development about writing or

expressive writing ideas. When you look at students' writing, that's how they express

their feelings sometimes. So you can tie it in, but it's kind of a stretch. There can be

disconnection.

While professional development focused on the unique skill set of school counselors is

preferred, professional development focused on the actual roles, duties, and tasks of school

counselors was highly valued among participants as well. Kiana stated:

I am tasked with part of RTI implementation, so I go to conferences for RTI, program

development and implementation. That is something that I am a part of, but as far as

school counselor-specific professional development, I don't get to do that a lot.

Professional development may not always reflect the unique needs of school counselors, but

participants appreciated professional development topics that were relevant to their school

population or reflected their particular roles, duties, or tasks within the school.

Ease of Implementation

School counselors were most eager to participate in professional development that could

be easily applied to their setting. For example, Holly described learning about and implementing

new strategies for working with students with autism, Asperger's, and other mental health

challenges after attending a PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports] conference.

Hence, one decision-making factor in selecting professional development was how easily participants could apply new knowledge to their settings. Ned identified a series of questions he asks before professional engagement activities: "Is this going to benefit me or my students? Am I going to walk away with a better understanding of how to serve my students? Am I going to walk away understanding how to be a more effective counselor?" Ned further articulated this idea stating, "I look for practical knowledge. I appreciate theory and the intangibles, but I think, because I'm a practitioner, it's good to implement the knowledge that comes from professional development immediately." This rich description expounds upon the importance of attending not only relevant professional development, but professional development that can be immediately useful in impacting the school.

When considering conference participation, participants identify sessions that offer easy implementation or practical takeaways. Holly commented, "If it's going to offer some strategies or something I can implement right away, I like to pick those." Other participants expressed frustration with professional development that offered great theoretical perspectives or new ideas, yet lacked the ability for easy implementation or replication. For example, Amanda described her reaction to a presentation at a school counseling conference: "We're just not able to implement it at the same level at our school because we don't have all those layers of people or support or funding or technology." Amanda continued that students in her school district do not have individual learning devices and therefore some strategies or best practices presented at the conference could not be implemented at her school.

Similarly, Ned reflected:

As much as I like ASCA, not everything that I'm going to see at a conference is something I'm going to implement in my building. I get to a point where I'm like, "This is good, but I'm not going to be able to do it."

Holly summarizes this idea by asking one question, "Is it practical for me to use immediately or is this something that I am going to shelve for later? It definitely has to be practical and applicable immediately."

Opportunity Cost

Participants also considered the costs and sacrifices, both professionally and personally, required of them when engaging in professional development. Jenny described, "We don't have a lot of professional learning days built into our school schedule; attending professional development is always at the expense of time away from school." Ned stated, "The first question I ask myself is do I feel like it was worth my time and effort to attend?" Other participants further described negotiating the costs and benefits, particularly when considering professional development that was away from their school buildings. Saniya explained:

> If I'm going to be gone three days in a row, it has to be tremendous professional development opportunity; otherwise, that's just too long for me to be away from work and I get too behind. It could impact the school in a negative way.

And Jason explained:

> Most often when professional development is offered it's during the school day. So to find the time, or schedule out the time, to get out of the building can be challenging and can become nearly impossible. For example, right now we're in the middle of academic advising and it would be really challenging for me to step away from that responsibility and try to make it up later down the road.

Participants were concerned with the amount of work missed by attending professional development and missed opportunities to engage with their students and staff, which could have an undesirable impact on the entire school. Kiana stated:

Our role in the building is set up where we're a pillar. Things could literally fall apart in our absence in that amount of time. Even if they say, yeah go I also know they have the expectation that everything is going to run smoothly--that it's not going to interfere with our responsibilities, which is sometimes impossible. The other thing is it's overwhelming. All the emails I get every day. It's stressful trying to catch back up with everything that you missed.

While attending professional development does accrue a cost, there were times when the cost was worth the benefit of attending. For example, Carol spoke about her first experience attending a conference far from home:

It was important for me to go in spite of the cost. It had been a while and I really felt like I needed to have some sort of professional development that was specific for school counselors and it's hard to come by. When I asked my principal about supporting travel cost and she approved it, it was like ok I can do this. It was a good thing.

With every professional development decision, participants had to weigh the potential benefits against the potential costs. As in the instances described above, often the costs of attending professional development were too much to overcome; requiring participants to be selective in choosing professional development activities that minimize the potentially negative impact on their school.

Theme Four: Lifelong Learning Foundation

Study participants all completed their entry-level school counseling training at a Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) partnership university. Six universities were provided grants from the National Center for Transforming School Counseling to revamp their school counseling preparation programs to include, among other things, an emphasis on students as lifelong learners. Therefore, in pursuing this study, there was an assumption that students from TSCI programs entered the school counseling profession with a similar understanding of professional development engagement.

Participants spoke about how the school counselor preparation program laid a foundation for them as lifelong learners. It was because of this foundation that many participants found value in professional development and took steps to engage in relevant professional development once in the field. For example, Arthur explained, "My [master's program] cohort went [to the conference] because that was the expectation that [our professor] had for us…I went from being an attendee, to presenting, to becoming a member of leadership, and to now being president." However, not all TSCI program graduates were impacted in the same way. Carol explained her level of involvement in professional conferences stating, "My first couple of years as a counselor it felt necessary and meaningful, but if you go every year, it's the same people doing the same thing. So, it's been a couple of years since I have gone." Yet, Carol described a different professional development platform that she began to pursue,

> Right now I'm doing clinical supervision for my LPC and that's been amazing. I look
>
> forward to every session and I feel like I am able to take away something that I can bring
>
> back to my school every session. After our supervision meetings, I feel like I've been to
>
> a counseling session. There are really a lot of layers to this clinical supervision. I've

been meeting with my group for a few months and we're in it for the long haul. So that feels really beneficial and meaningful to me right now.

Carol's professional development experiences show how a school counselor's professional development needs may change throughout the course of one's career. However, it is the value placed on continuous learning that has enabled Carol to reflect upon her professional development needs and to seek out the structure that will meet those needs. Without a strong foundation and expectation that school counseling students pursue lifelong learning, participants would not attempt to engage in professional development and therefore would not engage in a decision-making process about which professional development activities to attend.

In an attempt to convey the program components that helped to express the importance of lifelong learning, Rachel described "the extremely rich and intimate conversations" that occurred throughout the program and how they helped to embed in her a value of collaboration and networking among school counselors. Holly recalled the mantra, "Consult, consult, consult" and UGA's "heavy emphasis on social justice and other topics of culture and diversity." She attributed these program elements to her being "a reflective practitioner" and valuing the "opportunities to collaborate and consult." Jenny spoke of how faculty modeled professional development by sharing about conference attendance, professional presentations, and research projects. She was able to see firsthand how professional development activities contributed to the profession as a whole.

These quotes shed light on the impact of participants' experiences at a TSCI university. The program's emphasis on seeking current and relevant knowledge contributed to participants' views of, and consequently, their engagement in professional development. Without this foundational value of lifelong learning, participants would have no interest in professional

development and therefore would not be engaged in a decision-making process about professional development. Therefore, before any decisions are made about which professional development activities to engage in, school counselors must first see themselves as lifelong learners and view professional development as the vehicle to lifelong learning.

School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model

The creation of the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* (Figure 4.1) is a visual representation of the study's findings. At the base of the model is a school counselor's foundational belief in the value of lifelong learning. Without this foundation, there would be no need to make decisions regarding engagement in professional development. Without professional development as a value, then school counselors simply do not engage in or seek out professional development beyond requirements or mandates. In such cases, the counselors would not engage in a decision-making process and therefore, the findings of this study are not subject to those counselors.

The remaining three themes, and their subsequent sub-factors, are represented by three individual circles in the Venn diagram: Logistics, Interests, and K-12 Impact. No one theme or factor has a greater influence in the decision-making process; rather, it is at the intersection of these themes and factors that decisions were made by participants. However, while the visual depiction shows equally weighted circles, each circle may hold a different weight for each individual person. Elements found within each circle interact with elements of the other circles with each interaction being unique to the individual involved in the decision-making process. An example of the complex interaction between themes was evident when Carol was asked to describe her decision-making process regarding professional development. She highlights the

interplay of interest, relevance to school population, ease of use, logistics, family, financial costs, and opportunity cost, specifically:

> I would definitely say the first thing I think about is how applicable the professional development is to my job. I wouldn't go to something unless I felt like it was designed like something I can take back to my school and use in my job. I think that would be first and foremost. And then I would look at cost and the dates and the amount of time that it would take me away from my job and my family and that kind of thing. Even talking about the conference that's coming up--when I saw it was a Sunday, it became an immediate no because for me that would entail me getting a baby-sitter at $100 a day. So when it's not a school day or something like that, it's just an additional issue for me to have to deal with. So, the cost and the dates and times and all that matter to me. I guess location, too. Do I have to travel? That's always more complicated for me. And everything that comes across my desk or that is in my mailbox, I don't always feel like it's something I can just take and use--the ease of the use of the information. Like, can I go back to my school the next day and do something with that information? Do I have to study a book afterwards? I mean, just the ease of use is a big one for me too. I wouldn't necessarily say money is really an issue but it's something that I consider when attending professional development. I just think, am I going to ask the school to pay for this or am I going to pay? Is it worth it to me to pay? Do I have to go out of town? Sometimes it's just too much of a hassle to fill out all of the forms and all that stuff, if the professional development is not interesting or it doesn't fit all my other criteria. And definitely, I consider the impact it will have on my school in a positive way or in a negative way-- like, missing out on an important faculty meeting or something on my schedule. If I'm

going to be gone for three days in a row it has to be a super duper professional

development; otherwise, that's just too long for me and I get too behind.

In this example, it is clear that *Logistics* and *Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* hold

more weight in her decision-making process; yet, what is also evident is the complex interaction

between the themes and sub-factors.

As presented, the simple visual is representation of a complex decision-making process

that is unique for each individual. For each individual, these common elements hold different

weight in the decision-making process; yet all elements interact with each other. The decision

making is grounded in a value of lifelong learning that professional development helps to

achieve.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, a summary of the findings and a description of the *School Counseling*

Professional Development Decision Making Model were provided. The findings were visually

presented in a three-circle Venn diagram, where professional development decision making

occurred at the intersection of the 3 themes and 12 factors. Participant quotes were used to

provide rich context and thick descriptions of the themes presented. In the following chapter, the

study findings are related to current scholarship; implications are provided and recommendations

for future research are presented.

Table 4.1 Sources of Professional Development

Sources of Professional Development
Books
Certification Course Work
Clinical Supervision
College Fairs
Conferences (GSCA, ASCA, ACA)
Degree Course Work
District Sponsored
Local Collaborative Meetings
Peer-Facilitated Professional Development Groups
Private Online Course Work
RESA
Speaker/Workshop/Mini-Conference
Webinars

Table 4.2 Professional Development Topics

Counseling	Special Populations
Counseling Theories	Children with ADHD
Ethics	Children with Autism/Asperger's
Helping Skills	Children with Special Needs
Mental Health Topics	English Language Learners
Motivational Interviewing	First Generation College Students
Social Justice	Homeless Students
Suicide Intervention	LGBTQ
Trauma	Teen Parents
	Undocumented Students
Program Management	
ASCA Implementation	**Specific Topics**
Community Resources	Brain Development
Crisis Management	Bullying
Parent Engagement	Dementia
PBIS	Grounded Yoga
RAMP	Holistic Integrative Nutrition
RTI	International Service Learning
Suicide Protocols	Mindfulness
Use of Data	Neuropsychology
	Resiliency in children
Education	Self-Esteem
Career Pathways	Sex Trafficking
Curriculum and Instruction	
Financial Aid/FAFSA	
Instructional Strategies	
Leadership Development	
Teacher Evaluation	

Logistics

Financial Cost

Accessibility

Family

Where Decisions are Made

Interest

Source of Professional Development

Opportunity to Network

Significance of Topic

Choice

Impact on K-12 School

Counseling Program

Relevance to School Population

Ease of Implementation
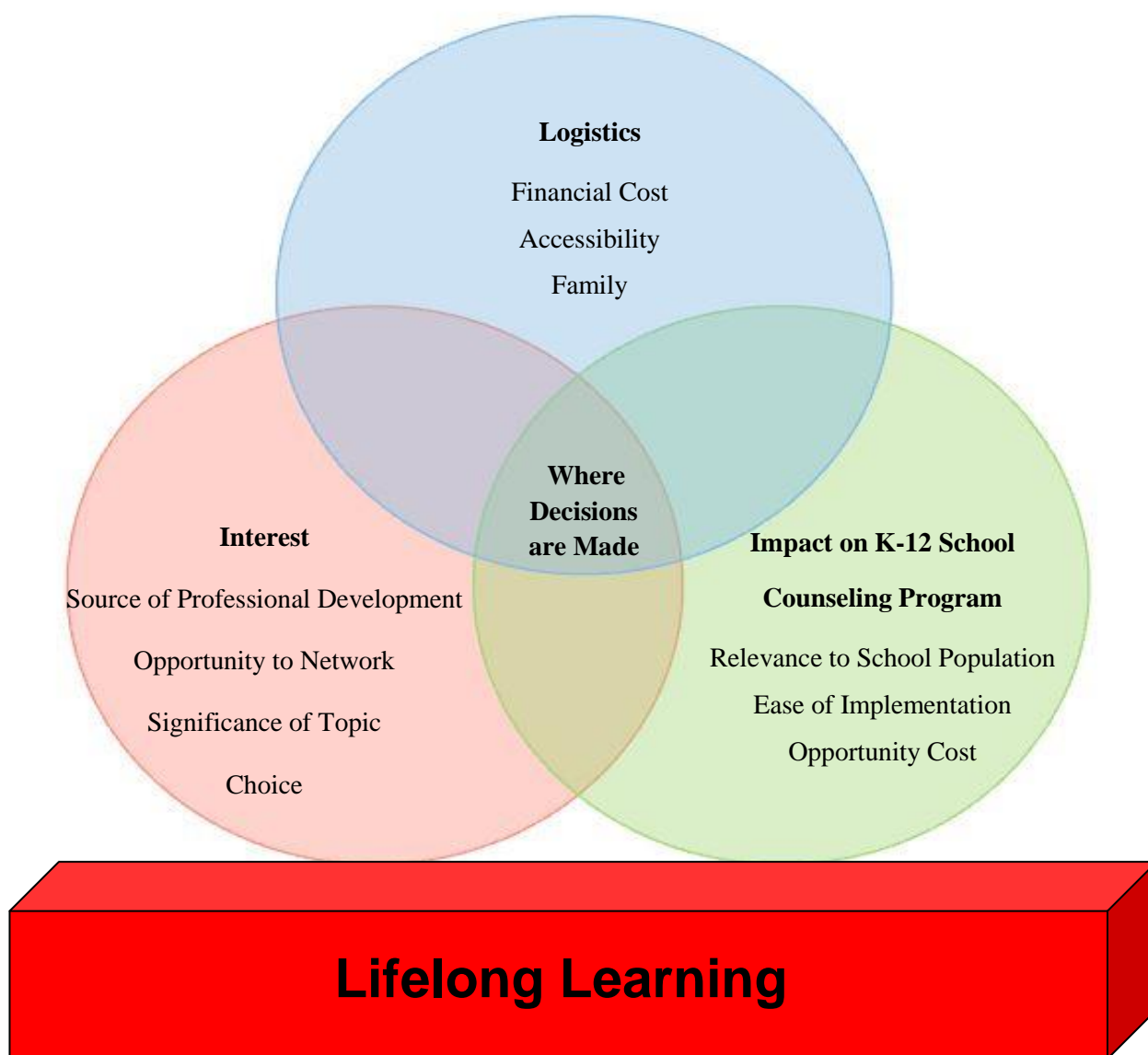
Opportunity Cost

Lifelong Learning

Figure 4.1. School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to explain how school counselors make decisions about engagement in professional development. The research question guiding this inquiry was, "What factors explain school counselors' decision making regarding professional development?" A preliminary search revealed limited literature focused on the professional development of school counselors (Konstam, Cook, Tomek, Mahdavi, Garcia, & Bayne, 2015). Furthermore, available literature failed to offer insight into how school counselors made decisions about their professional development participation. This study sought to discover the decision-making factors relevant to the professional development of school counselors. Findings from this study will offer insight to school counselors, counselor educators, and school personnel. Findings from this study will also provide implications for greater engagement in relevant professional development for school counselors. This topic is significant because of the ever-changing profession and as a result, the changing professional development needs of school counselors to remain current with best practice. As such, school counselors must rely on professional development to stay abreast of changes in the field and new best practices in providing services to K-12 students and families.

Chapter 4 presented participant demographics and findings from the study. The participant pool included 12 school counselors that were trained at a Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) partnership university located in the southeast United States and had at least three years of experience as a school counselor. Participants completed one semi-structured interview lasting 45 – 60 minutes. Interview data was collected and analyzed as themes emerged, ultimately resulting in the *School Counseling Professional Development*

Decision Making Model (figure 4.1), a three-circle Venn diagram created to visually depict the four themes and 12 sub-factors of professional development decision-making.

This chapter will discuss the findings of the study in relation to current literature and developmental theories that may offer additional perspectives on the decision-making process of school counselors regarding professional development. Also, study limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Summary of Findings

Five themes emerged from data analysis. Four themes were used to create a three-circle Venn diagram which visually represents the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* (Figure 4.1). The four themes were (a) *Logistics*, (b) *Interest*, (c) *Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* , and (d) *Lifelong Learner Foundation*. Sub-factors within each theme provided further explanation on the decision-making process of school counselors regarding professional development. The first theme presented, *Logistics*, yielded three factors: (a) Financial Cost, (b) Accessibility, and (c) Family. The next theme, *Interest,* included three factors: (a) Source, (b) Opportunity to Network, and (c) Significance. The third theme was *Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* with three factors: (a) Relevance to School, (b) Ease of Implementation, and (c) Opportunity Cost. It is at the intersection of these themes and factors that professional development decisions are made. The final theme, *Lifelong Learning Foundation*, explains how enrollment in a TSCI school counseling program impacted the value school counselors placed on professional development. Chapter 4 offers a description of each of the themes and sub-factors. Therefore, the following section will discuss the alignment of the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* to relevant literature and three developmental perspectives: Role Identity Theories (Stryker, 1968;

McCall and Simmons, 1996), Super's Life-Span Life-Stage Theory of Career Development (Super, 1980), and Ronnestad and Skovholt's (1993) Life-Span Developmental Model of Supervision. Additionally, social justice considerations will be addressed.

Discussion of Current Literature

Hannon (2016) reviewed literature regarding the professional development and supervision needs of school counselors and concluded that professional development needs of school counselors is not captured in the professional literature. However, there are a few studies that describe the professional development of school counselors. Konstam, Cook, Tomek, Mahdavi, Garcia, and Bayne (2015) explored the factors that sustain and nurture school counselors' engagement in professional development after formal training. Henderson, Cook, Libby, and Zambrano (2007) described professional development as a component of school counselor professional identity and Robertson (1998) offered an effective model of professional development for school counselors. Each of the above mentioned studies is described and discussed below in relation to the findings from the current study.

Konstam et al. (2015) sought to understand the factors that sustain and nurture professional growth among school counselors. One of their research questions asked, "Is there a relationship between school counselor professional experience and self-reported engagement in formal learning experiences?" The authors developed an instrument, *The Professional Expertise and Organizational Support Survey* (Konstam et al., 2015) to measure professional expertise, organizational support of evidence-based practices, and professional growth. Data from that survey was used to examine the relationships among six variables: (a) number of workshops/courses taken, (b) convenience in attending workshops/courses, (c) years supervising others, (d) interest in attending workshops/courses, (e) cost to attend workshops/courses, and (f)

years of experience in the field. Three of Konstam et al.'s six variables were also factors included in the *School Counseling Professional Development DecisionMaking Model*. Those common variables were: (a) convenience in attending workshops/courses and (b) cost to attend workshops/courses, both reflected in the *Logistics* theme of the *School Counseling Professional Development DecisionMaking Model,* and (c) interest in attending workshops/courses (*Interest* theme). The mention of these factors in both Konstam et al.'s study and the current study offers further support for the validity of these factors as decision-making considerations regarding professional development of school counselors.

In their study, Konstam et al. (2015) found that convenience in attending workshops/conferences was significantly correlated with years of experience in the field. Connecting this finding to the findings from the current study, as counselors continue in their professional roles and develop additional roles and responsibilities, both at work and at home, the convenience (*Logistics*) of attending professional learning experiences plays a more significant role in the decision-making process. For example, as counselors spend more years in the profession, they may gain more responsibility at work which makes travel and time away for professional development more difficult to navigate. Similarly, as counselors' family responsibilities increase, it becomes more difficult to manage professional development that creates inconveniences.

Lastly, Konstam et al. (2015) reported that counselors who expected to grow professionally throughout their career attended more courses/workshops as compared to those who did not expect to grow. Thus, counselors who value professional growth are more likely to engage in professional development. This finding supports the additional theme (*TSCI Partnership*) found in the current study--that enrollment at a TSCI partner university helped to instill a value for

professional development in counselors, which provided a foundation for their engagement in professional development.

While Konstam et al. (2015) sought to understand the factors that sustain professional growth among school counselors and the current study sought to explore a slightly different construct of school counseling professional development, three common themes where included in both studies: Logistics, Interest, and Cost. Whereas, Konstam et al.'s study simply looked at the relationship among these variables, the current study offered a descriptive understanding of how these factors intersect to influence decision making of school counselors' professional development.

In a heuristic inquiry into school counselor identity development, Henderson, Cook, Libby, and Zambrano (2007) identified "increasing competence" as one of the dimensions that demonstrates school counselor identity. Increased competence is the result of engagement in professional development. Therefore, in describing how school counselors seek to increase their competence, Henderson et al. offer insight into the decision of school counselors regarding professional development.

According to Henderson et al. (2007), during the "childhood stage" of counselor identity development, school counselors become aware of their need to learn more and develop more skills. This awareness begins during formal training and is best described in the additional theme, *TSCI Partnership*. The TSCI program's emphasis on lifelong learning and continued professional growth helped to increase participants' awareness of their need to learn more and develop more skills throughout their career. Without this awareness, counselors may continue in their professional career without a desire to engage in professional development. For instance, in the *Systemic Factors* theme*,* within the Culture of the Work Setting sub-factor, participants

described how their passion for professional development differed from some of their colleagues because of the differing value placed on professional development and continued professional growth.

Henderson, Cook, Libby, & Zambrano (2007) described the "adolescence stage," where counselors seek more specific knowledge related to students' needs. This "adolescence stage" aligns with the *Interest* and *Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* themes from the current study, where school counselor participants described how their professional development interests emerge as a result of student needs. Current study participants also shared that they valued professional development that could be immediately implemented and had a positive impact on the students' needs. For example, one participant spoke about attending a conference session on using data in her school counseling program and that she was able to utilize skills learned during that session immediately upon returning to school.

The authors also noted that school counselors sought to affiliate with other counselors, stating that "we seek out others who can identify with what it feels like to be a school counsellor" (Henderson et al., 2007, para. 64). The above quote mirrors the discussion of participants in the current study who discussed the value of networking, collaborating, and learning from other school counselors (*Interest* theme).

The themes found in the current study align with the findings from Henderson et al. (2007) and demonstrate the link between professional development and professional identity development. The connection between professional development and professional identity is further explored in the later section, Developmental Perspectives.

Robertson (1998) examined one school district that utilized study groups to address the professional development needs of school counselors. This study group model was found as an

effective model of professional development because it incorporated many of the factors that emerged from the current study. For example, in Robertson's study, elementary counselors incorporated their study group into their preexisting, centrally located, and regularly scheduled elementary counselors' meetings. This was an effective meeting structure because the study group utilized time that was already set aside for counselors to be out of their buildings. Therefore, this structure eliminated the opportunity costs (*Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* theme) that are associated with being away from work. In fact, Robertson acknowledged that finding the time for the study group was a critical factor in the success of the study groups, thus eliminating many of the logistical barriers of attending professional development during the school day as described by the current study.

Roberston's counselors were given a choice of which topic to study. The elementary counselors in Robertson's study chose to study the book *How to Solve Student Adjustment Problems* (Smith, 1990) because of many requests from teachers and parents for assistance related to this topic. Robertson's counselors were granted choice (*Systemic Factors* theme) in the professional development topic which resulted in the selection of a topic that was relevant (*Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* theme) to the needs of their school population.

Lastly, Roberston's (1998) study group model allowed counselors the opportunity to share experiences, insights, and reflections with fellow counselor colleagues, fulfilling the desire to network with colleagues (*Interest* theme) as expressed within the current study. For example, Robertson's counselors shared insights and reflections at each session and participants indicated that the study group had been a positive growth opportunity. The elements incorporated into Robertson's study group are similar to the desires of participant Rachel from the current study

who declared, "I want to talk with my colleagues. I want to hear what other people are experiencing in the field."

Again, Roberston's (1998) study effectively addressed significant factors of professional development decision making as found in the current study. Successfully addressing three of the elements of the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* as described above (i.e. logistics, choice, and networking) contributed to the success of Robertson's professional development study groups. Robertson's model is an example of how the current study and the resulting *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* can be used to help develop successful professional development opportunities for school counselors.

Peace and Sprinthall (1998) posited that school counselors, like teachers, would benefit from a model of peer-mentorship and peer-supervision as a means of professional development. Through the lens of cognitive development for adult learners, Peace and Sprinthall developed a 2-semester, 3-hour-per-week in-service supervision training program for experienced school counselors that would promote cognitive developmental growth and develop supervisory skills, therefore allowing the experienced school counselors to serve as mentors and supervisors for new counselors. The result of such training for experienced counselors and the subsequent supervision for new counselors would result in improved competence for both new and experienced counselors. The course focused on the needs of beginning counselors, renewing effective counseling skills, clinical supervision, differentiating supervision and analyzing supervision interactions. The implications of this study suggest that this type of training could fill the void of clinical supervision beyond the induction periods.

Such training as mentioned by Peace and Sprinthall (1998) would allow for on-site peer-supervision which would alleviate many of the logistical barriers expressed in this current study. This type of model could provide conveniently scheduled school counseling-specific professional development. However, the training of the supervisors requires a significant time commitment. As revealed in this current study, time away from both school and family is difficult for many counselors to navigate, especially for the length of time of the training course as presented by Peace & Sprinthall. The idea of peer-supervision should be considered as a model of professional development. This current study may offer insight into the necessary components and potential barriers in the development of an effective peer supervision program.

While there are few studies that focus on school counselor professional development, factors of the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* were applied to each of the studies presented, helping to further explain the decision making of school counselors regarding professional development. Future studies designed to specifically examine school counselor professional development decision making can better demonstrate the application of the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model*.

ASCA National Model

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has had significant influence on the professional growth and development of school counselors (Konstam et al., 2015). ASCA provides ethical standards, professional development, advocacy, and resources for school counselors (ASCA, 2016). Most notably, ASCA has endorsed the ASCA National Model (2012a), a framework for the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program. There are specific professional development needs of counselors when implementing the ASCA National Model (Johnson, Nelson, & Henriksen, 2011).

In 2009, Owens, Pernice-Duca, and Thomas surveyed urban high school counselors to determine their post-training professional development needs. They found that school counselors were being asked to perform a wide variety of duties to support students' academic development without sufficient training. Furthermore, Owens, Pernice-Duca, and Thomas identified mental health, student behavior management, family involvement, and career counseling as topics of professional development needed by school counselors to effectively implement a comprehensive school counseling program. The findings from this study confirm the need for school counseling professional development. Understanding how school counselors make decisions about professional development can assist in providing professional development that will support the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs like the ASCA National Model.

Zagelbaum, Kruczek, Alexander, and Crether (2014) conducted a review of content in the *Professional School Counselor* journal, volumes 6 -13. The authors found that since the initial publication of the ASCA National Model, the content in the *Professional School Counselor* journal shifted to align with the ASCA National Model. At the time of the review, 15% of articles reflected educational achievement, 24% reflected mental health, 21% reflected both academic achievement and mental health, and 40% of the articles reflected neither. The authors analyzed the content of the "neither" category and found that the third most frequent topic printed was professional development. This suggests that after the initial publication of the ASCA National Model, the professional literature reflected a desire for more professional development.

Between the years of the first ASCA National Model (2003) publication and the last publication in 2012, there were 461 articles published in the *Professional School Counselor*

journal regarding the ASCA National Model. However, since the last publication of the ASCA National Model, there have only been 66 articles published regarding the ASCA National Model. This decrease in publications could suggest that implementation of the ASCA National Model is believed to be widespread and that professional development to support the implementation of the ASCA National Model is no longer needed. Yet, Martin and Carey (2014) concluded that program evaluation is a skill still needed by school counselors in implementing the ASCA National Model. Similarly, Maras, Coleman, Gysbers, Herman, and Stanley (2013) stated that evaluation competencies are essential to successful implementation of the ASCA National Model but that counselors often lack the competency to perform evaluations.

As demonstrated above, professional development on topics such as program evaluation is still needed among school counselors to better help with implementation and evaluation of the ASCA National Model. Insight from the findings of this current study can be used to help determine the most effective method of providing professional development to school counselors on program evaluation and other topics necessary for the effective implementation of the ASCA National Model.

Developmental Perspectives

The *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model*, when discussed through the lens of development perspectives, offers a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to school counselors' professional development decision making. This section will discuss Role Identity Theories (Stryker, 1968 and McCall and Simmons, 1996), Super's (1980) Life-Span Life-Stage Theory of Career Development, and Ronnestad and Skovholt's (1993) Life-Span Developmental Model of Supervision in relation to the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model*.

Role Identity Theories

Defining the role of school counselors is critically important (Sparks, 2003); yet, role ambiguity is prevalent throughout the school counseling profession as a result of the multifaceted duties and responsibilities of school counselors (Konstam et al., 2015; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Compounding a history of role confusion is the fact that students, administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders often define the school counselor's role within the school, not the school counselor (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). From the start of the current study, an underlying assumption existed that school counselors' understanding of their roles influenced the professional development decision-making process. Therefore, the below discussion of participants' professional development engagement is applied through the lens of role identity.

Stryker (1968) asserts that identity develops when an individual accepts the roles expected of a person within that position. Further, if the relationship between the person and others is highly dependent on the execution of expected roles, the person will be more committed to those expected roles. Applying Stryker's theory to school counselors, a counselor's role is often defined by administration and other stakeholders. Therefore, the relationship between the counselor and the school is dependent upon how well the counselor executes the roles expected by administration and other stakeholders. As a result, counselors become more committed to those expected roles, according to Stryker's theory.

This phenomenon was described in the *Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* theme within the Relevance sub-factor. School counselor participants valued professional development that was relevant to the expected roles assigned to the counseling department, even if those roles were not endorsed by ASCA, such as teaching evaluation and test coordination. This finding suggests that school counselors may assimilate inappropriate roles into their identity

and commit to those roles though continued professional development focused on the skills necessary to fulfill those expected roles. For example, when given an opportunity to attend professional development for testing coordination tasks, one participant was eager to attend, as testing coordination was one task assigned to the counseling department by school administration. Thus, counselors may engage in professional development that supports imposed-upon roles in an effort to maintain a positive relationship with the school.

McCall and Simmons (1966) suggest that the goal of human behavior is to legitimize one's idealistic identity in the eyes of others, to find congruence between an ideal identity and how others perceive an identity. As such, not all counselors fully surrender and commit to the roles expected of them but attempt to find congruence between an idealistic perception of one's role and how others perceive their role. This idea was illustrated in the *Systemic Factors* theme within the Choice sub-factor. Many counselors that recognize the incongruence between their expected role and their ideal role used choice to legitimize their professional development engagement. For example, participant Ned was required to register for a district-provided professional development course. He chose to enroll in a course geared towards classroom teachers focusing on instructional strategies for working with students where English was a second language. Ned conceptualized this course as supporting his ASCA-aligned role of providing a core curriculum through classroom instruction to all students, including English-language learners. This example illustrates how counselors chose professional development activities that could creatively support an appropriate school counseling role.

McCall and Simmons (1966) presented strategies for resolving this common incongruence between the school-defined role and counselor-defined role. For example, individuals may choose not to engage in interactions that do not support their role identity.

Participants that were given a choice of attendance in professional development activities (*Systemic Factors* theme) chose not to participate in the activities that did not support their roles. Take participant Kiana, as an example, who has the freedom to decide not to attend professional development activities that do not support her role as a school counselor. Not all counselors have this option, however.

Another mechanism presented by McCall and Simmons (1966) is to blame the audience for causing the discrepancy between expected roles and ideal roles. For instance, counselors from the current study blamed mandatory professional development for the loss of time that prevented them from accomplishing other counseling tasks.

In applying role identity theories to school counseling professional development decision making, counselors develop a role identity based on both the expectations of the social structure (Stryker, 1968); in this case the school, and based on the idealistic view of oneself (McCall & Simmons, 1966) as a school counselor. Thus, school counseling professional development decision making is impacted by school counselors' roles; subsequently, their roles are reflected in professional development decisions.

Super's Life Span Life Stage Theory of Career Development

Super's Life Span Life Stage Theory (1980) of career development posits that people play a variety of roles as they mature throughout their lifespan. Super outlines the stages of career development: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). The maintenance stage is characterized by either remaining stagnant or keeping up with the advancements of the profession. It is at this stage that school counselors may engage in professional development in an attempt to maintain or improve necessary skills.

Examples of the maintenance stage are found in the *Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* theme. Matthew provided an example of how school counselors attempt to maintain current skills through professional development. Matthew shared that each year he looks forward to attending professional development on counseling ethics, as he wants to ensure that he remains current on ethical decision making. School counselors also use professional development to improve other skills through professional development. Participant Rachel spoke about improving a very specific skill to better serve children. Rachel became certified in grounded yoga so that she could help students use mindfulness within their lives. In applying Super's theory to school counseling, it is evident that school counselors indeed use professional development to both maintain and improve skills that allow them to successfully perform their roles within their schools.

Super's (1980) disengagement stage of development is characterized by school counselors that choose to disengage from professional development activities. This scenario was described in the Culture of Work Setting sub-factor (*Systemic Factors* theme). Within this factor were examples of school counselors nearing retirement or school counselors that did not hold a strong counselor identity, therefore choosing not to engage in professional development.

Finally, Super (1980) discussed competing roles. For some school counselors, the decision to engage in professional development may be based on competing roles, such as managing their role as parent, as found in the *Logistics* theme, under the Family sub-factor. School counselors with dependent family members had to prioritize professional duties and professional development activities. Those with available support systems were able to engage in more professional development activities, while those with limited support systems were less able to take advantage of professional development opportunities. Applying Super's (1980)

theory to school counseling professional development, counselors engage in professional development as an attempt to maintain their professional status which is most easily achieved when there are no other competing roles.

Ronnestad and Skovholt's Theory

Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) theory described counselor identity development through the description of 20 themes. Several of those themes offer insight into school counselors' decision making regarding school counseling. Ronnestad and Skovholt suggest that professional development is a lifelong process where self-reflection and an attitude of openness are prerequisites for optimal learning and professional growth. In the *Impact* theme within the Relevance sub-factor, participants spoke of self-reflection. Participants expressed that through self-reflection they were able to discover areas where professional growth was needed. For example, Amanda described that she sought out counseling for herself as a way to acknowledge and address deep convictions that she possessed. Counseling helped her to engage in self-reflection so that she would be better able to help others in the self-discovery process.

Additionally, the authors (Ronnestad and Skovholt, 2003) theorized that professional growth is a unique blend of the professional and personal selves. Similarly, participants also shared the belief that professional development was also personal development and vice versa. For instance, Holly shared that because of the practical skills needed in the school counseling profession, what is learned through professional development can also be used personally. Furthermore, Rachel described how her personal interest in neuropsychology, resilience, and yoga inform her school counseling practice.

The source of professional development (*Interest* theme) was reflected in Ronnestad and Skovholt's (2003) theory. They stated that development is influenced by multiple sources

including professional mentors, peers and colleagues, and theory and research, among others. In the discussion of professional development sources, participants identified faculty members, experts in the field, and conferences as sought-after sources of professional development.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) stated that clients can serve as a source of professional reflection and growth for counselors through feedback given by their reactions and attitudes. Similarly, students offer feedback to school counselors. Students' reactions, attitudes, and outcome data inform school counselors on what skills they need to improve upon. Participants described how the topics for professional development often come out of the needs of the students (*Impact on K-12 School Counseling Program* theme).

According to Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003), counselors who do not engage in professional development activities must be stagnant and struggle to meet the challenges of the profession. Support for this component of Ronnestad and Skovholt's theory is found in the discussion of Culture of Work Setting (*Systemic Factors* theme). In particular, participants spoke about colleagues who showed little interest in professional development. Participants attributed colleagues' lack of interest in professional development to stagnation via pending retirement and weak school counselor identity.

While the findings of the current study align with some components of the development theories discussed above, none of the theories fully describe the complexity of professional development decision making. The resulting *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* describes developmental components as discussed above but is also comprehensive by including practical considerations such as financial support, family responsibilities, accessibility, and system navigation. These are themes not apparent in current literature regarding school counseling professional development. Also, as evident from above,

there is a strong connection between counselor identity and the pursuit of professional development.

Limitations

Recruiting limitations were experienced as the pool of potential participants that met the inclusion criteria was narrow. In particular, there was difficulty in locating participants that held more than three years of experience and held no other advanced degrees. The assumption was made that, because of the influence of the TSCI training program and the emphasis on lifelong learning, many graduates pursued advanced degrees within three years of graduation from the TSCI program. Therefore, as snowball sampling continued, participants with three years of experience with advanced degrees were allowed to participate in the study.

This study was designed to explain decision making regarding professional development where some level of choice is available and therefore did not explore professional development required as remediation. Professional development required for remediation might occur when a school counselor's performance is unsatisfactory and professional development is required as an attempt to improve the counselor's performance. While required or mandatory professional development was discussed in some components of this study, those professional development activities were required as a school-wide or district-wide expectation and not as remediation.

Lastly, study participants did not engage in follow-up interviews to provide comment on the resulting theory. However, study participants were asked to comment on the emerging themes as they developed within the context of the initial semi-structured interviews until no new themes were presented.

Implications

The findings from this study offer implications for practicing school counselors, counselor educators, and schools/districts as described below. School counselors must advocate for their own professional development. Counselor educators must instill a value for continued professional growth, and districts must be responsive to the professional development needs of their school counselors.

School Counselor Practitioners

Not all schools or school districts provide relevant school counseling professional development, so the responsibility of professional development may become that of the school counselor. As such, school counselors should advocate for their professional development needs. Counselors may develop and propose a professional development plan to their school or school district. Within the professional development plan, school counselors may propose to organize a collaborative model of professional development, offer suggestions of relevant professional development topics, request to participate in professional development opportunities offered by outside sources, or suggest potential funding to support the professional development of school counselors. School counselor professional development advocacy may also further educate important stakeholders on the appropriate role and responsibilities of school counselors.

Having districts provide and support professional development is a goal that may not be immediately realized. Therefore, practicing school counselors may need to seek out their own professional development. National and local counseling and school counseling professional organizations offer professional development opportunities such as conferences, webinars, workshops, and recommendations for professional books. Membership benefits in such

organizations provide school counselors with a plethora of relevant professional development opportunities from which to choose.

School counselors should also think outside the box to make connections between their professional development needs and mandatory, seemingly irrelevant professional development activities. For example, school counselors could look for instructional strategies that might help when presenting the counseling core curriculum to a large group of students, explore evaluation techniques that could assist with collecting and analyzing outcome data, or integrate student learning objectives and standards into their core curriculum. While this is a passive approach and one that may not be applicable in all situations, this shift in perspective might help school counselors better endure some professional development activities.

Findings from this study may also help school counselors consider professional development as a factor when seeking employment. Specifically, school counselors may pay attention to the type of professional development opportunities provided by the school or school district, the financial support available to school counselors for professional development, the geographic location of the employment site, and access to outside sources of professional development. Metropolitan areas and college communities may offer greater access to professional development from sources outside the school district. Also, prior to employment, school counselors may become familiar with the culture and value placed on professional development within the potential counseling department, school administration, and within the school district.

Finally, recognizing that professional development may require travel and time away from home, when possible, school counselors can attempt to establish a support system within their community. This would help to navigate some of the logistics required in attending

professional development activities. Each counselor, school, and school district has a varying level of resources and professional development needs; therefore, not all of these suggestions may be appropriate for each scenario. However, these suggestions may provide some guidance in fulfilling desired professional development needs.

Counselor Education

All participants of this study received their master's degrees from a TSCI partner university. This study found that while enrolled in this program, participants began to value continued professional growth and therefore valued professional development once in the field. Counselor educators can place emphasis on lifelong learning and professional engagement. This can be achieved through setting clear expectations and modeling the consumption of professional development and production of professional scholarship. Counselor educators can embed opportunities for students to engage in professional growth activities into the program curriculum. For example, counselor educators can encourage attendance and participation in local or national conferences, offer opportunities for students to join research teams, and identify publishing opportunities for students.

Counselor education programs can also partner with local schools and school districts to offer professional development activities for school counselors. Counselor educators can provide updates on best practices, new topics emerging in the relevant literature, offer workshops, trainings, or presentations, share information for degree, certification, and licensure programs, and facilitate supervision groups. This type of arrangement can be mutually beneficial as practicing school counselors are able to engage in professional development activities. Too, counselor educators can use feedback from counselors to help instruction remain true to the realities of the profession. Also, counseling students can gain experience producing and sharing

professional knowledge. Relationships formed among counselor educators, counseling students, and practicing counselors may assist in recruiting site supervisors for practicum and internship placements.

Schools and School Districts

Schools and school districts hold responsibility to provide relevant professional development for school counselors and must recognize that the professional development needs of school counselors differ from those of teachers and other professionals in the school district. Therefore, schools can seek understanding of school counselors' roles and the specific needs of counselors. As a result, schools would be better able to support counselors' professional development advocacy efforts. This may require administrators to provide time and space for counselor professional development activities, seek school counselors' input in the creation of the professional development schedule to ensure that topics pertinent to school counseling are included, and offer financial support for school counselors to engage in professional development. Administrators can support the professional development of school counselors by offering a choice of which professional development activities most align with their specific professional development needs. Lastly, district and school level administrators must understand and communicate that professional development is important, that school counseling professional development results in increased school counselor confidence and competence, and therefore, school counseling professional development positively impacts students' achievement.

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Social Justice Considerations

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Bell (1997) states the goal of social justice is full and equal participation. While this may be the goal, the reality is that the inequitable distribution of resources impacts school counselors' career development (Arthur, Collins, Marshall, & McMahon, 2013). The current study found

varying levels of access to and participation in professional development activities. While participation in professional development is voluntary, the access to professional development must be present; yet there are inequities in who can access professional development (Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009).

New professionals encounter economic barriers to professional development which prevent them from attending national conferences and accessing educational opportunities (Barrett, 2011). Not only is this true for new professionals, but this study found that participants in smaller or more rural districts lacked access to professional development opportunities also. One's career development is strongly influenced by the social systems that surround them (Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009). Therefore, more scrutiny is required to uncover the systemic barriers that prevent school counselors from access to and participation in professional development.

Additionally, advocacy with and on behalf of school counselors is needed to increase access and participation. School districts must engage in honest and open communication about the professional development needs of school counselors and ensure that the professional development offered meets those needs. Ultimately, the largest impact of the lack of access to professional development for school counselors is the quality of services provided to students.

Future Research

The purpose of this study was to explain how school counselors make decisions about engagement in professional development. Based on the findings of this grounded theory study, there are three recommendations for future research related to this topic. First, as one finding of this study centers on the influence of matriculation in a TSCI partnership university, future research could examine the factors that help to build a foundation for lifelong learning and instill

a value in professional development. Following this line of research, professional development modules could be created for new school counselors during their inductee period to help in the transition from counselor-in-training to practitioner-learner.

Second, a large-scale quantitative study can be completed to generalize the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model*. An instrument could be developed that allows participants to rate, using a Likert-like scale, their level of agreement with statements that correspond to each theme and subcategory of the *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model*.

Third, theories of role identity were used to conceptualize the findings from this study. Therefore, research should attempt to further connect counselor identity and professional development decision making. Using an instrument such as the *Professional Identity Scale in Counseling* (Woo, 2014) to gauge counselor identity and the above described instrument developed to measure school counseling professional development decision making, correlation statistics can be used to describe the relationship between these two concepts.

Chapter Summary

The *School Counseling Professional Development Decision Making Model* offers a visual explanation of the factors considered by school counselors when making decisions regarding engagement in professional development. The intersections of the four themes are where professional development decisions are made. This chapter summarized the findings of this Grounded Theory Research study, related the findings to existing literature, discussed limitations of the study, and provided implications and future research recommendations.

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Appendix A

Email Recruitment

June 29, 2015

My name is Cheryl S. Sewell and I am a doctoral student in Counseling and Student Personnel Services at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a study for my dissertation and I invite you to consider participating in this study.

The title of my study is, "School counselor professional development decision making: A grounded theory study." This study will attempt to discover the factors that contribute to school counselors' decisions regarding in which professional development activities to engage.

Participant criteria include professional school counselors with 5 or more years of experience in public schools who have graduated from UGA's School Counseling master's program. If you meet these criteria, please consider participation in one 45-60 minute, face-to-face, Skype, or phone interview and a second shorter follow-up interview after the theory has been developed.

Participation in this research study is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate, or may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you do not meet these criteria, please pass this information along to colleagues that may be interested. If you would like to participate or have any questions, please respond to cls02@uga.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix B

Consent Letter

June 29, 2015

Dear Potential Participant

My name is Cheryl S. Sewell and I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Jolie Daigle in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in my dissertation research study entitled, "School counselor professional development decision making: A grounded theory study." The purpose of this study is to discover the factors that contribute to school counselors' decisions regarding in which professional development activities to engage.

Participants of this study must be professional school counselors with 5 or more years of experience in public schools. Your participation will involve two interviews. The first interview will be a face-to-face, Skype, or telephone interview and should only take about 45 – 60 minutes. After the theory or model has been developed, a second follow-up interview, approximately 30 minutes, will be conducted where you may provide feedback or elaborate on the theory or model. Participation in this research study is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate, or may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only.

As a result of this study, school leaders will recognize the importance of counseling-specific professional development which may result in increased support for professional development activities within and outside of the school district. School counselors will gain insight into the importance of professional development and factors that contribute to or hinder their engagement in professional development activities. Finally, school students will obtain the greatest benefit from this study through the greater impact of school counselors that engage in more frequent and relevant professional development.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Prior to the interview, you will be asked if you have read this consent letter and if you agree to participate in the above-described research study. Your verbal consent is sufficient for this study and will be noted. If you, at any time, no longer want to participate in the study, please send written notice to the email list below.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me (Cheryl S. Sewell) at 404-405-9962 or send an e-mail to CLS02@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 609 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Cheryl S. Sewell

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Research Question:

What factors explain school counselors' decision making regarding professional development?

Demographic Interview:

1. At what level do you currently work?

2. For how long have you worked at that level?

3. Have you worked at any other levels?

    a. Which ones?

    b. For how long?

4. In what state are you located?

5. What is your degree background?

6. Do you have any additional specialties?

Semi-structured Research Interview:

1. Tell me about how you got into school counseling.

2. What are the professional development activities that you have participated in throughout your tenure as a school counselor? What encouraged you to engage in these activities?

    a. District provided/mandated

    b. Professional associations

    c.   Continuing education/coursework/degree programs

    d.   Independent/Personal-one-time workshops, books, etc.

    e.   Supervision

3. Tell me about the role your school district plays in providing professional development.

4. Tell me about your most meaningful professional development experience in as much detail as possible.

    a.   What was the professional development? Describe what it looked like. Where did it take place? Who was present? How is it that you were there?

    b.   What made it so meaningful?

5. Tell me about your least meaningful professional development experience in as much detail as possible.

    a.   What was the professional development? Describe what it looked like. Where did it take place? Who was present? How is it that you were there?

    b.   What made it not as meaningful?

6. What factors encourage you to engage in professional development activities? Examples.

7. What factors discourage you from engagement in professional development activities?

8. What have been the barriers to engagement in professional development activities? Examples.

9. What advice would you offer to school leaders in charge of professional development for school counselors?

10. Is there anything else you think I should know?

11. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you again for your participation. I want to remind you that you may withdraw from participation in this study at any time as previously discussed. If you have any questions about the study or feel like you need assistance after your participation in this interview, please do not hesitate to contact me or committee chair, Dr. Daigle (jdaigle@uga.edu. Once a theory or model is developed, you will be contacted to schedule a follow up interview. At that time you may offer feedback and provide any more relevant information. Thank you.