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# Examining At-Risk Students' Perceptions Of The Role And Function Of School Counselors

Colleen Marie Johnson

*Eastern Illinois University*

This research is a product of the graduate program in [Counseling and Student Development](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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Examining At-Risk Students' Perceptions  
of the Role and Function of School Counselors

(TITLE)

BY

Colleen Marie Johnson

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in Counseling

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
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2009

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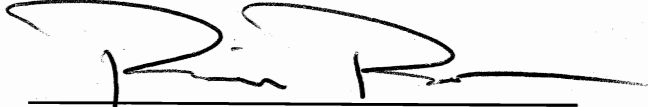
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Examining At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Role and Function of School Counselors

BY

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A thesis

Submitted to

Eastern Illinois University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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MASTER OF SCIENCE IN COUNSELING

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Eastern Illinois University

We recommend that this thesis be accepted as fulfilling part of the  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to examine the perceptions of the school counselor's role from the perspectives of at-risk middle school students. The principal researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with the sample population in order to better understand the way in which they regarded and perceived the school counselor's role and function. Analysis of the student responses allowed for the identification of emergent themes and commonalities. Several conclusions were drawn from this study's findings. The findings indicated that students denote individual counseling as the primary duty of the school counselor. Further, students believe school counseling is important within their educational experience and they feel positively about school counseling as a whole. The findings also suggested that students maintained various misperceptions regarding the school counselor's role before they met individually with the school counselor. Students expressed that the majority of their meetings with the school counselor were arranged due to a parent or teacher referral. These students also believed that school counselors should do more to increase their visibility within the school environment as well as focus on the comfort level experienced by students in regard to counseling. Suggestions for future researchers and current school counseling professionals are included within the discussion.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the role of the school counselor has evolved in an effort to accommodate changing educational and societal needs. As counselors have entered into the school environment, they tend to take on myriad roles and responsibilities. The extensive quantity of these duties contributes to the nebulous nature of what actually constitutes the title of school counselor. Professional counselor organizations have attempted to quell this disparate identity by comprising a set of guidelines to standardize the school counselor's function. This homogenizing of the profession; however, has not been uniformly acknowledged by all associated parties.

As social trends have influenced the expected role of the school counselor, research has evaluated how the professional practice has shifted as a result. Researchers have studied the current roles of professional school counselors in today's society as well as perceptions of role ambiguity and role confusion. These studies have indicated a difference in perception from parties associated with the school system (Schmidt, 2008).

The national school counseling professional organization, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has developed a specific definition of the school counseling role. This definition is one that is most commonly aligned with the role that counselor education programs prepare future counselors for serving. This role definition characterizes the school counselor's purpose as one that comprehensively meets the needs of students in regard to their academic, social, and career development. ASCA states that the goal of school counselors' duties should be to maximize student achievement. This goal can be ascertained by employing prevention and intervention

programs and other strategies that address the academic, social, and career aspects of students' experiences at their appropriate developmental level. These programs should include consulting with parents and school professionals as well as providing information and individual and group counseling to students (ASCA, 2004).

Research has indicated that administrators, who typically delegate the duties of the school counselor, have been shown to adhere to an older definition of guidance and counseling. This definition is one that does not precisely align with the role that current counselor education programs and professional organizations promote. The research literature also refers to perceptions of school counselors held by teachers and parents of students. However, there is not a clear foundation in the research literature that indicates how students actually perceive the role of the school counselor. In order to truly understand how to best advocate for the future of the profession, school counselors should have a firm grasp of students' needs and perceptions. Currently, this information does not exist in the literature in any clear and comprehensive capacity (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Moore-Thomas & Lent, 2007).

This study's focus was narrowed to center exclusively on the perceptions of the at-risk student sub-population. As this population is likely to encounter challenges within the school environment, they are often considered the most likely to utilize, and benefit from, school counseling services (Johnson, 1997; ASCA, 2004).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively assess perceptions of school counseling from the perspectives of at-risk middle school students. This study provides information on how these students characterize the role of the school counselor as well as

what contributes to the development of these personal perceptions. The influences, emotions, and encounters that have led to their awareness of and opinions toward the school counselor role will be explored. Students' needs, attitudes, and expectations regarding school counselors will also be examined. Ultimately, this study's purpose is to better understand how students perceive school counseling as well as how and why they come to hold the perceptions and opinions of school counseling that they do.

#### Research Questions

Five research questions directed the scope of the present study. These questions also guided the way in which students were prompted to reflect on their own experience with school counseling.

1. How do students perceive the nature of the school counselor's role?
2. What are students' thoughts and emotions regarding the role of the school counselor?
3. What contributes to students' perceptions and emotions regarding the nature of school counseling?
4. How are students and their needs being affected by the school counseling role?
5. What needs do students have that are not currently being addressed by school counselors?

#### Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that current and future counselors can gain insight into the firsthand perspectives of students and how they view the role of school counseling. These findings may help school counselors understand specific needs of

students, how to reach students most effectively, as well as how to produce a strong and collaborative environment for school counselors and students within the school system. Ultimately, these findings may have an impact on how school counselors can better their professional practice by knowing how students are most impacted by school counselors.

#### Limitations

Foremost, this study is limited by regional location; as all data was collected from one school setting in the Midwestern United States. Another limitation of this study was that, due to the nature of the study, reliance was put on the particular school's counseling department to provide the investigator with names of students who fit the criteria for participation. Due to the small size of the sample for this study, this sample population is not necessarily representative of all at-risk middle school students.

#### Definition of Terms

1. School counselor: An individual who is employed within the school setting and provides services to students that encompass academic, personal/social, and career concerns at an individual or group level. This individual has been educated and trained in school counseling and maintains licensure and/or certification within the field (ASCA, 2004).
2. Developmental guidance program: A comprehensive approach to school counseling which focuses on academic, personal/social, and career matters as they relate to particular students' developmental level. The implementation of this program includes consultative, informational, preventive, and intervention services (ASCA, 2004).

3. Perceptions: One's personal interpretation or understanding of a particular entity and its purpose (Oxford, 2000).
4. At-risk student: A student who experiences difficulty within the school environment due to various factors and is thus at risk of dropping out (Johnson, 1997).

### Summary

Since the inception of the school counseling profession, the school counselor's role has continuously evolved in an effort to best address the present needs of students. The most efficient way of investigating students' needs may be by directly enquiring about their perspectives and expectations regarding school counselors. Because school counseling is most specifically focused on the needs of students, forging this straightforward discourse, as this study aims to do, can contribute to the process of developing the school counseling profession.

Chapter I consists of the general introduction to the study; including the purpose, problem statements, and overview of this study's components. Chapter II includes the literature review, which encompasses the history of school counseling as well as the perceptions of school counseling held by various entities involved with the school system. Chapter III details the specific research methodology that was employed as well as a comprehensive account of how the study was conducted. The focus of Chapter IV is the study's findings and a summary of the qualitative information that was gathered. Chapter V consists of an analysis of the results, subsequent conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Initial Development of the School Counseling Profession

The school counseling profession initially became a component of American society near the onset of the twentieth century. Before school counselors were commonplace, students were typically assisted by classroom teachers regarding their social and career-related needs. Up until the early 1900s, American schools were typically populated by affluent males whose education curriculum was centered on exclusive preparation for specific career fields, such as medicine and law; thus establishing the American student population as relatively homogeneous. During the time of the Industrial Revolution, the country as a whole was experiencing a shift in cultural priorities, causing its institutions to subsequently progress and adapt as a result. Thus, the nature of the education system began to diversify and expand. Individuals from varying socioeconomic statuses, as well as females, began to enter into the school system. As public schools became more common in America; accordingly, the curriculum of these schools became more generalized. As a result, the American student population, and the needs of the students therein, became more divergent and plentiful. Classroom teachers were unable to sufficiently supply the type of career and social and emotional guidance that was now in demand (Schmidt, 2008).

Frank Parsons is often deemed to be the “Father of Guidance,” the individual responsible for establishing the school counseling movement in America. In 1908, Parsons established the Boston Vocational Bureau; an institution dedicated to providing assistance to adolescents and young adults in relation to their character development and

career pursuits. Parsons's emphasis was primarily focused on helping individuals find a vocation that was best suited to his or her personal needs, strengths, and goals. Parsons's bureau influenced the first major establishment of counseling in a school system; where, in Boston, 100 elementary and secondary teachers were assigned to serve as vocational counselors within their public school system. Parsons also developed a program that focused on training future vocational counselors to be able to provide appropriate guidance to adolescents in relation to their career-related goals. Shortly after this program's inception, the first counselor certification program was created by the School Committee of Boston. This program was later adopted by Harvard University and became the first college-level counselor education program (Nugent, 2000; Schmidt, 2008).

#### Significant Developments within the Profession

Throughout history, significant societal developments have notably aided in the propagation of the school counseling profession. World War II and its associated governmental influence considerably impacted the profession's development. The George-Barden Act of 1946 provided legislature that funded schools and other settings to support guidance and counseling related services. This was the first instance in which school counseling received funding from the government. This support propelled the field through a period of substantial growth and development (Schmidt, 2008).

In 1952, the development of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), a professional organization, helped to establish and define the professional identity of the school counseling role. The Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957 incited America's interest in remaining at the head of the space program. This



competitive nature led to a motivated interest in the education, and success, of American students; namely in the fields of math and science. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 was created as a response to the emerging criticism of the education system. This act ultimately served to further the governmental funding towards education and school counseling pursuits to keep students interested in academics. The NDEA proved to be successful in increasing the number of full-time school counselors and bettering the student-to-counselor ratio. The NDEA also increased the number of counseling institutes funded by the government (Gibson & Mitchell, 1999).

Later, The Education Act for All Handicapped Children of 1975 legislated for an increasing emphasis on counselors helping students with special needs within the school. This further expanded the focus on the importance of school counseling. Since this time, the need for establishing a solid sense of professional identity is what has been at the forefront of the school counseling field. Several counseling professional organizations and publications have become more developed and have gained considerable popularity across the nation. These entities have expanded the research literature on what the school counseling profession should, and currently does, entail. Thus, there has been an increased focus on school counseling as a legitimized and prospering career field (Schmidt, 2008; Gibson, Mitchell, & Basile, 1993).

#### The Nature of School Counselor Education

As the role of the school counselor has diversified from its initial state, the nature of counselor education has adjusted accordingly. In the early years of counseling, teachers with little to no training in guidance were able to carry out the school counseling role. By the 1970s, most states began to require a graduate-level education in school

counseling for teachers to officially become certified as counselors. These programs consisted of 30-36 semester hours. It was not until 1972 that non-teachers would be allowed to earn the title of school counselor. Wisconsin began this trend and, soon after, several other states had adopted the notion as well (Baker & Gerler, 2008).

In 1981, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) was established. Graduate program accreditation by CACREP is accepted by the most state licensure boards and certification bodies as fulfilling the educational requirements needed to obtain counselor licensure or certification (Baker & Gerler, 2008; CACREP, 2009). Those interested in pursuing counseling are typically encouraged to fulfill their degree requirements within a CACREP accredited program.

Essentially, CACREP standardizes the education and training of school counselors. To earn CACREP accreditation, a master's level graduate program must be comprised of a minimum of 48 semester hours that provide an education based on a set of unified standards that are a part of both the school counseling and community counseling concentrations. In addition to learning broadly about the counseling profession, CACREP also requires school counseling students to take specialty courses on counseling within the school setting (Baker & Gerler, 2008; CACREP, 2009).

According to CACREP standards, school counseling students are also required to complete practicum and internship experiences within their education program. These requirements provide opportunities for students to gain supervised field experience within the school counseling setting. One hundred hours of service are required for practicum while six hundred total hours of service are required for the internship experience (CACREP, 2009).

Ultimately, the current education for school counselors is much more intensive and nuanced than it has been in the past. Counseling students are educated on counseling theories, human development, research techniques, cross-cultural matters, and gain ample clinical experience in the school counseling field. Students are also required to understand the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) national model of school counseling as the basis of their school counseling foundation education. Students are taught to implement the standards of the ASCA model into their current and future school counseling practice. Overall, students must adhere to specific standards and regulations in order to earn a master's degree in school counseling. Typically, this degree must be earned before students are able to pursue certification in school counseling at the state and national levels (CACREP, 2009).

#### The American School Counselor Association and the Role of the School Counselor

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is a nationally recognized professional organization that has developed and promoted a specific role definition for American school counselors. ASCA defines a school counselor as an individual who has earned a master's level degree, or higher, in a school counseling related field and has established official certification in school counseling. Further, a school counselor is employed within the school setting in order to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that encourages academic achievement as well as the enhancement of students' career, social, and emotional development. The school counselor's focus is tied to ensuring that students have the skills and awareness needed to become productive members of adult society in the future. This comprehensive school counseling program is

characterized by several key components that are explained in detail below (ASCA, 2004).

ASCA's interpretation of the role of the school counselor supports the wide-ranging needs of students; directing attention to academic development as well as the complexities of students' social, emotional, psychological well-being. Thus, the ASCA national model of school counseling provides a role statement for school counselors and, ultimately, aims to demystify the nature of the school counseling profession. There is great emphasis on school counselors implementing these standards within their professional practice (Walsh, Barrett, & DePaul, 2007).

Within this model, ASCA promotes the creation of a developmental guidance program in schools that is substantiated on four specific standards. These standards include the components of foundation, delivery, management, and accountability. The concept of the developmental guidance program is based on a holistic notion of counseling and guidance that encompasses the academic, career, personal and social development of the student population (ASCA, 2004).

The foundation component of the ASCA national model details that counselors should devise a mission statement for their counseling program. This mission statement demonstrates the focal point of the counselors' activity and function. According to ASCA, the foremost purpose of school counseling is to promote the academic, social, emotional, and psychological well-being of students. By focusing on these factors, counselors contribute to the overall social, academic, and future career development of each individual student. To be most effective, the mission statement of the counseling

program should be aligned within these standards as well as the overarching mission statement of the particular school in which the program is developed (ASCA, 2004).

The delivery component of the model articulates the actual means used to execute the tenets of the mission statement. School counselors should be working with students, families, community members, school staff, and the school system as a whole. In communicating with these various parties, school counselors will provide preventive, informational, and responsive services. Preventive means include providing psycho-educational and informational services to invested parties. School counselors provide responsive services by utilizing their counseling skills in individual and group settings and in crisis situations. School counselors play a crucial role in mediating crisis circumstances that arise within the school setting including, but not limited to, instances of school violence, death, and other manifestations of loss experienced by students (ASCA, 2004).

The management component of the model focuses on the organizational skills needed to run a school-wide counseling program. School counselors should establish action plans, agreed upon by the administration, that delineate how much of their time will be spent working directly with students and in what capacity. They should ensure that administrators, staff, students, and parents are consistently aware of the school counseling program's elements; including its focal points and its successes. Further, school counselors should consistently encourage the active participation of these parties within the implementation of the overarching school counseling program (ASCA, 2004).

The accountability component of the model is focused on the counselor's thorough examination and evaluation of the various factors within their school counseling

program. All of the different methods they employ should be assessed for efficiency and adapted according to the results and findings they ascertain. School counselors should be actively focusing on the review and modification of their program in order to promote future success (ASCA, 2004).

Ultimately, the ASCA model of school counseling places the school counselor in the role of providing consultation, prevention and intervention strategies within the school environment in individual and group contexts. The goal of these services is to promote the student population's social, emotional, and career development as well as their ability to achieve academic success (ASCA, 2004).

#### Perceptions of School Counseling

Much research has been conducted on the existing debate of the professional role of the school counselor. It seems there is disparity amongst the ideal roles of the school counselor and the actual realities of the profession. School counselors are often left to negotiate their own sense of professional identity in a setting where their role is not clearly delineated or understood. Ultimately, school counselors across the country are likely to be establishing very different roles and job duties within their specific place of employment. This reality detracts from a unified and clear definition of the school counselor's role within the context of American society (Brott & Myers, 1999; Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001).

In a national survey of school counselors, results indicated that practicing school counselors often experience role ambiguity, role stress, and role confusion in relation to the professional roles. School counselors whose perceptions of the role matched their job experience tended to rank role stress and ambiguity as being very low. School counselors

who held role perceptions that were inconsistent with their job duties, and who felt ill-prepared to fulfill their current roles, tended to experience more role stress and role ambiguity (Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005).

This topic has been of specific concern within counselor education programs and how these institutions prepare school counseling students for work in the field. While school counseling students are typically taught the ASCA model of the profession, they are often confounded with conflicting roles and priorities when they enter into their actual job setting. A discrepancy seems to exist regarding the school counselor role amongst self-perceptions, accrediting bodies, educational programs, certification committees, and the school systems (Culbreth et al., 2005).

The actual job a school counselor will execute is most often reflective of the perceptions a specific school district's administrators maintain regarding the school counselor position (Ponec & Brock, 2000). The administrators' perceptions of the school counselor's role often vary from ASCA's interpretation of the school counseling profession. This differing perception is often deemed most critical, as these individuals are most likely responsible for assigning the duties that the school counselor will be required to perform as well as providing supervision accordingly (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005).

According to Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, & Skelton (2006), counselors sometimes feel as though administrators do not understand their professional role within the school setting. Oftentimes, they are put to the task of administrative work and other types of tasks that do not require making a connection with students. Instead, they are to perform tasks that are vital to the school's existence, yet require no actual

contact with students. Especially in rural areas where schools may not harbor the resources to hire multiple clerical assistants, school counselors will assume these responsibilities accordingly.

In a study conducted by Kirchner & Setchfield (2005), results indicated that counselors and administrators held conflicting perceptions about what constituted appropriate duties for a school counselor to perform. School counselors emphasized providing a safe and confidential environment, promoting wellness, responding to crisis, and communicating empathy as their most critical roles. School administrators reported that counselors' most vital roles included facilitating registration and scheduling, administering achievement tests, assisting in disciplinary interventions, maintaining student records, and assisting in special education services. Furthermore, all of the duties that school administrators listed as being important conflicted with the ASCA model, which is the very model that accredited education programs emphasize in the training of future school counselors (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005).

#### Student Perceptions of School Counseling

Much research has been established regarding client expectations about the counseling process (Barich, 2002). This research is based on the concept that client expectations can have a significant impact on how he or she will conceptualize, utilize, and be affected by counseling services. Clients' expectations and perceptions about counseling may influence if they will seek a counselor, what topics they will feel comfortable discussing with the counselor, as well as how committed they feel to the overall process. Much of this literature has maintained a focus on adults and late adolescent populations. Thus, the perceptions and expectations of children and



adolescents regarding counseling tend to be lacking in the research literature.

Additionally, this research also tends to focus exclusively on the perceptions of mental health counseling. As a result, there appears to be a void in the research in regard to how adolescent students perceive the role of school counseling (Moore-Thomas, & Lent, 2007).

Because there is much debate surrounding what role a school counselor will ultimately fulfill in any one school setting, it is important to investigate how students are being affected by the disparity. Further, students comprise the primary population for which the school counseling profession serves. It is assumed that research on adolescent perceptions of school counseling may inform school counselors of, not only how they are currently being perceived, but how they can best serve the population in the future (Eschenauer & Chen-Hayes, 2005; Whiston & Sexton, 1998).

#### At-Risk Student Population

The scope of this study was narrowed to focus on one subgroup of students, namely, the at-risk student population. This was based on the belief that at-risk students tend to have the most need for additional support in regard to their success within the school environment, as well as other mental health and well-being considerations. This reality makes at-risk students prime candidates for the utilization of school counseling services (Johnson, 1997; ASCA, 2004).

At-risk became an educational term upon being borrowed from the medical science field of epidemiology, which is characterized as the study of the existence, spread, and control of disease within a particular population (Richardson, Casanova, Placier, & Guilfoyle, 1989). The term is thought to have originated in the insurance

industry in dealing with the matter of calculating and predicting liabilities in association with insurance premium costs. In general, the term at-risk is used in relation to the probabilistic likelihood that a certain event or incident will take place within or amongst a particular entity (Davis, 2004). In education, the at-risk term is most often used to describe a student who is likely to encounter academic difficulty due to various factors and is thus at risk of dropping out of school (No child left behind, 2001).

While the notion of dropping out of school is frequently tied to the at-risk student label, research literature has elaborated on the at-risk term within a broader context of correlated factors, influences, and outcomes. At-risk students are those that are likely to lack the skills and self awareness needed to be academically successful due to a variety of circumstances and conditions. Further, they may be lacking the abilities and self-esteem needed to be successful as future participants in adulthood (Davis, 2004).

The most commonly referenced factors that contribute to the at-risk label may be best encompassed within a conceptual framework developed by Johnson (1997). This framework includes the classifications of: a) student risk factors, b) family risk factors, c) school-based risk factors, and d) cultural risk factors. These categories encapsulate the primary influences that may interfere with a student's likelihood of responding successfully within the school environment.

Student risk factors refer to individual tendencies including poor grades, behavioral issues such as discipline and criminal matters, social or emotional issues, drug use, peer pressure, low self esteem, learning disabilities, and truancy. Family risk factors include a lack of parental involvement or competence, divorce, a lack of educational history or importance amongst family members, substance abuse or criminal activity

affiliated with family members, a non-English language family background, and being within a family who is at or below the poverty level. School-based risk factors include inadequate teaching or academic programs, low teacher expectation of student progress, lack of individualized academic instruction, and overall lack of support from the school environment. Cultural risk factors involve a student identifying within a minority culture or group that may not be properly addressed by the school's social or academic elements (Johnson, 1997; Hixson, 1993).

Further, Davis, Brutsaert-Durant, & Lee (2002), suggested that at-risk students may also have a tendency to be unconventional learners; which makes them likely to perform poorly within a typical academic environment. These students may experience learning disabilities, anxiety, or other impediments that place them at need of more individualized intervention or academic assistance to succeed (Hixson, 1993).

Ultimately, research indicates that a wide range of factors contribute to a student being labeled as at-risk (Davis, 2004; Hixson, 1993; Johnson, 1997). Students who fit into this category are likely to struggle within the school environment in terms of being academically and socially successful. According to ASCA (2004), the role of the school counselor emphasizes a focus on the awareness, prevention, and intervention of factors that place students at-risk. Thus, at-risk students are a subgroup of the population that seems to greatly benefit from the implementation and utilization of effective school counseling services.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Design of the Study

The methodology utilized within this study was qualitative inquiry. This research style is characterized as attempting to make sense of a particular phenomenon by studying subjects, and the meanings they assign to particular phenomenon, within their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Specifically, one-on-one interviews were used to ascertain an understanding of student perceptions of school counseling. The participants were male and female students within the middle school setting. All of these individuals had utilized school counseling services during their middle school experience. Further, each student was determined as being a part of at-risk student population.

By using this methodology, the researcher was able to gain a detailed and nuanced understanding of each student's specific opinions and perceptions. The nature of this research design allowed participants to utilize word choice, voice inflection, and elaboration to provide a truly specific definition of their experience with and perceptions of school counseling. One-on-one interviews also allowed for the researcher to check for understanding and clarification as the participant explained his or her response. The researcher was also able to perceive the body language and voice tone of the participant during the delivery of his or her answers. All of these characteristics led to an in-depth and thorough understanding of the students' responses to the interview protocols (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The researcher contacted the primary school counselor at a middle school in Illinois to identify a potential interest in conducting this research at the respective school.

The middle school is located in the central part of Illinois and is comprised of seventh through eighth grade levels with a total enrollment of 411 students. Upon confirmation of the school's interest, the researcher supplied the school counselor with the necessary criteria for research participants. The criteria for participation included having the at-risk label as well as having utilized school counseling services during their time in the seventh or eighth grade while in attendance at this middle school. The school counselor supplied the researcher with a list of ten potential students. From this list, the researcher picked the selected participants at random.

### Participants

The researcher met with each of the selected students individually to explain the research project and enquire whether or not they were interested in participating. If the student agreed that he or she would like to participate, he or she then signed a student assent form (Appendix C). Being that these students were minors, they were also given a parental consent form to have signed (Appendix D). The completion of these forms indicated each student's voluntary participation as well as his or her full awareness of the benefits, hazards, and purpose of the present study. The IRB review approval form for this study is located in Appendix B.

The sample population for this study was comprised of six current middle school students who had utilized school counseling services and were labeled as being at-risk. Two participants were male and four participants were female. The participants ranged in age from 12 to 14 years old, with 13 years being the average age. Four of the participants were in the seventh grade while two of the participants were in the eighth grade. Three of

the participants identified as White, two of the participants identified as African-American and White, and one participant identified as Hispanic.

### Instruments

The researcher fulfilled the role of the primary instrument for the collection of data. The researcher conducted each of the one-on-one interviews and recorded minimal field notes during the process. Each of the interviews was audio recorded by means of a digital recorder and was subsequently transcribed by the researcher. The interviews took place in the spring of 2009 in a private, enclosed area within the guidance office at the middle school. They were conducted during non-academic periods of the school day. The official interview portion was guided by the interview protocols, which consisted of 21 questions and prompts (Appendix E). This interview protocol was developed in order to answer the five research questions specified in Chapter 1.

### Data Collection

Prior to the actual interview portion, each student was to have turned in a completed assent form (Appendix C), consent form (Appendix D), and a demographic survey (Appendix F). The researcher arranged times to meet with the students with assistance from the school counselor in accordance to the students' free periods during the school day. Before the interview began, the researcher again discussed the nature of the study, the associated risks and benefits, as well as the student's right to withdraw from the interview process at any time.

The interviews were audio-recorded by means of a digital recorder. They ranged in length from 21 minutes to 39 minutes. Once the interviews were conducted and recorded, the researcher then transcribed each interview. A follow-up interview was

conducted so that students could view the transcript of their interview and clarify any statements they had made previously. The interview transcript and field notes were then examined for common themes indicated by repeated words, phrases, and perspectives expressed by the participants. This data was organized by utilizing coding categories based on Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) analytic strategy of qualitative analysis. These categories included setting and context codes, perspectives held by subjects, subjects' way of thinking about people and objects, process codes, and relationship and social structure codes. The codification allowed for the data to be efficiently sorted and evaluated according to emergent themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

#### Treatment of Data

Ultimately, the codified data represented common and dissimilar themes amongst the participant responses. The data, organized by according research question, is presented in detail in Chapter IV.

#### Summary

Chapter III described the primary methodology of the present study's research design. Chapter IV will detail the themes derived from the participants' responses according to the research questions of the present study. Chapter V provides a discussion of the study's findings as well as recommendations for the school counseling profession as well as future research.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

A total of six participants were interviewed using the qualitative naturalistic method in the form of one-on-one interviews. This format allowed for current middle school students to respond to questions regarding their perceptions and feelings in relation to the school counselor's role. Students were encouraged to base their perceptions on the school counselors they had encountered throughout their entire educational experience. Students had attended, as a minimum, four different schools in total. In the district in which the students were situated, four distinct school buildings comprise the kindergarten through eighth grade levels. Each of these school buildings employs a different school counselor. The maximum number of schools that any one student had attended was five, as two of the students had previously attended school within another district. The students' current district is also unique in the fact that the town in which it resides houses a CACREP accredited counseling graduate program. Thus, their school district has been a prime candidate for hosting several practicum and intern school counselors throughout these students' educational experiences. Students have consequently been exposed to a variety of different school counselors over time. The students' responses are a product of all of these factors.

Within this study, students were able to articulate what has contributed to their overarching conceptualization of who they think the school counselor is and what they believe he or she should do. Students were also able to discuss what they have liked and disliked about the school counseling experience. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common and related themes.



The first student was a 13-year-old female in the seventh grade who identified as White and African-American. The second student was a 12-year-old, White female in the seventh grade. The third student involved was a 13-year-old female in seventh grade who identified as White and African-American. The fourth student was a 14-year-old male eighth grader who identified as White. The fifth student was a 14-year-old female in the eighth grade who identified as Hispanic. The sixth and final student was a 13-year-old male seventh grader who identified as White.

The emergent themes that are delineated within this chapter are representative of at least two of the six student participants involved in the study. The themes that were consistent amongst the majority of the sample are emphasized in order to illustrate the significance of the group's shared experience.

The findings are presented according to each research question. Research question one focused on how students perceive the role of the school counselor. Participant responses to this question are included within the narrative below.

Research Question #1: How do students perceive the nature of the school counselor's role?

Three common themes became apparent regarding these students' initial perceptions of school counseling. These common themes were (1) students believed the school counselor's primary role was to meet individually with students to help them with issues, (2) the students previously thought the school counselor only met with students who had serious mental health concerns or discipline issues, and (3) students associated the school counseling role with administrative tasks.

*Principal Role of the School Counselor*

The first emergent theme was that all six students believed the school counselor's primary role was to meet and talk with students on an individual basis concerning the issues and problems they may be encountering. Several of the students articulated that, in general, students often need to express their thoughts and emotions and that it is important to have someone, such as the school counselor, to be there to listen to them.

The first student explained that she characterizes the school counselor's role as being someone that students can express themselves to:

Where you just can go and talk to somebody and, ya know, let it all out and don't have to hold it in all the time, like, ya know, how you feel and that kind of stuff.

The fourth student responded with a comparable characterization of the school counselor's role by explaining that, "a school counselor is someone you can talk to." The second student in the study shared a similar sentiment by elaborating how she had been able to utilize individual school counseling services for herself in the past:

I think of a person that I could just talk to and get stuff off my chest about, especially here at school if something's bothering me at school, then I just go and talk about it or something that'd bothered me that morning.

She seemed to convey a sense of positivity about school counseling, as she stated that she felt that more students should take advantage of it:

I think everyone should, like, see a counselor now and then...maybe just to even talk about schoolwork or, like, just their friends, ya know, it doesn't always have to be home issues.

While specifying her perception of the school counselor, the third student detailed an awareness of the types of issues school counselors deal with when working with the students:

Adults who counsel kids who might have problems at home or have problems anywhere, like, at school or around town or anything, that's what I think.

She also went on to highlight the importance of the listening aspect of the school counselor's role:

Like....they help them out or talk to them about it. Just be, like, a listener because some kids don't have people who just listen.

Similarly, the fifth student stated that school counselors focus on helping and advocating for students within the school setting:

Like, they help you with your issues and they help you if you're in a fight with a teacher, they try to get on your side and try to help you get out of that situation as much as possible. I came to a counselor because some things are just really hard, I just couldn't keep it in.

She went on to illustrate a feeling of catharsis that was experienced when she met with a school counselor and was able to discuss the nuances of her issue:

Well I felt, what I wanted to do was like – you wanted to let, like, everything that was bottled up, like, loose. Like, let it go, like, ya know, like, let the water pour out....you just wanted to pour it all on the table and let her know what's going on, or, let the counselor know, whoever it is,

what's going on. That was my main reaction, was just, to let them know this is how I'm feeling.

The sixth student cited that school counselors also help students achieve goals associated with issues that are affecting them. He related this opinion to his personal experience with a school counselor, including how the school counselor contributed to making him feel more comfortable with the presenting issue he was dealing with:

...to help students accomplish goals and not be afraid of fears and stuff. I think of a counselor helping you with a problem or an issue in your life.... 'cause I had anxiety and I went to a counselor and that's what it was like. I thought she was just gonna sit there and ask about what was goin' on and stuff but she actually talked outside of the issue. It was a little more comfortable, 'cause you weren't just talking about an issue, you're actually talking about other stuff too.

#### *School Counselors' Perceived Association with Serious Mental Health and Discipline Matters*

The second emergent theme was that five of the students had perceived school counselors as being exclusively associated with students with mental health and discipline concerns. Two of these students explained they had held these types of views about school counselors before coming to talk individually with them. They expressed that this seemed to be a traditional, or stereotypical, way of looking at school counselors which seemed to be existent amongst their peers at school. The fourth student pointed out how other students in school have responded to the notion of school counseling:

I know every time they say “go to the guidance office,” they’re all like: “ooooohh,” they do that stupid thing like you’re in trouble.

He explained that, like his peers, at one point he had held a similar opinion about school counseling as well. Prior to meeting with a school counselor, he described his awareness of school counseling:

Before, I thought it was like, to help people, like, that, like, killed someone or went to jail. I didn’t know it was just, like, talking.

The first student elaborated on this perception as well:

I mean I like it, I don’t think there’s anything wrong, um, I just think that there’s, like, a lot of misconceptions about it, like, what it, what it’s about and that kind of stuff. Schools, like, most of the time, there the counselor deals with, like, the kids, ya know, that act up and, like, that kind of stuff. And, or, like, um, maybe, like, whenever they see stuff on TV, people that have, like, major problems, ya know, like, go and talk to them or something. Like, they are always, like, um, acting out in class, like, yelling, that kind of stuff, like, talking back to the teacher, like that kind of stuff.

She explained that a previous school counselor she had known had contributed to her prior misconception about the school counseling role:

Like, at my old school, ya know, the school counselor was just, like, she was, uh, she would sometimes even, like, deal with people that got in trouble or something, she wasn’t really, like, reaching out to people, like, individually at all.

Similarly, the second student expressed the reality of the aforementioned perception. She further related this type of misconception to individuals whom she was familiar with in the school setting:

Most of my friends though, they don't, like, come and talk but I know some people that do. They probably just think that they talk to the kids that have problems, I guess. Just like...home problems, discipline problems, and different sorts of things. But, it's, like, different than that ...ya know, it's not just, oh school counselors....they just talk to all the weird kids that have issues, ya know?

#### *School Counselors and Administrative Tasks*

The final emergent theme focused on the perception that the school counselor appeared to mainly have administratively focused priorities within the school environment. Two of the students explained their initial perception of school counseling was that it specifically dealt with such entities as paperwork and grades. The first student expressed that she had previously been unaware of the fact that school counselors talk to students. Due to her experience, she perceived them as working more administratively within the school environment.

I didn't really think that they, like, actually talk to you or whatever. I just figured that they were just, like, involved in the school and grades and that type of stuff.

The fifth student reflected the busy nature of school counselors. She described how she had come to this awareness as well as how she felt about their priorities:

They have so much going on. Um, like other students, new students, paperwork, making sure students go in, like, the right classes. And, um, yeah – helping other students and staff, I guess. I just see my counselor running around and I know she's in charge of all the paperwork, so, like...for new students to transfer their information and grades and stuff like that. I do think the counselor should try to get through to a person, like, as much as possible. So, I think people are more important than paper. Since we're, like, way older, the counselor doesn't, like, look for you, you have to look for them.

Research Question #2: What are students' thoughts and emotions regarding the role of the school counselor?

The second research question generated three emergent themes from the student participants. These themes were (1) students expressed feelings of apprehension about meeting their school counselor for the first time, (2) students felt very positively about the role the school counselor served, and (3) students felt the counselor being within the school building was very important.

*Initial Apprehension Regarding School Counseling*

The first common theme was that, before meeting with a school counselor, two students experienced nervousness regarding how the counseling session would transpire and how the counselor would view them. The first student reported a sense of caution and curiosity that she experienced before going to a school counseling session for the first time:

Um, like, at first I was afraid that she was, like, gonna judge me on, like, what I was saying, like, um, like, if I were to say something that maybe she didn't agree with maybe...would she judge me on it? And, like, view me as like a bad person or something.

The second student experienced a similar sense of caution regarding her initial meeting with a school counselor. She expressed a feeling of anxiety regarding what the session would consist of:

I was, like, a little nervous because, like, I didn't know what she would ask me and stuff but everything went over good.



*Positive Feelings Regarding the School Counselor*

The second common theme that emerged was that all six students felt positively about the school counselor's role. Ultimately, they felt they had benefitted from utilizing school counseling services in the past and felt it was important to have a school counselor available for students if they needed to talk. The first student detailed her feelings regarding the role with enthusiasm:

I think it's good to have a school counselor because somebody, like, need to talk to somebody, like, I think there would be, like, a lot more stuff going on, ya know, if some people didn't talk to somebody. Like, I know sometimes I feel I just like need to talk to the counselor, ya know. There are some things that I talk to her about that I don't want to talk to my friends about because you can't, like, fully trust them but...and, like, she has, like, a perspective, ya know, that, ya know, an out of the situation perspective.

The second student reflected a similar sentiment, happily highlighting how she personally had been impacted by school counseling:

I really like going to school counseling, like, because they're always gonna be here and you can always talk to 'em and stuff. If something happens, like, that morning I can just come in here and talk about it and just, like, helps me like relieve all this stress and it helps me go on with my day. It's always nice, there's never been.... I've never felt uncomfortable talking to someone.

The fourth student identified that a component of why he enjoys talking to the school counselor is because he knows the information will be kept confidential, which is different than many of his relationships:

Sometimes it's just good to talk to someone, ya know. Mainly just the talking part. Like, you feel comfortable talking to them, like, some things you can't talk about with your friends and your family. ... 'Cause you know they'll keep it a secret, like you know, like if you tell people you don't want to know stuff and you can tell them 'cause it's their job to keep it a secret.

The sixth student specified how talking with a school counselor can be useful, especially in circumstances where one may not have anyone else to talk to:

I think it's actually helpful. Because, like, if you're afraid to talk to a teacher or parent; you can talk to a school counselor. Or, if you talk to your teacher and parents and they don't know what to do, you can talk to a school counselor.

#### *Significance of Counselor Being within the School Environment*

The third primary theme focused on the significance of the counselor being within the school building. Two students believed this was advantageous, as it provided accessibility and convenience. Additionally, two students believed this proximity aided in the school counselor being able to have a deeper understanding of the student's issue due to being aware of the realities of their age group, as well as the student's particular circle of friends.

The sixth student mentioned the convenience of being able to see the counselor at school, as he spends most of his days within the school building. He also explained the practical side of this reality, as it is not costly for the student to engage in counseling:

I find it useful for a counselor at school because you don't have to pay lots of money and it is convenient because you go to school everyday. It's just convenient to go here.

The first student reflected this attitude, while also emphasizing how the counselor's placement in the school can help reach students who may not be able to seek counseling services elsewhere:

Well, I think it's, like, a good way for someone to talk to somebody cause like, um, maybe they can't go see a counselor and they feel like they need to talk to somebody or maybe they're, like, afraid of, like, what their parents might think or something. And some people, ya know, like, can't go to a counselor or whatever.

The second student stated that the counselor being in the school was important, as it enhanced the counselor's comprehension of the student's presenting issue:

Um, they kind of like know, since it's school, they know how kids are these days, they know, like, it's hard to find your real friends and know who, like, to trust and stuff like that. So they can relate to that and help me, like, with that. It helps me when I'm having a bad day with my friends I can just come down here and she helps me understand them and stuff like that. Like, what the kids are saying, ya know, and how they can get sometimes and stuff like that. Knowing the kids....just knowing, like, what

goes on around the school, ya know – whose the troublemakers, whose, ya know, stuff like that.

The fifth student also described how the school counselor's knowledge of background information about her presenting issue was helpful to the overall counseling process:

She, like, she knows, like the people I'm talking about and so it's easier so I don't have to explain it to her and she knows their background and she knows how they act and their personalities.

Research Question #3: What contributes to students' perceptions and emotions regarding the nature of school counseling?

Participant responses alluded to two common themes regarding how students became aware of the school counselor's role. The primary themes were (1) students cited not truly understanding what the school counselor did prior to meeting personally with them and (2) students typically came to meet with their school counselors due to a parent or teacher referral.

*Lack of Exposure to the Role of the School Counselor Prior to Parent or Teacher Referral*

The first primary theme was that students expressed not having much exposure or awareness to who the school counselor was before they actually came to meet with the school counselor for individual counseling. The other emergent theme centered on the way in which students were prompted to more actively encounter the school counselor. Five of the students specified that a parent or teacher referral was what caused them to become aware of school counseling services. Two of the students were aware of the school counselor by being a part of various classroom guidance activities (such as lessons on bullying, courtesy, and being respectful). These two students were not aware of the counselor's other roles until it was overtly specified to them.

The second student explained that she initially did not know the school counselor provided any other services than classroom lessons. Her perspective was enhanced once her parents contacted the school to make arrangements for her to meet individually with the school counselor:

Our counselors would, like, come in once a week and they'd go over, like, respect, responsibility. Once a week we'd have a lesson on something different for like an hour maybe. I really thought it was cool. I liked it, that the counselors went into different classrooms. She always, like, came and talked about the, like, the lessons and stuff, like once a week. And she did that. And, then, after, like, awhile, I just thought she was just somebody that just came in and, like, talked about it and stuff...and talked about life lesson things until I went and saw her, like, one-on-one and talked about more than just the lessons she went over in class. I just knew there was a counselor because my parents got kinda worried about me so they called in the school and asked them if I could talk to somebody about it. And so, uh, that's what I did.

The first student described a similar experience:

My school counselor would come to classrooms and, like, she would do, like, lessons sometimes, or, like, um, even, like, if we were having a school fundraiser or something she would, like, come to the classroom and do, like, a powerpoint or something on it. Like, she'd probably come like a twice year, like, twice in a school year to your classroom or something; and that's the only reason that I knew about her.

...and then, like, whenever we were in girls group and um I was just talkin' to her and then she told us all, like, all the girls that are in girls group, if we needed to talk to her, um, like, um, individually or whatever then we

could. Well, like, I didn't know that before girls group, like I didn't even talk to her.

The fourth student explained that he was unaware that the school even had a counselor before his parents suggested to the school that he meet with someone for individual counseling:

Actually my mom just signed me up for it. I just found out because my parents signed me up. I knew what it was about, but I didn't know what we were gonna be doing. I don't even know if I knew what a counselor was before two years ago when I started meeting with him. Like, I didn't even know if we had school counselors, actually.

The sixth student described his first exposure to the school counselor as being of a similar nature:

My parents, they went and talked to the school. I was nervous...because I was actually in first or second grade that I met one. And I didn't know that we had one and I didn't know what they were like. It went away pretty quickly. Getting used to being there. Knowing what they do.

The third student explained that, "one of my teachers recommended it, to see the school counselor." Likewise, the fifth student participant reported that a teacher was responsible for making her aware of the school counselor when she was young. She detailed what her feelings were about this initial meeting:

It all started when I was like, in first grade, I had really weird issues. My first grade teacher said something about it. Why don't you go to a counselor and I was like, what is a counselor? And then they went in to,

like, we won't tell anyone, this is confidential, or whatever. So, then I was like, okay this is cool.

After that, the counselor started coming into our classroom and teaching us, like, bullying stuff, like, not to bully people and what to do if you were bullied and stuff like that.



Research Question #4: How are students and their needs being affected by the school counseling role?

The fourth research question produced one common theme amongst participant responses. The primary theme was that all of the students felt positively about the school counselor's role and that their needs were being appropriately addressed.

*Students' Needs and Goals Associated with School Counseling*

All six students reported they were receiving what they needed from the school counselor's role. In general, most students specified that when they entered into a counseling relationship, they had a specific goal in mind they wanted to work towards achieving. Some of these students felt as though their goal had been attained and that their needs were thus being met. One student believed that reaching his goal was still a work in progress. The sixth student reported that his intention in meeting with a school counselor was because he "wanted to gain independence and gain trust". The first student explained how her needs were met after deciding to meet with a school counselor:

I just, like, wanted to talk to somebody so, like, I felt like I could get it off my chest. And, um, like, how to deal with, like, a situation better, like, ya know with, um, dealing with it, like, emotionally and whatever and not like, blowing up at something, ya know. Like learning how to control your emotions. And yeah, I am now.

The second student stated her personal goal in relation to her school counseling sessions. She portrayed how the school counselor had been able to assist her in reaching this objective:

Better attitude, like, throughout the day. Because my dad, like, makes me, like, so mad in the mornings that I just, like, I wanna, like, not even wanna go to school and I just want to be alone and stuff. But I come here and I get it off my chest, so, that's nice, 'cause it helps me not be so angry and reduces my stress level, I guess. Usually my goal is met. If I just can get it off my chest, and then, I'll stop thinking about it for the rest of the day and, then, go home and it usually happens again and I just come back. But ya know, it's a repeating process and I'm just trying to get it better.

The third student reported how she conceptualized the purpose of school counseling in regard to the goals she had established and reached with the assistance of her school counselor:

Counseling can help you out and stuff, like, with my problems....and stuff. It could help you with stuff, like, that's happening at home. I think better, um, confidence of myself. Because lately I haven't been having much confidence. I think I'm, like, meeting it. It kind of helped me, because, like, most of the time I'd just be, drooping around doing nothing really and just sitting around and...I never, and like people would make fun of me, I'd go somewhere and start crying or something and just act like nothing was wrong and not show my feelings. But, like, I started going to a counselor and they told me that, like, I have to have confidence and not to let people, like, make fun of me or let.... put me down or anything just, like, do something about it, if you really want something to happen then

you'll do something about it but if you don't, then you're not gonna do anything about it.

Research Question #5: What needs do students have that are not currently being addressed by school counselors?

The final research question was addressed by three emergent themes. The themes amongst these participant responses were (1) students believed school counselors should be more visible in the school environment, (2) school counselors should focus on making the counseling experience more comfortable for students, and (3) students stated that school counselors may have a tendency to be too intrusive when dealing with certain types of student issues.

*School Counselors' Visibility within the School Setting*

The first common theme was that students thought school counselors should make an effort to be more visible within the school setting. Two students explained that the school counselor should be more active in making all students aware of who they are and what they do. The first student speculated that many students in the school may not know what the school counselor is there to provide:

Well, I mean they just need to be there for people to talk to. Most people, ya know, only know of the school counselor because of her running around school, I mean, I don't know that many people that go and talk to her or whatever. But, I mean, I think people should be more aware about it that they can. That they're there and that they can talk to or whatever.

The fifth student shared this opinion and went on to explain her perspective on the way school counselors currently have made themselves visible to the student body as well as what they should do in order to be more effective:

No, kids have to try to find out themselves. They're not announcing it or they're not putting up like fliers about it. I think if they want to come, it's their own decision to, if they feel comfortable. Just be friendly and let the kids know that you're always there to help them and whatever they need, ya know. Make sure you can back that up. Being outgoing and socializing with the kids and make a good impression; being visible.

### *School Counselors and Student Comfort Levels*

Another emerging theme indicated that students felt school counselors should make the counseling process more comfortable to the students they encounter. The first student when on to articulate how school counselors could make the counseling experience even more comfortable for students:

Like, maybe to make the situation better, they should have stuff for, like, I know for whenever, like, I talk to someone like about how I feel or what I think about something I like fidget with stuff. I think it's a way, I just do that naturally, like whenever I'm talking to someone about what I'm feeling or that kind of stuff. So, like, making the room, like, comfortable.

The sixth student expressed uncertainty as to how many students were actually familiar with the role of the school counselor. He described how he thought school counselors could make themselves visible to more students:

I think they should go to the classrooms more often, because, to show that the counselor is always there rather than, like, not being there that much.

He, too, believed that his individual experience with the school counselor was enhanced by feeling a sense of comfort which he deemed integral to the process:

The setting and the room. Like, have – don't make it like a class setting; have photos and other stuff.

*Perceptions of Intrusiveness from School Counselors*

The final theme centered on a concern that school counselors were sometimes too intrusive when talking with an individual student. This concern was expressed in relation to school counselors' affiliation with reporting instances of abuse and other problematic matters to authorities such as the police or the Department of Children and Family Services. The first student had experienced this attitude before and described the essence of her point of view:

Well, like, if someone, like, if they mention something and someone doesn't wanna talk about it, they shouldn't, like, poke and prod at the situation because maybe, ya know, they don't wanna talk about – because eventually they probably will, ya know, um, talk about it and they just probably don't wanna talk about it right then. Like, if you say "I don't wanna talk about it" then don't, like, ask why, ya know.

Due to past experiences, the third student had previously held a very negative image of school counselors. Although she had positive feelings about her current school counselor, she discussed having very negative emotions toward one particular school counselor from her past, "back when I was there, I basically hated them." She went on to detail how that influence has molded her current view:

And something I dislike about it is that, sometimes they're getting, like, way too personal like asking about your personal life and stuff like that. I kind of thought that they would just, like, ask questions about your parents

and stuff 'cause that's what happened to me, the counselor asked me about my parents and I just kind of thought... they ask if we were abused or if we were sexually abused or anything like that, or if our parents did drugs or anything. And, that's pretty much it. And, like, if they, if the student answered yes, if they were brave enough to, then the counselor would tell DCFS and take the kids away from them and put the parents in prison or something.

In response to this occurrence, this student went on to explain how she had currently come to believe that school counselors should act:

If the student comes to them, they should, like, listen to what they have to say. But if they recommend to see the child, then, um, and, like, they're asking questions I think they should ask first....just, like, ask if it's okay for them to ask this question before they ask it. And...um, ask them if they want to actually talk because some students really don't want to talk to the counselor because it might, maybe they forgot about whatever happened and they don't remember about it or, um, yeah, so I think they should just ask before they ask questions.

The fifth student maintained a related outlook:

I don't like when, like, the counselors ....not all of them do it, but like when they – have the parents involved. Okay, like, say...say your, like, dad is hitting you or you're scared to go home because your parents are gonna abuse you or whatever. And then you tell the counselor that and they tell somebody else and then they call your house. And then your parents are

going crazy because you accused them of this or that...and then....they end up hitting you anyway...and then there's the cops and...I haven't experienced anything like that but I know other students that have so, it's a very uncomfortable situation. They say, they always say, if something bad were to happen I'd have to let someone with more authority know about this...so...I think it gets old. 'Cause a person should be, like, smart enough to know that if they're getting hurt and let someone know. Let, like, not the counselor know, let, like, the cops or something.



### Summary of Findings

Chapter IV detailed the similar and dissimilar experiences of at-risk middle school students and their perceptions of the role of the school counselor. A variety of themes were found in relation to how these students view and feel about the school counselor's role. All of these students reported positive experiences and good relationships with school counselors. They all believed that the primary duty of the school counselor was to meet with students in individual counseling sessions to talk about the student's current issues or problems. However, the majority of these students specified that, at one point, they lacked a broad understanding of who the counselor was and what he or she did within the school setting. Several of the students were also able to identify areas they felt needed to be further developed or addressed in order to improve the overall school counseling profession.

## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine at-risk middle school students' perceptions of the school counselor's role. These perceptions had been developed over the span of their entire educational experience. The way in which these students perceived and felt about school counseling was addressed as well as how they came to these conclusions. Students' thoughts, feelings, likes, and dislikes regarding the school counselor's role were evaluated. It was assumed that the awareness of these perceptions could provide valuable information about how school counselors can most effectively work with this particular population.

Research Question #1: How do students perceive the nature of the school counselor's role?

The ASCA national model of school counseling defines a school counselor's primary function as being dedicated to developing the skills and self-awareness needed for students to be academically and socially competent individuals. Ultimately, they should be prepared for the prospect of becoming capable and well-adjusted adult members of society. The ASCA model encourages the utilization of a multitude of methods in order to achieve this overarching goal. Among these methods are informational and preventive measures as well as different types of intervention in group and individual contexts (ASCA, 2004).

The students within this study seemed to entertain a narrower focus of the school counselor's role. When prompted to describe what is meant by the term, school counseling, each of the participants' initial reactions was individual counseling. In fact,

the only component of the ASCA national model that was tied to their personal definition of school counseling was the individual counseling aspect. In response to other interview protocols, some of the students did mention an awareness of group and classroom guidance services provided by certain counselors they had encountered. Yet, when asked to explain their perceptions regarding what school counselors do, all of the students identified individual counseling as being the primarily salient feature. The third student characterized the school counselor's role as working with individual clients regarding various types of social or emotional issues:

Adults who counsel kids who might have problems at home or have problems anywhere like at school or around town or anything, that's what I think.

Five of the students went on to specify that they used to believe school counselors only dealt with individuals who had serious mental health or discipline issues within the context of individual counseling services. Several of these students highlighted that such a notion seemed to be a common misconception amongst their peer group. They stated they had personally come to a more accurate realization that school counseling was not merely directed at serious mental health matters or discipline issues. The fourth student participant alluded to the transformation of his perceptions of the school counselor:

Before, I thought it was, like, to help people, like, that, like, killed someone or went to jail. I didn't know it was just, like, talking.

Two of the students highlighted administrative priorities as a part of the school counselor's primary role, in addition to individual counseling responsibilities. One

student shared that, in the past, she had not known her school counselor performed any other tasks outside of managing paperwork and grades for her particular school:

I didn't really think that they, like, actually talk to you or whatever. I just figured that they were just, like, involved in the school and grades and that type of stuff.

This emphasis on administrative tasks is reflective of how many school administrators' may view the school counselor's job tasks. Further, paperwork and other forms of administrative work may be the very role that school administrators are insisting and designating school counselors to serve (Kirchner, & Setchfield, 2005; Monteiro-Leitner et al, 2006).

Overall, it seems that students may not be readily comprehending all of the roles that school counselors should be serving in accordance with the ASCA national model (ASCA, 2004). In order to reach all students, it seems that school counselors should emphasize the use of the ASCA model as well as promote awareness of their various roles to all students. According to these students' responses, students may need to be made more overtly aware of what school counseling services are in existence within their school as well as how they can utilize them.

These students indicated that, although they may not have a broad view of the school counselor's function, they regard individual counseling as the most salient component of the overall school counseling role. It seems that individual counseling resonates most strongly with their conceptualization of what a school counselor does. This reality supports the ASCA national model's emphasis on social and emotional development and indicates that students do not overwhelmingly associate school

counseling with the more outdated role definition of dealing with administrative tasks (ASCA, 2004). Instead, these students perceived that a focus on social/personal and emotional matters in individual counseling is of primary importance to the school counselor's duties.

Research Question #2: What are students' thoughts and emotions regarding the role of the school counselor?

The participants in this study overwhelmingly reported positive feelings regarding the school counselor's role. They specified that such a role was useful and relevant to the school environment and that they personally had benefitted from their experience with school counseling. One of the students reflected fondly on how school counseling had positively impacted her:

I really like going to school counseling, like, because they're always gonna be here and you can always talk to 'em and stuff. If something happens, like, that morning I can just come in here and talk about it and just, like, helps me, like, relieve all this stress and it helps me go on with my day. It's always nice, there's never been.... I've never felt uncomfortable talking to someone.

Another student focused on the way school counseling benefitted the overall environment of the school and the student population:

I think it's good to have a school counselor because somebody, like, need to talk to somebody, like, I think there would be, like, a lot more stuff going on, ya know, if some people didn't talk to somebody.

Students also seemed to appreciate the convenience and practicality of having a counselor employed within the school building. Students pointed out that the counselor's situation in the school setting made it easy for students to have access to their services. Further, two students identified how their understanding of their background, peers, and circle of friends aided the counselor in being able to help with the student's presenting issue.

Um, they kind of, like, know, since it's school, they know how kids are these days, they know, like, it's hard to find your real friends and know who, like, to trust and stuff like that. So they can relate to that and help me, like, with that. It helps me when I'm having a bad day with my friends I can just come down here and she helps me understand them and stuff like that. Like, what the kids are saying, ya know and how they can get sometimes and stuff like that. Knowing the kids....just knowing, like, what goes on around the school, ya know – whose the troublemakers, whose, ya know, stuff like that.

It seems that these students find the function of the school counselor to be a very important part of their educational experience. Students maintain positive emotions regarding their school counselors and were able to explain what they have gained from the school counseling services they have utilized. These students not only cited the convenience of having a counselor in the school, but they also expressed how this placement actually enhances the counseling relationship and the successes within it.

Further, students expressed that there is a true need for counselors to be present with the school environment; as students are dealing with issues that can be benefitted by

the school counseling position. Several of the students explained that students, sometimes, simply need someone to talk to. They explained that the school counselor is who they have turned to in order to fulfill this role and help them accordingly.

These students articulated a clear need for school counselors to exist within the school setting. In light of these students' responses, it seems that the importance of the school counselor's role should continue to be emphasized within the American education system. Administrators, school personnel, and school boards should be enlightened to this perspective, as they often contribute to the nature of the school counselor's job position and the assigned duties therein. It seems as though students are, and should continue to, truly benefit from adopting a newer model of school counseling; one that more aptly deals with the personal/social aspects and individualized needs of each student (ASCA, 2004).

Research Question #3: What contributes to students' perceptions and emotions regarding the nature of school counseling?

Students seemed to develop their perceptions of school counselors as they were personally exposed to the different duties that a school counselor performs. While one student did mention the influence of television on school counselor stereotypes, the general consensus seemed to be that students remained unaware of certain counselor roles until they specifically encountered those roles in their personal experience. The fourth student described his previous lack of understanding about school counseling and how it changed:

Actually my mom just signed me up for it. I just found out because my parents signed me up. I knew what it was about, but I didn't know what

we were gonna be doing. I don't even know if I knew what a counselor was before two years ago when I started meeting with him. Like, I didn't even know if we had school counselors, actually.

The fifth student similarly described her first encounter with the school counselor:

It all started when I was, like, in first grade, I had really weird issues. My first grade teacher said something about it. Why don't you go to a counselor and I was like, what is a counselor? And then they went in to, like, we won't tell anyone, this is confidential, or whatever. So, then I was like, okay this is cool.

These students also tended to feel positively about and comfortable with their current school counselors, leading them to respond positively toward the notion of school counseling as a whole. It appears that students may need to be overtly informed of the school counselor's various roles within the school context in order to be aware of their existence. School counselors should work towards promoting their identity within the school environment as well as encouraging students to know of and seek the services school counselors provide (ASCA, 2004).

All but one of these students indicated that a parent or teacher referral was the reason for which they had sought school counseling services. Further, these students explained that prior to this prompt, they did not actually know they could approach the school counselor within such a capacity. This finding is consistent with the ASCA national model's focus on incorporating school staff and parents in the process and promotion of the school counseling program (ASCA, 2004).



It seems that, within the school building, teachers may maintain a significant influence in the process of getting students in touch with school counselors. It is evident that teachers should be recognized as a prevailing liaison between the individual student and the school counselor. School counselors should ensure that teachers are aware of the services they provide, and should maintain an open line of communication with these staff members. Teachers often spend the most direct time with students, so their consistent contact with school counselors may be of considerable importance to the well-being of the student body as a whole.

Parent recommendations also seem to be a prevalent means of matching students with the school counselor. School counselors and the school as a whole should maintain an open and welcoming environment so that parents feel able to contact the school with their concerns and their requests for best assisting their children. This contact with parties outside of the school environment can be integral in allowing the school counselor to be aware of circumstances that are impactful but not actually observable to students within the school building.

Research Question #4: How are students and their needs being affected by the school counseling role?

All six of the students expressed their satisfaction with the nature of school counseling, and further elaborated on how they were receiving what they wanted and needed from the school counseling role. Several students stated how it was typical to set goals once they had entered into a counseling relationship. These goals seemed to create a new set of needs that were intended to be met within the context of the counseling relationship and its successes. The typical types of goals set by students centered on

social and emotional areas; such as learning how to manage emotions or deal with others peacefully. The first student defined the goal that she had been successfully working towards with her school counselor:

I just, like, wanted to talk to somebody so, like, I felt like I could get it off my chest. And, um, like, how to deal with, like, a situation better, like, ya know with, um, dealing with it, like, emotionally and whatever and not, like, blowing up at something, ya know. Like learning how to control your emotions. And yeah, I am now.

Further, three of the students reported that they were able to attain their personal goals in some respect. Students explained that, not only are their specific goals being met, but that their overall needs have been effectively addressed by school counselors. Students indicated that school counselors have helped them to manage and deal with personal issues they have encountered. Further, school counselors have seemed to substantiate a feeling of comfort for students, as they are aware that they have someone in the school who can be seen as an outlet and advocate for the individual student and his or her issues.

This reality substantiates ASCA's push for school counselor's to focus on students' social and personal development within a comprehensive school counseling program. The emphasis on individual counseling seems to be of importance, as students consistently cited positive responses to their experiences with it. Thus, it seems that prioritizing direct service to students, such as in the form of individual counseling, is crucial to an effective school counseling program (ASCA, 2004).

Research Question #5: What needs do students have that are not currently being addressed by school counselors?

After stating their general contentment with current school counselors' roles, four students described a few areas in which they felt counselors could change or modify their current practice. When prompted with questions regarding what was missing from the school counseling experience, students typically speculated on the ways in which they thought school counselors could expand their visibility as well as the level of comfort experienced by students. The first student explained that a lot of students in school may not be familiar with the role of the school counselor:

Well, I mean they just need to be there for people to talk to. Most people, ya know, only know of the school counselor because of her running around school, I mean, I don't know that many people that go and talk to her or whatever. But, I mean, I think people should be more aware about it that they can. That they're there and that they can talk to or whatever.

The fifth student described a lack of self-promoting done by school counselors:

No, kids have to try to find out themselves. They're not announcing it or they're not putting up like fliers about it. I think if they want to come, it's their own decision to, if they feel comfortable.

It seems that students believe that increasing the school counselor's visibility within the school setting is essential. School counselors may need to work to ensure that their presence and available services are recognized and understood by all students. The students within this study suggested that more visibility may decrease misperceptions of

what the school counselor does while increasing the number of students that school counselors can help.

Students also pointed out that enhancing the level of comfort experienced by students should be of importance to school counselors within their practice. The first student reflected on the significance of feeling comfortable with the school counselor:

Like, maybe to make the situation better, they should have stuff for, like, I know for whenever, like, I talk to someone, like, about how I feel or what I think about something I, like, fidget with stuff. I think it's a way, I just do that naturally, like, whenever I'm talking to someone about what I'm feeling or that kind of stuff. So, like, making the room, like, comfortable.

The focus on this level of comfort seems to suggest that students have a tendency to experience initial wariness about meeting with the school counselor in an individual counseling setting. Having the school counselor identify this level of comfort as important and work towards increasing it, seems important to the relationship between school counselor and student. This may further increase the rapport and enhance the nature and successes of the counseling relationship.

Another area in which students felt dissatisfied concerned the mandated reporter status of school counselors. Two students felt uncomfortable with the way in which school counselors may handle situations where abuse or related issues have occurred. The fifth felt that the school counselor's tendency to report these types of instances was off-putting:

I don't like when, like, the counselors ....not all of them do it, but, like, when they – have the parents involved. Okay, like, say...say your, like, dad

is hitting you or you're scared to go home because your parents are gonna abuse you or whatever. And then you tell the counselor that and they tell somebody else and then they call your house. And then your parents are going crazy because you accused them of this or that...and then....they end up hitting you anyway...and then there's the cops and...I haven't experienced anything like that but I know other students that have so, it's a very uncomfortable situation.

This concern seems to stem from a lack of understanding regarding the particular roles or duties maintained by the school counselor. Here, it seems that students may not fully comprehend the legal obligation of the school counselor to report such incidents for the sake of the well-being of the child. This matter could be addressed by specifically ensuring that students accurately comprehend all of the roles, duties, and responsibilities of the school counselor.

#### Future Researchers

The present study did not comprise a thorough analysis of all student populations and their perceptions of the school counseling role. Thus, it is not generalizable to all of students that exist within the American education system. In order to examine student perceptions of school counseling more comprehensively, it is important for future researchers to consider the following suggestions:

- 1) Select students who come from a wide variety of different backgrounds and are situated within different sample populations within the American educational system.

- 2) Within the data collection portion, include the experience of the current school counselor from the same school as the student participants. Compare how the school counselor's professional priorities and focus relate to the students' interpretations and perceptions of the school counseling program.
- 3) Select sample populations with varying levels of exposure to and experience (i.e., number of sessions) with school counselors.
- 4) Conduct a longitudinal study of student perceptions and how they fluctuate throughout the entire educational experience of participants. Such a study could focus on populations where students will become affiliated with different school counselors, perhaps in different school buildings, along the trajectory from kindergarten through twelfth grade.
- 5) Compare the differences in perception between female and male participants as well as individuals at varying grade levels.
- 6) Explore how different student groups specifically utilize and benefit from school counseling services.
- 7) Explore how students rank and define the various roles and responsibilities associated with the school counselor. Differentiate what types of reasons students seek out school counselors; such as social/emotional issues, administrative matters, etc.
- 8) Explore the perceptions and attitudes regarding school counseling from students' parents.

### Current School Counseling Professionals

The findings of this study are readily applicable to current school counselors within their professional practice. The present study's findings provide personal and nuanced accounts of how a particular sub-population views the notion of school counseling. Thus, school counselors can better understand how these types of students are affected by the school counseling role in both positive and negative ways. School counselors can then utilize this information in order to most effectively address the needs of these students while veering away from behaviors that may not be as engaging and beneficial to these students. Recommendations for school counselors include the following:

- 1) Be proactive in disseminating information regarding the role of the school counselor. Make all students more aware of the various types of school counseling services that students are able to utilize.
- 2) Emphasize the use of the ASCA national model in school settings and include all of the components of and standards specified therein.
- 3) Be an advocate for students in the school environment in relation to issues they may be encountering with teachers, administrators, and parents.
- 4) In individual counseling, thoroughly explain all of the duties and responsibilities that are a part of the school counseling role; such as the nature of the mandated reporter status in terms of seeking to protect students at all costs.
- 5) Provide more classroom guidance type activities that allow students to learn about relevant social, personal, or career related issues. These activities can simultaneously increase the exposure that students have in regard to counselors.

- 6) Prioritize the components of job tasks so that direct service and contact with students becomes primary.



### Conclusions

This study explored at-risk middle school students' perceptions of school counselors. The naturalistic inquiry method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) was employed, in the form of one-on-one interviews, so that participants could produce thorough and individualized responses in regard to their perceptions, experiences, and opinions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the principal researcher. Common themes from the participant responses were detailed in chapter IV. Within this chapter, these common themes were presented along with conclusions and recommendations for practitioners and future researchers.

Foremost, participants seemed to be very satisfied with their experience of school counseling. Students described the benefits of having someone with whom they could talk to about their issues in the school environment. Further, it seems this particular population was most familiar with the individual counseling services that were provided by the school counselor. While these students had been made aware of other components of the profession by personal experience; such as group counseling, classroom guidance, and administrative tasks; their primary way of describing the school counselor role was by its exclusive association with individual counseling. Students did not readily correlate any other counselor roles, as depicted by the ASCA national model, when identifying their most significant characterization of school counselors (ASCA, 2004).

Several students described how they had previously held inaccurate images of school counseling; as they believed school counselors only worked with students who struggled with discipline infractions or suffered more serious mental health conditions. It was only after they participated in individual counseling that they began to reformulate

their perceptions. Thus, it seems conclusive that experiences and exposure to the nuances of the school counselor's role contribute to the feelings and emotions students have about school counseling as a whole. Overall, it seems that students were not cognizant of the various roles of the school counselor unless they were personally involved with them. Thus, students may be missing out on the services and benefits of school counseling simply because they have not been explicitly told what to expect or seek from the school counselor.

These findings indicated that school counselors may need to make a concerted effort to become more visible within the school environment. This visibility could be achieved by coming to classrooms, posting information about their services in the building and on the school website, and ensuring they are present where students are actually able to see them. This may include spending time in the lunchroom, the hallway, and among individual classrooms. School counselors may benefit from visiting each classroom near the beginning of the academic year to introduce himself or herself to the students and explain the role that the school counselor fulfills within the particular school building. This introduction could include specifying the school counseling department's goals or plan for the year including the way in which students should anticipate hearing from the school counselor next. Visiting classrooms in this capacity may take only one day or one week's worth of time, but could prove very influential in terms of how many students become aware of, and eventually utilize, school counseling services.

Further, school counselors should use the ASCA national model as a foundation for the programs they develop within their school. It seems beneficial for students that school counselors host a variety of services that can effectively reach out to the student

population in varying capacities. This could mean instituting regular guidance activities, group counseling, and career development related activities. This could continue to enhance the visibility of school counselors as well as the utilization of services from students.

Overall, this study's findings can help school counselors understand what contributes to students' perceptions and opinions of school counseling. School counselors may better understand how to best serve this population of students within their professional practice.

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Appendix A  
Department Thesis Approval

# Approval of Thesis Proposal

Name Colleen M. Johnson

SS#/Banner ID E12104983

Title of Thesis

Examining At-Risk Students' Perceptions  
of the Role and Function of School  
Counselors

The thesis project is to be conducted in the manner described in the proposal with the following exception and/or conditions:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11/20/08  
Date of Approval

*Nidia A. Lasso*  
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

*Angela M. [Signature]*  
Member, Thesis Committee

*[Signature]*  
Member, Thesis Committee



Appendix B  
IRB Consent Form

March 6, 2009

Colleen Johnson

Counseling and Student Development

Thank you for submitting the research protocol titled, "Examining At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Role and Function of School Counselors" for review by the Eastern Illinois University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has Approved this research protocol following an Expedited Review procedure. IRB review has determined that the protocol involves no more than minimal risk to subjects and satisfies all of the criteria for approval of research.

This protocol has been given the IRB number 09-014. You may proceed with this study from 3/5/2009 to 3/4/2010. You must submit Form E, Continuation Request, to the IRB by 2/4/2010 if you wish to continue the project beyond the approval expiration date.

This approval is valid only for the research activities, timeline, and subjects described in the above named protocol. IRB policy requires that any changes to this protocol be reported to, and approved by, the IRB before being implemented. You are also required to inform the IRB immediately of any problems encountered that could adversely affect the health or welfare of the subjects in this study. Please contact me, or the Compliance Coordinator at 581-8576, in the event of an emergency. All correspondence should be sent to:

Institutional Review Board c/o Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

Telephone: 581-8576

Fax: 217-581-7181

Email: [eiuirb@www.eiu.edu](mailto:eiuirb@www.eiu.edu)

Upon completion of your research project, please submit Form G, Completion of Research Activities, to the IRB, c/o the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. Thank you for your assistance, and the best of success with your research.

John Best, Chairperson

Institutional Review Board

Telephone: 581-6412

Email: [jbbest@eiu.edu](mailto:jbbest@eiu.edu)

Appendix C  
Student Assent Form

## Student Assent Form

I am conducting a study to learn about how middle school students view school counseling. I want to learn what helps to create these opinions and where those ideas come from.

If you agree to be in the study, I am going to ask you some questions about what you think about school counseling in general. Your answers will be kept entirely private and will not affect your standing with Charleston Middle School or Eastern Illinois University. Related student responses will be used in the writing of this research project and will be entirely anonymous.

Your responses will be used for educational purposes only; to expand upon how school counselors can do a better job of helping students.

You can ask any questions that you might have about this study at any time. Also, if you decide at any time that you would no longer like to participate, you may stop whenever you want.

I am interested in your honest opinions and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers.

Signing this paper means that you have read this form and that you would like to be a part of this study. If you don't want to be in the study, you do not need to sign the paper. Being in this study is completely up to you, and you will not be penalized if you do not sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D  
Parental Consent Form

## Parental Consent Form

Your child is invited to participate in a research study about student perceptions of school counseling being conducted by Colleen M. Johnson and Dr. Heidi A. Larson of the Department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University.

Your child was selected as a possible participant because your child is within the demographic that we are interested in studying. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have. If you would like your child to participate in this study please sign and return this form to the school.

**THE STUDY:** The purpose of the research study is to examine student perceptions of the role and function of school counselors. If you agree to have your child in this study, your child will be asked to:

- [1] Answer a series of open-ended questions in one 30-45 minute interview. The interview questions will focus on your child's personal perceptions of the role of the school counselor, how they came to think this way, and what opinions and expectations they have regarding school counseling. The interview will be conducted within school hours during a non-academic period, such as study hall or during the lunch hour.
- [2] Agree to allow this interview to be recorded using a digital audio recorder.

**RISKS/BENEFITS:** There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study. The benefits the participants may receive from this study include their sense of contribution towards expanding the current literature regarding school counseling. By participating, your child will be contributing to the knowledge base of school counseling students and current school counselors in order to better their professional practice. The potential benefits to society include understanding how to best prepare counselors for the school counseling field.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** The records and personal identification of this study will be kept entirely private. Relevant student responses will be used in the writing of thesis and will be kept entirely anonymous. All interviews will be transcribed and all recordings will be destroyed upon completion of this thesis project.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:** Your decision whether or not to have your child participate in this study will not affect your relations with Charleston Middle School or Eastern Illinois University in any capacity. If you decide to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw your child at any time. Likewise, your child is free to withdraw from the study at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing from the study. Your child will receive a ten dollar gift certificate as a token of the researcher's appreciation for participating.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** Please feel free to contact me, or any other associated party, with any questions that may arise. All contact information is located on the back of this sheet.

**PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE:**

- Yes, my child may participate in this study.
- No, my child may not participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Colleen M. Johnson, Principal Researcher  
Department of Counseling & Student Development  
Eastern Illinois University  
600 Lincoln Avenue; Charleston, IL 61920  
cmjohnson@eiu.edu.  
309.369.7076

Tracy Valinevicius  
Charleston Middle School Counselor  
920 Smith Drive, Charleston, IL 61920  
tval@charleston.k12.il.us  
217.639.6013

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board  
Eastern Illinois University  
600 Lincoln Avenue; Charleston, IL 61920  
eiuirb@eiu.edu  
217.581.8576

Appendix E  
Interview Protocol Questions



Participant Number \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Protocols

1. What do you think school counseling is?
  - a. How did you come to think this way?
  - b. What types of things made you believe this to be true?
  - c. What are your thoughts on this role?
2. What do you think a school counselor should do?
  - a. What caused you to think this way?
3. What are your thoughts about school counseling?
4. What are your feelings regarding school counseling?
5. Before you came to a counseling session, what did you think might happen in counseling?
  - a. What did you think school counselors should and should not do?
  - b. What types of things do you think should/could be talked about in a counseling session at school?
6. Have these expectations been met? How so?
7. What have you hoped to gain from counseling?
  - a. Did you feel this was achieved/met?
8. Is there anything you find useful or good about counseling at school?
  - a. Elaborate on what it is that you found useful.

9. Is there anything you dislike about counseling at school?
  - a. Elaborate on what it is that you found that you disliked.
  
10. What do you wish your school counselor did or would do?
  - a. Is there anything missing from the school counseling experience?
  - b. What would improve the school counseling experience for you?

Appendix F  
Demographic Survey

## Demographic Survey

1. Gender      (1) Male      or      (2) Female
  
2.      Race/Ethnicity:  
      \_\_\_\_\_ (1) White (non-Hispanic)  
      \_\_\_\_\_ (2) Asian American  
      \_\_\_\_\_ (3) Hispanic  
      \_\_\_\_\_ (4) African American  
      \_\_\_\_\_ (5) Native American  
      \_\_\_\_\_ (6) Other (please specify):
  
3.      Grade \_\_\_\_\_
  
4.      Age      \_\_\_\_\_

