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# Exploring the Supervision Expectations and Experiences of Rural School Counselors

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# Walden University

College of Counselor Education & Supervision

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Exploring the Supervision Expectations and Experiences of Rural School Counselors

by

Jeannie Johnson

MEd, University of North Florida, 2009

BSW, Middle Tennessee State University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

November 2020

## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to addresses the gap in knowledge and seek to understand the supervision experiences of rural school counselors. In this study, the similarities and differences between their expectations and received supervision were specifically explored as well as how these counselors cope with and manage their role of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in a rural area. Data was collected from six participants via phone interviews and analyzed utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Selection criteria included licensed or certified school counselors actively practicing in rural areas. For the purposes of this study, rural areas were defined as an area that is not heavily populated or urbanized. Rural areas are often difficult to define and usually characterized by comparison to urban areas, which have specific population size and density, such as more than 50,000 people. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to address the central research question focused on the lived experiences of rural school counselors regarding their expectations and experiences of clinical supervision while implementing comprehensive school counseling programs and what could enhance their supervision experiences. The following 4 major themes emerged: disconnect in expectations versus experiences, clarifying roles and responsibilities, collaboration, and desire for increased support. The implications of this study for positive social change include increasing the professional knowledge of successful strategies that school counselors can employ to effectively manage supervision needs as well as ways counselor educators can provide additional skills, support, options, and training to prepare future school counselors for working in rural areas.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

School counselors deliver developmentally appropriate comprehensive school counseling programs to address the academic, personal/social, and career needs of all students (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2019). School counseling began as vocational guidance and evolved to take on a more clinically oriented role before finally shifting into the current comprehensive model (ASCA, 2019). School counselors often must juggle multiple roles while handling wide-ranging administrator expectations and large caseloads to ensure student needs are met (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Moyer, 2011).

A key element to the counseling profession is supervision. Although school counselors are required to receive supervision during their training, school counselors often lack access to supervision once they begin their practice (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016; Duncan, Brown-Rice, & Bardhoshi, 2014; Wilson, Schaeffer, & Bruce, 2015). Bernard and Goodyear (2014) defined supervision as an intervention extending over time that is evaluative, enhances the professional skills of the supervisee, and monitors the quality of client services. In line with Bernard and Goodyear's definition, the American Counseling Association [ACA] (2014) and ASCA (2016) ethical guidelines address the needs for supervisor preparation and gatekeeping in the profession as well as ensuring client welfare. For example, counselors are bound by ACA Ethical Code F.1., which speaks directly to the need for supervision to ensure client welfare, and Ethical Code F.6.b that discusses the requirements of supervisors to utilize gatekeeping and remediation

measures to address supervisee limitations. Under the ASCA ethical guidelines, school counselors are called to seek supervision from school counselors and other professionals knowledgeable of school counselors' ethical guidelines on ethical or professional issues. Abiding by the ethical guidelines is important for school counselors to maintain high standards of integrity, leadership, and professionalism (ASCA, 2016). Without adequate supervision preparation and gatekeeping procedures, students and society can suffer due to school counselors practicing without proper supervision and oversight (ACA, 2014; Grimes, Haskins, & Paisley, 2013; Wilson et al., 2015).

Highlighted by the importance of supervision to the counseling profession, researchers have called for further inquiry into the subject (Duncan et al., 2014; Kreider, 2014; Ünal, Sürücü, & Yavuz, 2013). Rural school counselors, in particular, have been emphasized as a population needing further study (Grimes et al., 2013; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). Due to rural school counselors' unique experiences, researchers have called for further inquiry into their experiences, particularly with supervision (Duncan et al., 2014; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). Rural school counselors may face isolation, a lack of resources, and the lack of adequate supervision (Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015).

Research into rural school counselor supervision expectations and experiences could lead to social change through guiding professional practices, leading to more ethical practices as well as calls for access to clinical supervision for all school counselors and increased collaboration among school counselors. There may also be implications for counselor training programs, such as strategies for supervision in a rural

setting and advocacy skills training for new counselors to work towards better supervision access.

In Chapter 1, I present the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, theoretical foundation, and nature of the study. The chapter also includes a discussion of definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study.

## Background of the Study

Researchers have continued to call for further study into the experiences of school counselors, the rural school counseling experience, and supervision for school counselors. Bernard and Goodyear (2014) defined supervision and discussed different supervision models. For example, the discrimination model of supervision is situation specific, allowing the supervisor to choose from three separate roles and focus areas within a supervision session (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). The supervisor can act in the teacher, counselor, or consultant role while focusing on intervention, conceptualization, or personalization (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). The authors also discussed dimensions of the supervision relationship and delivery of clinical supervision, finishing by addressing the professional responsibilities of clinical supervisors, such as gatekeeping and promoting clinical supervision through training and research. Bernard and Goodyear identified the purpose of supervision as fostering the supervisee's professional development and ensuring client welfare. Ethical guidelines and accreditation standards validate the purpose and importance of supervision to the counseling profession (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; CACREP, 2016). Additionally, researchers have confirmed the

benefits of supervision for counselors and clients, such as supporting the personal and professional growth of counselors as well as ensuring client welfare (Duncan et al., 2016; Ünal et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015).

Kreider (2014) conducted a quantitative study of 100 mental health professionals to answer questions on the impact of dual-role supervision and level of supervisor training on supervisee self-disclosure. Participants completed a 30-item online survey and were recruited nationally through the convenience sampling of national electronic discussion lists for counselors and counselor educators and snowball sampling of professional colleagues (Kreider, 2014). The online survey utilized the Trainee Disclosure Scale, developed by Walker, Ladany, and Pate-Carolan (2007), and the Supervisor Self-Disclosure Survey based on the research of Ladany and Lehrman-Waterman (1999). Both scales utilized a 5-point Likert scale for responses (Kreider, 2014). Kreider found supervisor self-disclosure helped to encourage supervisee self-disclosure in dual-role supervision and stressed the importance of informed consent to clarify expectations and help mitigate any potential negative effects of dual-role supervision, such as potentially exacerbating the inherent power differential in the supervisory relationship. For example, supervisees may be reluctant to disclose information during a clinical supervision session if their supervisor also makes administrative supervision decisions related to employment and compensation.

Duncan et al. (2014) chose to focus on school counselors instead of all mental health professionals and completed a quantitative study of 118 certified school counselors in a Midwestern state to address the importance of clinical supervision among school

counselors. Participants completed an online survey addressing areas of importance of supervision, current experiences with supervision, future need for clinical supervision, and future training and education needs (Duncan et al., 2014). Duncan et al. (2014) reported school counselors found clinical supervision as important to professional growth but noted that access to any form of supervision was limited in rural areas. A majority of the participants in their study reported receiving no clinical supervision. They acknowledged a limitation of their study was the sample was from school counselors in only one Midwestern state and called for further research of school counselors nationwide.

Additionally, Ünal et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study to investigate elementary and high school counselors' supervision processes and the efficiency of their supervision. They conducted structured interviews of 10 school counselors, using a descriptive analysis method and found counselors were supervised by administrators with no counseling education. The supervision was deemed ineffective due to poor communication and relationships among school counselors and supervisors, a lack of time devoted to the supervision process, and a lack of experience and understanding of the role of school counselors by the supervisors (Unal et al., 2013).

Walker (2015) conducted a literature review to examine factors influencing the effectiveness of services and programs offered by school counselors. The purpose of the review was to evaluate the literature to determine how it can be used to inform and improve school counselors' practice through highlighting knowledge gaps and making recommendations for future research (Walker, 2015). Walker noted professional identity,

professional collaboration, and clinical supervision as factors influencing effective school counselor services and programs. The author also reported a lack of literature on school counseling practices and called for further research into the exploration of clinical supervision for school counselors, specifically, suggesting that researchers look at current models of supervision training and its appropriateness for the school setting.

To highlight the rural school counseling experience, Grimes et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study on the experiences of rural school counselors as social justice advocates. Face-to-face, semistructured interviews were conducted with seven participants, leading to the themes of stability of place, community promise, mutual reliance, personal and professional integration, and a focus on individuals. Interview questions included asking the participants to describe the community in which they lived and worked and what it is like to be a school counselor in a rural area. Participants were also asked to describe what social justice meant in their work and how others reacted to their social justice efforts as well as to give examples. The researchers stated partnerships with families, community leaders, government officials, and other school stakeholders were key to exposing socioeconomic struggles and addressing a lack of resources. Grimes et al. noted the limited research on the rural school counseling experience as a whole and called for counselor educators to prepare future rural school counselors to create strong partnerships.

In another qualitative study on rural school counselors, Wilson et al. (2015) focused on school counselors and school counselor interns from rural areas in the western United States to explore their clinical supervision, consultation, and professional growth

needs. The authors used a grounded theory approach and conducted four focus groups with 21 total participants and asking six structured interview questions. The questions included asking participants to describe the rural supervision process, supervision special needs for rural school counselors, opportunities for professional development in rural settings, and what is most helpful from supervision (Wilson et al., 2015). Wilson et al. found a need for increased supervision training opportunities for school counselors. Major themes included unique issues of rural school counselors, dynamics of rural living, supervision from school administrators, supporting development through technology, desire for increased connection and supervision, and identifying roles and responsibilities (Wilson et al., 2015).

According to the literature, supervision is an important component to ethical and effective counseling practice (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; Bernard & Goodyear, 2014);however, clinical supervision has not been emphasized for school counselors (Duncan et al., 2014; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). Researchers have called for further study into the rural school counseling experience because the extant research on this topic, particularly on supervision, is limited. I conducted this study to fill this gap in knowledge.

## Problem Statement

School counselors deliver developmentally appropriate comprehensive school counseling programs to address the academic, personal/social, and career needs of all students (ASCA, 2019). Ethical guidelines call for counselors to utilize clinical supervision to provide effective services and ensure client welfare (ACA, 2014; ASCA,

2016). Researchers have found access to proper clinical supervision and consultation can increase a school counselor's effectiveness and create positive student outcomes (Grimes et al., 2013; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al.). Additionally, supervision is essential for school counselors' personal and professional development due to frequent role ambiguity, varied administrator expectations, and large caseloads (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Moyer, 2011). Lack of access to clinical supervision can also raise occupational stress leading to burnout (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Moyer, 2011).

The ASCA (2016) specifically stated that school counselors should seek consultation and supervision from school counselors or other professionals knowledgeable of school counselors' ethical practices regarding ethical or professional issues. Rural school counselors, in particular, can face greater difficulties meeting this requirement due to their remote locations and, often, can be the only accessible counseling professional in their areas (Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). According to Grimes et al. (2013) and Wilson et al. (2015), rural areas can face unique challenges, such as isolation, lack of opportunities and resources, and school counselors required to fulfill multiple roles. Wilson et al. also singled out the lack of adequate supervision as one of the main challenges this population faces. Wilson et al. found many rural school counselors only receive administrative supervision from persons, such as principals, that have little or no counseling experience. As access to supervision can impact the quality of counseling services, researchers have called for further inquiry into the rural school counseling experiences, specifically in addressing the gap in knowledge related to the expectations and understanding of clinical supervision in

school counseling settings in rural areas (Grimes et al., 2013; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological, qualitative study was to understand the supervision experiences of rural school counselors, specifically to explore the similarities and differences between their expectations and received supervision as well as how these counselors cope with and manage their role of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in a rural area. A phenomenological approach was most suitable for the purpose of understanding the lived experiences of rural school counselors, specifically involving their expectations, understanding of supervision, and experiences of coping with and managing school counseling duties. Although researchers have identified the benefits of clinical supervision for school counselors, they have also highlighted a lack of access to clinical supervision and called for more research into the rural school counseling experience and clinical supervision in a school counseling setting (Grimes et al., 2013; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). The phenomenological theoretical approach supported my attempt at understanding the phenomenon of supervision expectations of rural school counselors through conducting semistructured interviews in which I asked participants open-ended questions seeking descriptions of how they individually experience the phenomenon of supervision in rural areas while coping with and managing school counseling tasks. In understanding the stories behind the participants' various supervisory experiences in rural areas, other school counselors and school counselor educators may learn methods to expand on the

discrimination model of supervision to fulfil roles and duties to support students while addressing deficits.

## Research Questions

The main research question that guided this study was: What are the lived experiences of school counselors in rural areas involving their expectations and experiences of clinical supervision while implementing comprehensive school counseling programs? The subquestion was: What could enhance their supervision experiences?

## Theoretical Foundation

In this hybrid study, I used a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach to understand school counselors' supervision expectations and experiences in rural areas. I also explored the expectations and experiences of participants through the lens of supervision theory. A hermeneutic phenomenological framework is used to understand the context of the lived experiences of the study participants (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Patton (2015) described hermeneutics as interpreting *how* and *why* context matters. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed for placing importance on the context of a rural setting during the exploration of the supervision expectations and experiences of school counselors, which was important to the uniqueness of the study.

Phenomenology is one form of qualitative research and is rooted in Husserl's descriptive and Heidegger's interpretive philosophies (Reiners, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Husserl believed the observer could transcend the phenomena being studied for an objective view of the meaning of the individual's experiences (Reiners, 2012; Sloan &

Bowe, 2014). Heidegger, a student of Husserl, extended hermeneutics, or the philosophy of interpretation, by studying the concept of being in the world (Reiners, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Heidegger rejected Husserl's idea of remaining neutral while investigating the essence of a phenomena (Reiners, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Hermeneutics concentrates on interpretation by looking at context and the original purpose of the data (Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Additionally, a key assumption of Heidegger is that people are always engaged in and interpreting the world (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, & Dowling, 2016; Wilson, 2014). Heidegger's concept of *dasein* or being in the world contradicted Husserl, the originator of phenomenology, because Heidegger believed that people cannot remain detached from the phenomena (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). For example, the *hermeneutic circle* refers to a cycle of exposure to a text, interpretation of the text, and then reexposure to the text offering closer inspection and new insights (Heidegger, 1962; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Gadamer expanded upon Heidegger's work in hermeneutic phenomenology and believed that language, understanding, and interpretation were linked (Slow & Bowe, 2014). Gadamer furthered described the hermeneutic circle by suggesting all interpretations are derived from prejudgements, which can influence the understanding of a phenomena (Regan, 2012). As a school counselor who has practiced in rural areas, I reflected upon my own experiences and biases to be aware of how this impacted the study.

Bernard and Goodyear (2014) described the three major categories of clinical supervision models as psychotherapy-based models, developmental models, and process models. In developmental models, supervisees have the benefit of not being locked into a single psychotherapy theory (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Supervisors can instead focus on the different requirements of supervisees based on their levels of education and experience (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Supervision process models focus on the supervision process itself and the supervisee's learning process instead of concentrating on conveying one therapeutic approach as with the psychotherapy-based models (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Milne, 2014). The discrimination model has the benefits of accessibility and flexibility, which makes it a good fit in a variety of settings (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Timm, 2015). Through the discrimination model, supervisors can take on the role of teacher, counselor, or consultant to address intervention, conceptualization, and personalization (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Timm, 2015). The discrimination model allows for the supervisor to work with supervisees from different psychotherapeutic approaches, which further encourages diversity and consideration in the supervisory relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Ober, Granello, & Henfield, 2015; Timm, 2015). Using the lens of the discrimination model allowed me to shape interview questions and content that specifically addressed these components of clinical supervision.

## Conceptual Framework

I lowed a constructivist framework in this study. Constructivism focuses on an individual's perspective and acknowledges individuality and diversity due to the notion

of multiple realities (Cleaver & Ballantyne, 2014; Tlali & Jacobs, 2015). Social constructivists believe that individuals seek to understand their world and construct meaning through social interactions with others (Grimes et al., 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through the use of the constructivist framework in this study, I sought to understand the supervision experiences and expectations of rural school counselors and how these school counselors manage to provide effective academic, personal/social, and career services for students in their areas. Further discussion of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks is included in Chapter 2.

## Nature of the Study

In this study, I employed a qualitative approach with a hermeneutic, phenomenological design. Phenomenology seeks to understand the stories behind how people experience various phenomena (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I explored the meaning behind school counselors' experiences of supervision as they implement comprehensive school counseling programs. Additionally, hermeneutics focuses on context and interpretation (Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014), and in this study, the unique experience of school counselors in rural locations was specifically considered.

The hermeneutic, phenomenological approach of this qualitative study allowed for the in-depth, semistructured interviewing of participants to collect detailed information through asking open-ended questions to address the research questions. Smith and Firth (2011) described the framework approach as allowing the researcher to move continuously between stages during analysis to refine themes and categories and aligning with the hermeneutic circle of reflection and interpretation. This hermeneutic

phenomenological approach also best addressed the purpose of the study to understand the supervision expectations and experiences of rural school counselors, specifically how these counselors cope with and manage their role of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs given their geographic locations through the gathering of rich, descriptive data rather than statistical or numerical data collected in a quantitative approach.

A sample size of six to 12 practicing rural school counselors aligned with both theoretical and practical guidance (see Baker, Edwards, & Doidge, 2012; Mason, 2010). Actual sample size depended upon data saturation, which occurs when no new information is learned from the number of participants interviewed (Baker et al., 2012; Mason, 2010). The selected sample size met the needs of a phenomenological study while also producing a manageable amount of data (see Baker et al., 2012; Mason, 2010). I will further discuss the methodology used in Chapter 3.

## Definitions

This section includes definitions of key terms used throughout the study.

*Administrative supervision*: Supervisory activities related to the efficiency of the delivery of services (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). For example, administrative supervisors are focused on items, such as staffing issues, fiscal matters, and communication protocols.

*Clinical supervision*: Supervisory activities designed to improve the application of counseling theory and technique (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). For example, clinical

supervisors utilize supportive and educational elements to focus on both the quality of services provided and supervisee professional development.

*Rural*: For the purposes of this study, an area that is not heavily populated or urbanized. Rural areas are often difficult to define and usually characterized by comparison to urban areas, which have specific population size and density, such as more than 50,000 people (Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2017).

*School counselor*: A counselor who possesses a minimum of a master's degree and state licensure requirements for employment in a school setting. School counselors address the academic, career, and social/emotional needs of all students through a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2018).

## Assumptions

The first assumption was that participants would provide honest answers to interview questions. Participants providing complete and truthful answers can impact the credibility of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants may have been reluctant to answer truthfully because they were asked to provide responses related to their work environment and they may have had concerns about confidentiality or only provided socially acceptable responses. To be eligible for participation, respondents must have been licensed school counselors, making it reasonable for the second assumption that they would abide by the ASCA (2016) ethical guidelines as they participated in the interviews. Another assumption was that rural school counselors would have a unique experience from school counselors in suburban and urban communities. Researchers have shared some of the unique challenges of rural communities, such as a lack of resources

and isolation, which led to the assumption that school counselors in rural areas will have different experiences from their counterparts in more populated communities (see Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015).

## Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I focused on rural school counselors. The research was delimited by some geographic factors due to not all school counselors being included in the study because of the research scope being limited to rural school counselors. The HRSA (2017) defined rural areas as an area with less than 50,000 people. Participants were required to understand and sign informed consent forms. Bleiker, Morgan-Trimmer, Knapp, and Hopkins (2019) described transferability as the potential for research findings to be applied in other settings. The scope of this study may limit transferability of the findings from rural school counselors to other specialty groups of counselors, such as those in urban areas or school counselors in general. Although the scope of this study may limit transferability, researchers have specifically called for further research into the rural school counseling experience justifying the need for such a limitation (see Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). The goal of qualitative study is to produce rich, descriptive data of a phenomena instead of generalized statements for other people or settings (Bleiker et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Other methodologies, such as a quantitative approach, were not used due to their inability to provide the rich details of the supervisory expectations of rural school counselors compared to the type of supervision actually received and by whom gained from the in-depth interviewing that takes place in a phenomenological study.

## Limitations

Qualitative research has some limitations due to conflicts that can arise between time, energy, and funding constraints (Mason, 2010). For example, meeting a desire for data saturation while also producing a manageable amount of data within a reasonable timeline. A potential barrier in this study was difficulty in recruiting participants for interviews. School counselors may have been hesitant to participate due to confidentiality concerns, and the focus on school counselors only in rural areas limited the number of available participants. Accessing participants in rural areas posed some challenges for face-to-face interviews due to distances and the time required for travel. Video conferencing was an option to address the challenge of distance but also comes with a separate set of challenges, such as technology challenges, access to Internet, security, and confidentiality. Barsky (2017) shared the benefits of utilizing video conferencing technology, such as the ability to reach persons in remote areas that may not otherwise receive services and more timely and convenient access, which outweighed potential negatives, such as confidentiality concerns. Barsky noted that confidentiality challenges can occur when utilizing technology, but steps to mitigate issues can be taken, such as sharing the limits of confidentiality during informed consent and password-protecting or encrypting files to limit unauthorized access. Phone interviews were used to avoid the potential concerns related to video conferencing.

Bias may have been another limitation because I was a practicing rural school counselor at the time of the study. Journaling and member checking were used to address this potential bias. Ensuring clear separation of the researcher's role within the school

district from the researcher's role as a researcher may have also been a challenge if participants retained employment in the same district as me. A clear separation of roles had to be established to ensure confidentiality and prevent potential bias.

Bleiker et al. (2019) described ways to address issues of dependability, which may also have been a limitation to this study, by having qualitative researchers provide an audit trail of documentation of the research process. Following the suggestions of Bleiker et al., records included evidence of participant selection, field notes, reflections from throughout the study, and anonymized transcripts.

Finally, Ravitch and Carl (2016) described transferability as applying qualitative findings to broader settings while still maintaining the context-specific results. Due to the scope of the study on the expectations and experiences of rural school counselors, transferability may also be a limitation. The results of this study may be limited to only rural school counselors and not applicable in other settings, such as urban areas or school counselors in general.

## Significance of the Study

Researchers examining school counselors' experiences have consistently noted the limited extant literature on rural school counselors' experiences and called for more research on rural school counseling issues, specifically with a focus on the area of clinical supervision (Duncan et al., 2014; Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). The purpose of supervision is to foster the supervisee's professional development and ensure client welfare (ACA, 2014; Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). School counselors have found clinical supervision to be important to professional growth and achieving positive student

outcomes, but researchers have noted limited access to any form of supervision in rural areas (Duncan et al., 2014; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). With this study, I sought to fill the gap in understanding of the supervision experiences of rural school counselors by exploring the similarities and differences regarding expected and received administrative and clinical supervision as well as how these school counselors manage to provide effective academic, personal/social, and career services for students in their areas.

Addressing supervision challenges for rural school counselors can lead to positive social change through increasing the professional knowledge of successful strategies that school counselors can employ to effectively manage supervision needs. Crespi (2003) highlighted how teachers and other educators deemed continuing education as critical and, in some cases, required by states to maintain certification, which furthers the necessity for the effective supervision of school counselors. Additionally, researchers have stated that supervision can help counselors maintain and enhance their professional competence through clinical supervision as well as ensuring compliance with school policies and laws through administrative supervision (Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002). Having access to a strong support system of supervision that develops counselor competence and ensures compliance with applicable school policies and laws can help to prevent negative consequences, such as professional burnout and potential legal or ethical ramifications from a malpractice lawsuit (Herlihy et al., 2002). Insights from this study can be used to aid counselor educators in better preparing future school counselors to work in rural areas as well as provide practicing school counselors with ideas of how to

utilize available resources for supervision and advocate for their professional development. Using the findings of this study, school counseling programs can provide additional skills, support, options, and training to prepare future school counselors for working in rural areas.

## Summary

Supervision is encouraged throughout counselors' careers to ensure ethical practice and client well-being (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; Kreider, 2014). Supervisors may serve in clinical or administrative roles or both (Kreider, 2014). Unfortunately, not much emphasis is placed on clinical supervision for school counselors (Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). Rural areas often face shortages of resources and staffing forcing counselors into dual supervision roles or to do without clinical supervision (Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015).

Chapter 1 included an overview of the study with discussions of the problem statement, purpose of the study, research question, theoretical foundation, and nature of the study. I also provided definitions, assumptions, the scope and delimitations of the study, limitations, and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 includes an in-depth review of relevant literature. In the chapter, I will present the literature search strategy, the theoretical foundation, and major concepts related to the study. An overview of the rural school counseling experience is also paired with information on administrative and clinical supervision.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

Researchers have stated that school counselors in rural areas face unique challenges, such as increased poverty, lack of resources and access to services, and additional academic and career barriers (Bright, 2018; Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). Bright (2018) noted that research into the unique needs of rural areas is limited and called for further research into what school counselors can do to address these issues in a rural context. Wilson et al. (2015) discussed a lack of adequate supervision as one of the main challenges of rural school counselors. Ethical and accreditation standards have established the importance of supervision, and researchers have called for further inquiry into the rural school counseling experience including addressing the gap in knowledge of expectations and understanding supervision in rural settings (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; CACREP, 2016; Grimes et al., 2013; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to understand the supervision experiences of rural school counselors, specifically to explore the similarities and differences between their expectations and received supervision as well as how they cope with and manage their role of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in a rural area.

To begin to address the gap in knowledge of rural school counselors' experiences in this chapter, I provide a concise synopsis of the current literature. I present the literature search strategy, including a list of databases and key search terms used. I also discuss the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study. The literature review is separated into the key topics of the role of school counselors, rural issues, and

supervision. What is known and unknown in this field is discussed and the gaps that I sought to fill with this study are identified.

## Literature Search Strategy

To locate peer-reviewed articles published within the last 5 years, I used the following databases: ERIC, ProQuest Dissertations, SAGE Journals, and Thoreau multidatabase. The keywords searched included *school counselor, rural school counseling, supervision, clinical supervision, administrative supervision,* and *consultation.* Due to the limited research available, I expanded my search to include articles and dissertations published more than 5 years ago. The sources used in developing the literature review helped in establishing definitions used throughout the study, such as the various forms of supervision; identifying unique challenges of rural areas; and clarifying the key concepts of this study.

## Theoretical Foundation

### Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomenology is one form of qualitative research and is rooted in Husserl's descriptive and Heidegger's interpretive philosophies (Reiners, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Husserl believed the observer could transcend the phenomena being studied for an objective view of the meaning of the individual's experiences (Reiners, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Heidegger, a student of Husserl, extended hermeneutics, or the philosophy of interpretation, by studying the concept of being in the world (Reiners, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Heidegger rejected Husserl's idea of remaining neutral while investigating the essence of a phenomena (Reiners, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Phenomenology is a qualitative design that focuses on peoples' perceptions of the world and includes descriptions of meanings for individuals' lived experiences (Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hermeneutics concentrates on interpretation by focusing on context (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Patton, 2015; Wilson, 2014). One of Heidegger's key assumptions was that individuals are always engaged in and interpreting their world and that the researcher cannot remain detached from identifying the essence of a phenomena (Heidegger, 1962; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Heidegger's concept of dasein, or being in the world, contradicted Husserl, the originator of phenomenology, because Heidegger believed that people cannot remain detached from the phenomena (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). For example, the hermeneutic circle refers to a cycle of exposure to a text, interpretation of the text, and then reexposure to the text offering closer inspection and new insights (Heidegger, 1962; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

A hermeneutic, phenomenological approach focuses on understanding the context of the lived experiences of the study participants (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). For example, in this study, I focused on rural school counselors' expectations and experiences of supervision. Sloan and Bowe (2014) also mentioned that the preference in hermeneutic phenomenology is for the context of the phenomenon to dictate how data are analyzed instead of formalizing an analytical method.

Patton (2015) described hermeneutics as interpreting *how* and *why* context matters. Gadamer expanded upon Heidegger's work in hermeneutic phenomenology and believed that language, understanding, and interpretation were linked (Slow & Bowe,

2014). Gadamer furthered described the hermeneutic circle by suggesting all interpretations are derived from prejudgements, which can influence the understanding of a phenomena (Regan, 2012). As a school counselor who has practiced in rural areas, I reflected upon my own experiences and biases to be aware of how they may have impacted the study. The context of rural school counseling and supervision experiences are key to the study and, therefore, required the hermeneutic, phenomenological tradition. For example, using a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach allows the researcher to identify the essence of the phenomena and interpret those phenomena for a richer description of the data (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed me to place importance on the context of a rural setting for exploring the supervision expectations and experiences of school counselors, which was important to the uniqueness of the study.

**Discrimination Model**

In this study, I explored the expectations and experiences of participants through the lens of supervision theory. Bernard and Goodyear (2014) described the three major categories of clinical supervision models as psychotherapy based, developmental, and process. In developmental models, supervisees have the benefit of not being locked into a single psychotherapy theory (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Supervisors can instead focus on the different requirements of supervisees based on their levels of education and experience (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Supervision process models focus on the supervision process itself and the supervisee's learning process instead of concentrating

on conveying one therapeutic approach as with the psychotherapy-based models (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Milne, 2014).

The discrimination model has the benefits of accessibility and flexibility, which makes it a good fit in a variety of settings (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Timm, 2015). Through the discrimination model, supervisors can take on the role of teacher, counselor, or consultant to address intervention, conceptualization, and personalization (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Timm, 2015). Intervention addresses the observable skills the counselor is employing in session, while conceptualization addresses how the supervisee understands what occurs in session and selects interventions (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Personalization includes the supervisee's personal style in counseling and ability to address countertransference (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Supervisors take on the teacher role to increase structure to provide direct instruction and give feedback, while the consultant is a more collegial role for supervisees to think and act on their own (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Acting in the counselor role allows the supervisor to enhance supervisee reflectivity (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). The discrimination model allows for the supervisor to work with supervisees from different psychotherapeutic approaches, which further encourages diversity and consideration in the supervisory relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Ober et al., 2015; Timm, 2015). Using the lens of the discrimination model allowed me to shape interview questions and content that specifically address these components of clinical supervision.

### School Counseling Supervision Model

Luke and Bernard (2006) proposed the school counseling supervision model (SCSM) as an expansion of the discrimination model in response to the need for clinical supervision for school counselors and the lack of supervision models that addressed all aspects of a comprehensive school counseling program. The SCSM considers each of the four comprehensive school counseling program domains (i.e., large group intervention; counseling and consultation; individual and group advisement; and planning, coordination, and evaluation) as a point of entry for supervision (Luke & Bernard, 2006). After identifying the point of entry, the SCSM allows for the supervisor to then consider the focus of supervision and the supervisory role (Luke & Bernard, 2006). The SCSM model extends the discrimination model to consider the unique needs of school counseling supervisees as opposed to other supervision models that focus solely on the counseling (Luke & Bernard, 2006). Utilizing this model helped to guide me in developing the research questions to understand the supervision expectations and experiences of rural school counselors and how those supervision experiences can be enhanced.

## Conceptual Framework

I utilized a qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological approach to understand the supervision experiences of rural school counselors, specifically to explore the similarities and differences between their expectations and received supervision as well as how they cope with and manage their role of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in a rural area. Hermeneutics concentrates on interpretation by

focusing on context, and a key assumption of Heidegger (1962) is that  are always engaged in and interpreting their world (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Wilson, 2014). Researchers have utilized a phenomenological approach to gather rich data and an understanding of school counseling experiences, and those researchers have called for further study into the school counseling experience, specifically addressing the supervision experiences of rural school counselors (Bultsma, 2012; Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). With this study, I sought to fill this gap in knowledge regarding the supervision experiences of rural school counselors.

## Literature Review

### Role of the School Counselor

Dahir and Stone (2013) described the transformation of school counselors from the beginning of the profession in the late 19th century with the father of vocational guidance, Frank Parsons, to their current roles influenced by the ASCA National Model. School counseling began with a focus on vocational guidance and finding the right match between work opportunities and personal characteristics, then expanded into personal and social development services as society began to see an increased need for mental health services (ASCA, 2019; Chandler et al., 2018; Dahir & Stone, 2013). The introduction of the ASCA National Standards in 1997 and the ASCA National Model in 2003 further propelled the comprehensive program approach to school counseling from looking at school counseling as a response service to an active program (ASCA, 2019; Chandler et al., 2018; Dahir & Stone, 2013).

School counselors are now tasked with balancing the expectations of administrators, student demands, and community priorities to create a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses the academic, personal/social, and career needs of all students (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Chandler et al., 2018; Moyer, 2011). The ASCA National Model (2019), now in its fourth edition, provides counselors a framework for implementing the organizational concept to create a comprehensive program. The ASCA National Model is divided into the four components of define, manage, deliver, and assess. The define component is made up of student standards and professional and ethical standards for school counselors (ASCA, 2019). The ASCA (2016) ethical guidelines included under the professional standards section encourages school counselors to seek supervision when ethical or professional questions arise. The manage component provides program focus and planning tools (ASCA, 2019). The deliver component describes the activities and services provided through the school counseling program via direct and indirect student services (ASCA, 2019). For example, school counselors may work directly with students through classroom instruction, small group settings, or individual counseling and utilize consultation, collaboration, and referrals to assist students indirectly. Finally, the assess component highlights the data-driven nature of a comprehensive school counseling program through program assessment, as well as, individual assessment to inform professional development (ASCA, 2019). Although school counselor assessment is included in the ASCA National Model, the framework stops short at directly mentioning supervision as a way to fulfill this component. Instead, the ASCA National Model includes professional standards and

competencies along with an evaluation template, which it states may be used for self-assessment, evaluations during counselor education programs, and by school administrators for hiring decisions or performance evaluation (ASCA, 2019).

Although the ASCA National Model does not explicitly call for supervision for school counselors, the ASCA ethical guidelines discuss supervision multiple times making supervision important to the school counseling profession (ASCA, 2019). ASCA Ethical Guideline B.3.h. calls for school counselors to seek supervision on ethical and professional questions from other school counselors or professionals knowledgeable school counselors' ethical practices (ASCA, 2016). This guideline highlights not only the importance of supervision for school counselors, but also the importance of receiving supervision from professionals trained in school counseling. Section C of the ASCA ethical guidelines addresses school counselor administrators' and supervisors' roles and responsibilities (ASCA, 2016). For example, school counseling supervisors should take steps to eliminate interference with compliance of ethical guidelines such as ensuring appropriate staff supervision and training. Finally, Section D of the ASCA ethical guidelines addresses issues related to school counseling intern site supervisors (ASCA, 2016). Section D shows the importance of supervision during a school counselor's training and their first experiences in practice during their practicum and internship. As supervision has been designated as integral to the role of school counselors by ASCA, exploring the expectations and experiences of rural school counselors can be significant in understanding how these school counselors support themselves and their students.

**Supervision**

Bernard and Goodyear (2014) identified the purpose of supervision as fostering the supervisee's professional development and ensuring client welfare. Administrative and clinical supervision are distinct types of supervision with differing purposes, but both are necessary for effective school counseling (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006). Supervision is also encouraged throughout counselors' careers to ensure ethical practice (ACA, 2014; Kreider, 2014). For example, counselors are bound by ACA Ethical Code F.1.which addresses the need for supervision to ensure client welfare, and Ethical Code F.6.b that requires supervisors to utilize gatekeeping and remediation measures to address supervisee limitations (ACA, 2014). The ASCA ethical guidelines address supervision specifically for school counselors by calling for them to seek supervision from school counselors and other professionals knowledgeable of school counselors' ethical guidelines on ethical or professional issues (ASCA, 2016). Although ethical guidelines call for supervision and research supports the benefits, clinical supervision is often lacking for school counselors and not mandated beyond initial training (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; CACREP, 2016; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012).

Administrative supervision is not counseling specific and addresses the school counselor's roles and responsibilities as an employee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Herlihy et al., 2002). Principals or other administrators with little to no counseling training or experience often conduct administrative supervision (Wilson et al., 2015). Administrative supervisors attend to staffing issues, fiscal matters, and communication protocols (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). For example, administrative supervisors may

assist new school counselors in learning job tasks and expectations of the position that are specific to that school, as well as, navigating their new school's culture.

Clinical supervision enhances the supervisee's professional development and counseling skills (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Supervisory activities designed to improve the application of counseling theory and technique such as case conceptualization, counseling processes, and interventions selected make up the core focus of clinical supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006). Development of professional identity is also an important component of clinical supervision highlighting the importance of accessibility to supervision from other school counselors (Bultsma, 2012; Wilson et al., 2015).

Building on the discrimination model of supervision, Luke and Bernard (2006) proposed the School Counseling Supervision Model (SCSM) in response to the need for clinical supervision for school counselors. The SCSM addresses all aspects of a comprehensive school counseling program instead of focusing solely on counseling, which allows supervisors to address the unique needs of school counseling supervisees (Luke & Bernard, 2006). For example, supervisors select a point of entry from the four comprehensive school counseling program domains (large group intervention; counseling and consultation; individual and group advisement; and planning, coordination, and evaluation) and then consider their focus of supervision and the supervisory role (Luke & Bernard, 2006). A school counseling specific supervision model allows supervisors to address school counselors' unique needs while enhancing the professional development of school counseling supervisees.

Adherence to ethical guidelines such as those that address supervision ensure school counselors to maintain high standards of integrity, leadership, and professionalism (ASCA, 2016). Both ACA and ACSA address supervision in their ethical guidelines, but clinical supervision is not mandated for school counselors beyond their time in training (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; CACREP, 2016). CACREP (2016) standards mandate weekly individual and group supervision requirements for counseling students during practicum and internship courses. The ASCA ethical guidelines encourage school counselors to seek supervision from other school counselors to develop professional competence and as a responsibility to self when ethical or professional questions arise (ASCA, 2016). Although supervision is encouraged through the ethical guidelines, ASCA does not go so far as to mandate supervision, but instead utilizes consultation as a component of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2016, 2019). Consultation is included as an indirect student service under the deliver component for school counselors to both provide and seek (ACSA, 2019). As supervision has been shown to be an important component of school counseling through the ASCA National Model and ethical guidelines, it is important to further explore the supervision expectations and experiences of rural school counselors to understand how rural school counselors implement comprehensive school counseling programs.

**Rural Issues**

Rural areas are often difficult to define and usually characterized by comparison to urban areas, which have specific population size and density such as more than 50,000 people (HRSA, 2017).The unique needs of rural areas include isolation, lack of

opportunities and resources, and school counselors required to fulfill multiple roles (Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). School counselors are tasked with addressing the academic, social-emotional, and college and career readiness needs of all students, but research shows that rural students face increased challenges in those areas (Bright, 2018; Nichols, Goforth, Sacra, & Ahlers, 2017). For example, Dobson (2018) discussed the challenge of isolation and lack of resources in context of rural students' aspirations for attending college. Dobson noted that a lengthy drive from a more populated area often discourages college recruiters from visiting smaller schools in rural areas, as well as, creating challenges for students to visit the larger college fairs held in urban areas. Bardhoshi and Duncan (2009) highlighted another challenge of school counselors being tasked with multiple roles and unclear definition of appropriate and inappropriate tasks. Principals' perceptions of school counselors' roles and duties were found in a positive view, but some inappropriate duties such as test coordinator were still deemed as important (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009). Bardhoshi and Duncan stated that convenience and cost effectiveness were likely the source of rural school counselors continuing to be delegated inappropriate duties. Sutton (2002) also noted school counselors being tasked with multiple roles by taking on the responsibilities of a community mental health resource due to the convenience and needing to fill the gap in available services. Additionally, Sutton noted a difference in working in rural areas versus urban areas is the counselor visibility and accessibility, as well as, culture issues. For example, Sutton mentioned school counselors being frequently approached while outside of school to discuss student issues or even being questioned on why they may have been away from

school during the day. Rural school counselors face additional barriers if they are viewed as an outsider and not familiar with the local culture (Grimes et al., 2013; Sutton, 2002). Rural school counselors may also face the lack of adequate supervision due to isolation and lack of resources (Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015).

Researchers have also noted a lack of research into rural issues. For example, researchers have stated that rural students have received less attention compared to other populations and that further study is needed to capture their unique experiences and develop best practices for rural students (Bright, 2018; Nichols et al., 2017; Schafft, 2016). Although 29% of public school students attend a rural school versus 32% in suburban areas and 25% in urban areas, rural schools are often overlooked in research and policy-making (McFarland et al., 2019; Schafft, 2016). Researchers have also called for further study into the rural school counseling experience (Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). Grimes et al. (2013) advocated for further study into the rural school counseling experience to assist counselor educators to better prepare future rural school counselors. Additionally, Wilson et al. (2015) specifically focused on furthering study into supervision experiences of rural school counselors. This study will support researchers call for further study into rural issues specifically the rural school counseling experience and supervision experiences of rural school counselors. As researchers have noted the unique challenges and experiences of rural areas and called for the further study on the rural school counseling experience, exploring the supervision expectations and experiences of rural school counselors can be significant to filling the gap in knowledge

of rural school counseling and understanding how those school counselors implement comprehensive school counseling programs.

## Summary and Conclusions

A review of the literature has revealed the role of the school counselor, supervision, and rural issues related to school counseling. School counselors must balance administrator expectations with student needs to create a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses the academic, personal/social, and career needs of all students (ASCA, 2019; Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Moyer, 2011). Ethical guidelines call for supervision and school counselors receive supervision during their initial training, but there is often a gap in supervision desired and received by practicing school counselors (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012; Wilson et al., 2015). Rural areas have unique challenges and have often been overlooked in research (Bright, 2018; Nichols et al., 2017; Schafft, 2016).

Chapter 3 includes an in-depth discussion of the research method. Information will include the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and methodology of the study. Included in the methodology is participant selection and logic. Instrumentation and procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection are also included in the methodology section, as well as information on data analysis. Issues of trustworthiness will also be discussed.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to understand the supervision experiences of rural school counselors, specifically to explore the similarities and differences between their expectations and received supervision as well as how they cope with and manage their role of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in a rural area.

In this chapter, I provide the specific research plan for the study, including a description of the research design and rationale. This chapter also includes a discussion of the role of the researcher, methodology, and data analysis plan.

## Research Design and Rationale

In this hermeneutic, phenomenological study, I sought to address the following research questions: What are the lived experiences of school counselors in rural areas involving their expectations and experiences of clinical supervision while implementing comprehensive school counseling programs? and What could enhance their supervision experience? The central phenomena studied was supervision, more specifically, the different experiences of administrative and clinical supervision. Additionally, I explored how rural school counselors are the individuals making meaning of this experience in this study.

To best address the research questions, I employed a qualitative research method. Qualitative researchers seek to understand a phenomenon, such as the supervision experiences of rural school counselors (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, I used a phenomenological design, which is employed to collect and describe the lived

experiences of individuals who have experienced the phenomena studied (see Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Phenomenology typically involves interviews and open-ended questioning to gather data (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A quantitative design was ruled out because quantitative research uses numbers and statistics versus the rich, descriptive data achieved through qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Quantitative methods require standardized measures, which would have limited participants' responses of their expectations and experiences of supervision.

Patton (2015) described hermeneutics as interpreting *how* and *why* context matters. The context of rural school counseling and supervision experiences are key to the study and, therefore, required the hermeneutic, phenomenological tradition. Using a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach allows the researcher to identify the essence of the phenomena and interpret those phenomena for a richer description of the data (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Additionally, a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach allowed me to place importance on the context of a rural setting for exploring the supervision expectations and experiences of school counselors, which was important to the uniqueness of the study.

## Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research and is a central component in qualitative research designs (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the researcher's positionality, which is the researcher's role in relationship to the context and setting of the research, and social location or social identity are important in every stage of the research process. The

hermeneutic, phenomenological design requires the researcher to interpret the meanings found in relation to the phenomena (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). As a school counselor working in rural areas, I became interested in best practices to assist my students and fellow school counselors. As the primary researcher in this study, my background and current position as a school counselor influenced how I interpreted participants' responses and how participants responded to me. For example, participants may have felt as though I would understand their experiences and were willing to share more information with a fellow school counselor than someone in an administrative position. This process of being aware of and reflecting on how my questions, methods, and position may have impacted the data is reflexivity and is aligned with Heidegger's key assumption that individuals are always engaged in and interpreting their world (see Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Through the use of reflexivity and a hermeneutic approach, my prior experiences impacted the data analysis and interpretation.

As an insider researcher, or someone conducting research within the group or community in which I identified, I faced some potential challenges (see Hanson, 2013). Ensuring clear separation of my role within the school district from my role as a researcher may have been a challenge if participants retained employment in the same district as me. A clear separation of roles had to be established to ensure confidentiality and prevent potential bias. Researchers can use several strategies to mitigate threats to validity and address potential bias issues, such as triangulation, member checking, audit trails, and thick description (Bleiker et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I mitigated bias

in this study by member checking participants' responses and following the interview guide, which included the key guiding questions asked in the interviews.

## Methodology

### Participant Selection Logic

The participants in this study were practicing school counselors in rural areas. For the purposes of this study, I considered rural areas as areas not heavily populated or urbanized with populations smaller than 50,000 people (see HRSA, 2017). Targeted participants were recruited through the ASCA listservs. Potential participants who met the participation criteria of actively practicing school counselors in a rural area were invited to contact me via e-mail to indicate their interest and provide contact information for the study. Recruiting for an ideal sample size of six to 12 participants or until saturation of data was attained aligned with both theoretical and practical guidance (see Baker et al., 2012; Mason, 2010). Data saturation occurs when no new information is learned about the phenomenon being studied (Baker et al., 2012; Mason, 2010). Mason (2010) discussed the conflicts that arise between time, energy, and funding constraints and the desire for data saturation. For example, limitations on resources may dictate the amount of time that the researcher may dedicate to ensuring data saturation has been achieved in the study. The selected sample size met the needs of a phenomenological study while also producing a manageable amount of data (see Baker et al., 2012; Mason, 2010).

## Instrumentation

In this study, I gathered data from the participants through semistructured interviews. In semistructured interviews, an interview instrument is used to organize and guide the interview with specific questions to be asked of all participants, but the order, wording, and subquestions are customized to follow a conversational path (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Follow-up questions were also used in the interviews as needed. Semistructured interviews allowed for flexibility that aligned best with the theoretical framework and goals of this study to explore the lived experiences of school counselors in rural areas related to their expectations and experiences of clinical supervision while implementing comprehensive school counseling programs (see Grimes et al., 2013; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For example, the flexibility displayed by Wilson et al. (2015) more closely aligned with my goals and approach versus the structured interviews of Ünal et al. (2013) even though both addressed supervision experiences of school counselors. Asking open-ended questions during the semistructured interviews allowed participants to share their expectations and experiences of supervision as a rural school counselor (see Appendix A). I audio-taped the interviews.

## Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited utilizing the ASCA Scene listserv. I posted invitations for participation to the study through the listserv and followed up with indications of interest from potential participants to review procedures, answer questions, and arrange interviews. I posted requests for participation weekly until I had obtained the goal sample size of six to 12 participants and data saturation was reached. Participants were selected

based upon the interest they showed in the study and their response to the request for participation, which included my contact information, the criteria of being a school counselor actively practicing in a rural area, and ability to participate in the interview within a reasonable amount of time or 1 month from the initial request for participation. As part of the informed consent process, participants were notified they were free to exit the study at any time. Prior to scheduling the interview, I asked participants to complete and return a brief demographic form by e-mail or in person (see Appendix B). Interviews were conducted via phone, lasted less than 1 hour, and were audio recorded by me. Audio recordings were then transcribed and analyzed. I used pseudonyms for the participants during transcription to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality.

**Data Analysis Plan**

A hermeneutic, phenomenological approach is used to develop an understanding of the context of participants' lived experiences (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hermeneutics concentrates on interpretation by looking at context and original purpose (Heidegger, 1962; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). A key assumption of Heidegger was that people are always engaged in and interpreting the world (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Wilson, 2014). For example, Smith and Firth (2011) described the framework approach, which allows the researcher to move continuously between stages during analysis to refine themes and categories. The framework approach described by Smith and Firth aligns with the hermeneutic circle of reflection and interpretation. The hermeneutic circle refers to a cycle of exposure to a text, interpretation of the text, and then reexposure to the text, offering closer inspection and

new insights (Heidegger, 1962; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed through a transcription service, which I checked for accuracy. Copies of the transcripts were sent to participants as a part of member checking, which is utilized in qualitative research to address issues of trustworthiness and increase credibility (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

To begin data analysis, I examined my own experiences as a rural school counselor and prejudgements about supervision expectations and the experiences of rural school counselors. Following Heidegger's key assumption, my own experiences and background were involved in the ongoing process of the interpretation of the data.

After listening to the interviews and taking notes, I reviewed the written transcriptions of the participant interviews to complete the data analysis process. Multiple readings of the transcripts allowed me to gather themes and refine categories to reflect on the meanings presented and more deeply understand the supervision expectations and experiences of rural school counselors. Sloan and Bowe (2014) described the coding procedure that aligns with the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which I used in this study. The transcripts were analyzed and a holistic theme from each transcript was taken first. Smith and Firth (2011) described this first stage as data management, in which the researcher becomes familiar with the data, identifies initial themes, and develops a coding matrix by assigning data to the themes and categories in the data matrix. I started by reading each transcript and identifying initial themes and making notes. Next, selective statements and phrases were highlighted throughout the transcript along with a written interpretation considering the holistic

theme. Sloan and Bowe stated the highlighted statement and attending interpretation constituted the hermeneutic circle. Smith and Firth called this second stage, descriptive accounts, in which the purpose is to identify the association between themes until the bigger picture emerges. I continuously reviewed each transcript focusing on preliminary meaning units or participants' specific phrases to make connections between those preliminary meaning units to form specific themes. Smith and Firth identified the final stage as explanatory accounts, in which the researcher seeks to reflect on the original data and the analytical stages to ensure an accurate representation of the data, find meaning in the concepts and themes, and seek wider application of the concepts and themes. In this stage of data analysis, I connected the themes that developed back to specific research questions and began to form general descriptions of the phenomena.

## Issues of Trustworthiness

### Credibility

Credibility is directly related to research design and involves the complexity of integrating interpretation, representation, and the truth of the data (Cope, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For example, researchers can utilize direct quotes to demonstrate the data is represented accurately and not based on researcher bias or viewpoints (Cope, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Member checks, which is participant feedback or validation, were utilized to ensure I accurately captured the participants' data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### Transferability

Transferability is concerned with the contextual aspects of the study and ways in which the qualitative study can be transferrable to broader contexts (Bleiker et al., 2019;

Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thick descriptions of contextual factors provided by participants' demographics and the study background addressed transferability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For example, the unique challenges faced by rural school counselors may not translate to experiences for school counselors in other areas, but some findings of the experiences of supervision in a school counseling setting and strategies for coping with and managing school counseling duties may be applicable across demographics.

**Dependability**

Similar to reliability in quantitative studies, dependability describes the stability of the data (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended using research design memos to consider issues of validity, which refers to the quality and rigor of the study. For example, the audit trail including field notes, rationale for participant selection and research methods, and anonymized transcripts added to the study's dependability (Bleiker et al., 2019).

**Confirmability**

Researchers described confirmability as parallel to objectivity in quantitative studies and acknowledge qualitative researchers do not claim to be objective, but rather seek confirmable data (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability can be addressed through reflexivity, which is a continuous self-reflection of the researcher's identity, positionality, and bias (Bleiker et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For example, acknowledging and exploring ways that biases influenced interpretation of the data.

## Ethical Procedures

This study was conducted following the ethical requirements of the ACA (2014) Code of Ethics and the Walden (2019) Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Walden IRB granted permission for the study before any data were collected (IRB Approval #06-05-20-0661299, expiration June 4, 2021). This study was considered minimal risk to participants due to the lack of utilizing vulnerable populations or sensitive topics. Participants' anonymity was protected through utilizing pseudonyms. As shared through the study's informed consent, participation was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time. If a participant chose to withdraw from the study, all data collected from the participant would be deleted. All data were kept confidential through password-protected electronic files and documents kept in a locked cabinet with myself having sole access. After 5 years of study completion, all data will be destroyed.

## Summary

I described in this chapter the specific research plan for this hermeneutic phenomenological study, including rationale for the research design. Also included in this chapter was discussion on the role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. In Chapter 4, the results of the data are presented as findings.

# Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to understand the supervision experiences of rural school counselors, specifically to explore the similarities and differences between their expectations and received supervision as well as how they cope with and manage their role of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in a rural area. After reviewing the literature, I found gaps in the knowledge related to expectations and understanding of clinical supervision in school counseling settings in rural areas, so I conducted this study aiming to address this gap. The main research question was: What are the lived experiences of school counselors in rural areas involving their expectations and experiences of clinical supervision while implementing comprehensive school counseling programs? The subquestion was: What could enhance their supervision experiences?

In Chapter 4, I present the demographics of the participants, data collection methods, and findings of the study. A discussion of the data analysis procedures and evidence of trustworthiness is also included.

## Research Setting

I began data collection in June 2020 after receiving IRB approval (IRB Approval #06-05-20-0661299, expiration June 4, 2021). Data collection was completed within 4 weeks. All interviews were completed via phone, following data collection procedures, and scheduled at times mutually convenient for me and the participant. Phone interviews allowed for participants from across the United States to be interviewed as well as adherence to recommended social distancing guidelines due to the ongoing COVID-19

pandemic. Affecting many countries globally, COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus, which was previously unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (World Health Organization, 2020). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) recommended that individuals keep a safe space of at least six feet between themselves and other people who are not from their household to prevent the spread of infection, which is transmitted when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks and droplets are launched into the air and land in the mouths or noses of people nearby or inhaled into the lungs. Additionally, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, schools across the United States closed during the Spring 2020 semester and were forced to switch to online formats to continue education. Although conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, only one participant mentioned it during the interview.

## Demographics

Participants were required to meet the inclusion criteria of actively practicing school counselors in rural areas (see Table 1). The definition of rural areas I used for this study was that of areas not heavily populated or urbanized with populations smaller than 50,000 people, which was included on the invitation to participate to assist in the identification of qualified participants (see HRSA, 2017). I excluded school counselors that did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

| Participant | Experience (years) | Grade level | State | Gender | Age | Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 | 2 | 9–12 | Oregon | Female | 29 or less | White |
| Participant 2 | 7 | 7–12 | New Hampshire | Female | 30–39 | White |
| Participant 3 | 2 | 9–12 | Mississippi | Male | 30–39 | Black |
| Participant 4 | 5 | 6–12 | New Hampshire | Female | 50–59 | White |
| Participant 5 | 2 | 9–12 | Colorado | Male | 29 or less | White |
| Participant 6 | 16 | K–8 | Nevada | Female | 40–49 | White |

## Data Collection

I was granted IRB approval for this study on June 5, 2020, and the initial request for participants was posted on June 8, 2020. Requests for participation were posted weekly over the course of 4 weeks on different days of the week to reach a larger audience until data saturation was obtained. The first post was made on a Monday, with the second on a Wednesday, and the final on a Tuesday to vary exposure to potential participants. Data saturation was achieved after recruiting six participants, which took 4 weeks to reach. Data saturation occurs when no new information is learned about the phenomenon being studied (Baker et al., 2012; Mason, 2010). The data collection met the

needs of a hermeneutic, phenomenological study while also producing a manageable amount of data (Baker et al., 2012; Mason, 2010).

Participants contacted me via e-mail to express their interest in participating in the study. Each participant completed the informed consent and demographic form prior to scheduling the semistructured, phone interviews with me. Each interview lasted less than 1 hour and w recorded using a digital voice recorder as well as the digital voice recording application on my computer as a backup. Interviews were transcribed by an automated transcription service and then checked for accuracy by me. All participants received a follow-up e-mail within a week of the completion of the last interview with a copy of their transcript requesting feedback and verification of accuracy. I completed entries in a reflective journal weekly during each transcription, and all information was saved in password-protected files.

## Data Analysis

I used a hermeneutic, phenomenological design to interpret the data collected because this design focuses on understanding the context of the participants' lived experiences (see Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hermeneutics concentrates on interpretation by looking at context and original purpose (see Heidegger, 1962; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). A key assumption of Heidegger was that people are always engaged in and interpreting the world (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Wilson, 2014).

I began by examining my own experiences as a rural school counselor as well as the prejudgements about supervision expectations and experiences of rural school

counselors that were documented in my journaling. Because Heidegger believed that people are always engaged in and interpreting the world, my own experiences and background were involved in the ongoing process of the interpretation of the data (see Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Wilson, 2014). I noted during my journaling that participants were of varying age and experience levels and found myself identifying with the participants in many ways. For example, I discovered that participants with less experience leaned on support from their counselor education programs and then again when noticing the more experienced school counselors shifting to collaboration with school counselor colleagues and community resources. Participants were located across the United States, which I viewed as a benefit to the study by capturing a broader picture of rural school counselors' experiences. I also reported that all participants were comfortable during the interviews and genuinely intrigued by the study. Participants were eager to share their experiences, and my initial concerns about data collection, such as participants not wanting to openly share, were alleviated.

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed through a transcription service, which I checked for accuracy after receiving. Copies of the transcripts were then sent to participants as a part of member checking. Member checking is utilized in qualitative research to address issues of trustworthiness and increase credibility (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The next step included reading the transcripts multiple times to identify themes and refine categories, which allowed me to reflect on the meanings presented and more deeply understand the supervision expectations and experiences of rural school counselors (see Table 2). The transcripts were analyzed, and a holistic theme from each

transcript was developed first. I printed out each transcript and was able to highlight phrases common among each response.

Table 2

*Preliminary Meaning Units*

| | Meaning units | Examples from interviews |
|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 | Disconnect in expectations<br>Clarifying roles<br>Collaboration<br>Desire for support | "My evaluations, throughout the year, all based on all the verbiage as if I were a teacher so it doesn't really apply to what I'm doing at all….That's not really the correct tool to evaluate me."<br>"In order to get people to advocate, they have to understand what we do."<br>"You need a third party to be able to point out your blind spots. They're blind spots for a reason." |
| Participant 2 | Disconnect in expectations<br>Clarifying roles<br>Collaboration<br>Desire for support | "I'll reach out to the other area school counselors…being rural, we already are lacking resources anyway so we're lucky to have a school social worker."<br>"We kind of make do with the best that we can…it's definitely not like supervision." |
| Participant 3 | Disconnect in expectations<br>Clarifying roles<br>Collaboration<br>Desire for support | "What I was receiving in my counselor education program but my job is nothing like what I went through in my counseling program."<br>"As far as them actually knowing my role, my standards, and know things that I'm actually supposed to be doing, they're not abreast to that."<br>"Playing multiple roles really hasn't allowed for me to seek supervision as I needed."<br>"I've had to seek supervision outside of the school to make sure that I'm doing right. I still reach out to some of my professors from my counselor ed program and mental health counselors outside of school district." |

*(table continues)*

| | Meaning units | Examples from interviews |
|---|---|---|
| Participant 4 | Disconnect in expectations<br>Clarifying roles<br>Collaboration<br>Desire for support | "I expected that my principal would be interested in hearing how counseling should line up with the ASCA guidelines and be willing to let us show our expertise."<br>"It's really important to have a collaborative effort and then you don't feel like you're isolated on an island…work as a team is more important than ever."<br>"Student concern team meetings… maybe there were some other approaches. We would always leave there with more suggestions that we came up with together." |
| Participant 5 | Disconnect in expectations<br>Clarifying roles<br>Collaboration<br>Desire for support | "They talked supervision as being a kind of collaborative or mentorship where I'm working with administration to get things done…there definitely is a lot more collaborative relationships."<br>"I don't think we have anyone in the school district who can even offer it…we were encouraged to kind of find mentorship outside of the school."<br>"I think if the department of education recognized the school counselors as their own thing and set up programs for supervision and things like that, I think that could be a huge help." |

*(table continues)*

| | Meaning units | Examples from interviews |
|---|---|---|
| Participant 6 | Disconnect in expectations<br>Clarifying roles<br>Collaboration<br>Desire for support | "Micromanaging…principal that I had at my internship was kind of like that."<br>"Staff and administrators felt that I should be doing what I felt were above my scope…in a rural school that a lot of those students don't necessarily have the access to some of those things."<br>"It's difficult to establish those connections and learn who those people are that I can go to if I have questions. Maybe we're provided with information about who the other rurals are and possibly those representatives could act as some kind of a supervisory capacity." |

I continuously reviewed each transcript focusing on preliminary meaning units or participants' specific phrases and making connections between those preliminary meaning units to form specific themes. I read each transcript separately, and then, each question together across all interviews. Bowe (2014) stated the highlighted statements and attending interpretations constituted the hermeneutic circle. Participants did not provide any additional data or request clarifications after receiving copies of their transcripts. For the final step, I connected the themes that had emerged back to specific research questions and began to form general descriptions of the phenomena. The following four major themes emerged: disconnect in expectations versus experiences, clarifying roles and responsibilities, collaboration, and desire for increased support.

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

### Credibility

Credibility is directly related to research design and involves the complexity of integrating interpretation, representation, and the truth of the data (Cope, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As shown in Table 2, I utilized direct quotes to demonstrate the data is represented accurately. Direct quotes help ensure data is not based on researcher bias or viewpoints (Cope, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Member checks, which is participant feedback or validation, was utilized to ensure the researcher is accurately capturing the participants' data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Each participant received a follow-up e-mail with a copy of their transcript for additional feedback and to check for accuracy.

### Transferability

Transferability is concerned with the contextual aspects of the study and ways in which the qualitative study can be transferrable to broader contexts (Bleiker et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I provided thick descriptions of contextual factors provided by participants' demographics and the study background. Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested using thick descriptions to address transferability. Some findings of the experiences of supervision in a school counseling setting and strategies for coping with and managing school counseling duties may be applicable across demographics, but the unique challenges faced by rural school counselors may not translate to experiences for school counselors in other areas. Although participants represented multiple areas of the United States and levels of experience, the number of participants may limit transferability.

### Dependability

Similar to reliability in quantitative studies, dependability describes the stability of the data (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended using research design memos to consider issues of validity, which refers to the quality and rigor of the study. Bleiker et al. (2019) suggested creating an audit trail to add to a study's dependability. For this study, I created an audit trail including rationale for participant selection and research methods, reflective journaling, and anonymized transcripts. I also utilized member checking through follow-up e-mails, which provided participants a copy of their transcript for additional feedback and to check for accuracy.

### Confirmability

Researchers described confirmability as parallel to objectivity in quantitative studies and acknowledge qualitative researchers do not claim to be objective, but rather seek confirmable data (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability can be addressed through reflexivity, which is a continuous self-reflection of the researcher's identity, positionality, and bias (Bleiker et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I was able to increase confirmability through reflective journaling and member checking.

## Study Results

Four major themes emerged including disconnect in expectations versus experiences, clarifying roles and responsibilities, collaboration, and desire for increased support. These themes repeated throughout each participants' interview. The themes emerged from the research questions of what are the expectations and experiences of

clinical supervision while implementing comprehensive school counseling programs and what could enhance their supervision experiences.

**Disconnect in Expectations and Experiences**

A common theme that emerged is a disconnect between the expectations and experiences of rural school counselors implementing comprehensive school counseling programs. Participants spoke to their expectations for supervision and the job itself and how those expectations did not match their experiences once in their positions as rural school counselors. Participants all reported receiving administrative supervision from a principal or other school administrators, but no formal clinical supervision. Researchers have confirmed the benefits of supervision for counselors and clients such as supporting the personal and professional growth of counselors, as well as, ensuring client welfare (Duncan et al., 2016; Ünal et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). This study aligns with Duncan et al. (2014) who reported school counselors found clinical supervision as important to professional growth but noted that access to any form of supervision was limited in rural areas. Two participants stated their expectations for supervision matched their experiences, but only because they had low to no expectations.

When discussing their expectations for supervision, participants shared their expectations were based upon ASCA guidelines and their experiences in their counselor education training programs (ASCA, 2019). Participant 4 stated, “I expected that my principal would be interested in hearing how counseling should line up with the ASCA guidelines and be willing to let us show our expertise.” Participant 4 followed up with discussing the conflict that arose sometimes in differing expectations between trying to

follow ASCA guidelines and other ideas from administration. Participant 6 shared their expectations as “micromanaging…principal that I had at my internship was kind of like that.” Participant 6 described the disconnect in experiences as his supervision being more of a collaboration or mentorship and very ‘hands-off supervision’. Participant 3 also was expecting "what I was receiving in my counselor education program” but expressed, “my job is nothing like what I went through in my counseling program.” Participant shared his internship was more focused on counseling activities and was able to receive supervision for counseling sessions, but he does not have as much time to devote to individual counseling now instead focusing on other tasks. Overall, participants shared a disconnect in supervision expectations and experiences unless they had low to no expectations.

**Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities**

Another major theme that emerged was clarifying roles and responsibilities. All participants spoke at length about their frustrations with role confusion and differing expectations. When discussing his administrators, Participant 3 shared, “as far as them actually knowing my role, my standards, and know things that I’m actually supposed to be doing, they’re not abreast to that.” Participants supported Wilson et al.’s (2015) findings that many rural school counselors only receive administrative supervision from persons, such as principals, that have little or no counseling experience. Some participants shared their formal evaluations were based on or similar to teacher evaluations and not necessarily focused on a professional school counselor role. Participant 1 stated, “my evaluations, throughout the year, all based on all the verbiage as if I were a teacher so it doesn’t really apply to what I’m doing at all….That’s not really

the correct tool to evaluate me." Participant 6 expressed concern over differing expectations on her role providing therapeutic service stating, "staff and administrators felt that I should be doing what I felt were above my scope" but acknowledging "in a rural school that a lot of those students don't necessarily have the access to some of those things." This led to Participant 6 having to find a way to compromise on meeting administrator expectations, the needs of the students, and staying within her scope of practice.

Most participants expressed an understanding that part of being a rural school counselor was taking on extra tasks they did not consider part of a professional school counselor role, but this limited their ability to seek out and receive supervision. Participants stated a common issue in rural areas is limited resources and access, which created the need for them to take on additional roles and responsibilities limiting their time. Participant 3 shared, "playing multiple roles really hasn't allowed for me to seek supervision as I needed." The discussion further expanded into a desire for administrators to have a better understanding of the school counselor role, which would result in reallocating some duties to allow for more supervision opportunities. Participant 1 shared the importance of advocacy in clarifying roles and ensuring supervision is more helpful "in order to get people to advocate, they have to understand what we do."

**Collaboration**

Collaboration was a major theme shared throughout the participants experiences. Participants described collaboration when discussing their supervision experiences, as well as, sharing what could enhance the supervision experience. For example, all

participants stated that they did not have a designated clinical supervisor, but many shared that collaboration became an important piece in helping to fill the gap in their needs. Participant 4 discussed the importance of collaboration by stating, “it’s really important to have a collaborative effort and then you don’t feel like you’re isolated on an island…work as a team is more important than ever.” Walker (2015) also noted professional identity, professional collaboration, and clinical supervision as factors influencing effective school counselor services and programs. When discussing how she sought out supervision in the absence of an assigned clinical supervisor, Participant 2 shared, “I’ll reach out to the other area school counselors” and added, “being rural, we already are lacking resources anyway so we’re lucky to have a school social worker.”

Many shared that their supervision experiences were more informal and collaborative processes rather than formal, evaluative experiences. Participant 5 shared, “they talked supervision as being a kind of collaborative or mentorship where I’m working with administration to get things done…there definitely is a lot more collaborative relationships.” Participant 4 described “student concern team meetings” where members would discuss their approach and “maybe there were some other approaches. We would always leave there with more suggestions that we came up with together.” The group could include administrators, another counselor, and school social worker depending on who was available, but the meetings were not regular and ended once schools were closed due to COVID-19 during the spring semester. Participant 4 shared that she sometime collaborated remotely with her other school counselor after schools closed due to COVID-19, but the formal meetings ended.

Most participants agreed collaboration was needed to access and fulfill supervision needs for rural school counselors. Many shared they would like to see collaboration among the state counseling associations, school counselors, and department of education to assist in providing guidance and resources for supervision. Participant 6 shared, "it's difficult to establish those connections and learn who those people are that I can go to if I have questions." Participant 6 further discussed the need for collaboration by recommending a "more formalized communication network of people that we could as rural school counselors communicate with for those kinds of questions and collaborations." Participant 5 shared when discussing clinical supervision, "I don't think we have anyone in the school district who can even offer it…we were encouraged to kind of find mentorship outside of the school district." Overall, participants shared that collaboration was key in fulfilling their supervision needs and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in a rural area.

**Desire for Increased Support**

The final theme that emerged and was strongly present throughout each interview was a desire for increased support. Throughout the interviews, participants shared they were not receiving adequate supervision and expressed an openness to more. Participant 2 shared, "we kind of make do with the best that we can…it's definitely not like supervision." Participant 3 discussed, "I've had to seek supervision outside of the school to make sure that I'm doing right. I still reach out to some of my professors from my counselor ed program and mental health counselors outside of school district."

Each participant had recommendations on how to improve their supervision experiences and enhance the supervision experiences for all rural school counselors by increasing access to support. Participant 5 shared, “I think if the department of education recognized the school counselors as their own thing and set up programs for supervision and things like that, I think that could be a huge help.” Participants also suggested increased support and resources from state counseling associations to assist in advocacy and accessing supervision. Participant 6 discussed how rural representatives on the school counseling association board could increase support by stating, “maybe we’re provided with information about who the other rurals are and possibly those representatives could act as some kind of a supervisory capacity.” Some participants suggested having a lead school counselor or director of the school counseling programs would be a beneficial resource and someone to seek out for supervision. Participant 1 discussed the benefits of having a lead counselor to conduct supervision with recording sessions by stating, “you need a third party to be able to point out your blind spots. They’re blind spots for a reason.” The dedicated resource for supervision was seen as critical due to the supervisor having knowledge of the school counselor’s role and the availability to provide supervision without distraction from other duties.

## Summary

In Chapter 4, I discussed the demographics of participants, data collection methods, and findings of the study. Data analysis and discussion on evidence of trustworthiness was included followed by the themes that emerged from analyzing the main research questions. Four major themes emerged including disconnect in

expectations versus experiences, clarifying roles and responsibilities, collaboration, and desire for increased support.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss my findings of the study as they connect to the literature. I will also discuss the limitations of the study and recommendations for additional research, school counseling resources, and training opportunities. Finally, I will include implications for positive social change.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to understand the supervision experiences of rural school counselors, specifically to explore the similarities and differences between their expectations and received supervision as well as how they cope with and manage their role of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in a rural area. Using a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach and focusing on context and interpretation (see Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014), I specifically considered the unique experience of school counselors in rural locations in this study. Four major themes emerged from data analysis: disconnect in expectations versus experiences, clarifying roles and responsibilities, collaboration, and desire for increased support. The main research question that guided this study was: What are the lived experiences of school counselors in rural areas involving their expectations and experiences of clinical supervision while implementing comprehensive school counseling programs? The subquestion of the study was: What could enhance their supervision experiences?

In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings of this study and their connections to the literature; the limitations of the study; as well as recommendations for additional research, school counseling resources, and training opportunities. The chapter also includes the implications for positive social change. Finally, I conclude the chapter and study with a summary.

## Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study provide additional understanding of the supervision experiences of rural school counselors, specifically on the similarities and differences between their expectations and received supervision as well as how they cope with and manage their role of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in a rural areas. Previous researchers have found rural school counselors may face isolation, a lack of resources, and the lack of adequate supervision (Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). However, access to proper clinical supervision and consultation can increase a school counselor's effectiveness and create positive student outcomes (Grimes et al., 2013; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). The following four major themes emerged from data analysis: disconnect in expectations versus experiences, clarifying roles and responsibilities, collaboration, and desire for increased support.

### Disconnect in Expectations Versus Experiences

All participants spoke to their expectations for supervision and how those expectations did not match their experiences once in their positions as rural school counselors. Only two participants stated their expectations for supervision matched their experiences because they had low to no expectations and received only minimal administrative supervision with no formal clinical supervision. Participant 2 shared, "I think they've matched them pretty well in the sense that I didn't expect any and I haven't gotten any." Participants all reported receiving administrative supervision from a principal or other school administrators, but no formal clinical supervision. In referencing clinical supervision, Participant 3 stated, "I haven't received any supervision since my

internship years." Participants' experiences confirmed the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 that stated school counselors and rural school counselors, in particular, do not receive adequate supervision (Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). This is a concern for school counselors entering the profession who may not feel prepared to adequately assist students and need extra support.

**Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities**

Researchers have shared school counselors often experienced supervision that was deemed ineffective due to poor communication and relationships among school counselors and supervisors, a lack of time devoted to the supervision process, and lack of experience and understanding of the role of school counselors by the supervisors (Unal et al., 2013). All participants spoke to their struggles with stakeholders having differing ideas on school counselors' roles or a lack of knowledge from administrators that were acting in a supervisory role. School counselors are now tasked to deliver developmentally appropriate comprehensive school counseling programs to address the academic, personal/social, and career needs of all students (ASCA, 2019). Per the ASCA (2019) National Model, which provides counselors with a framework for implementing the organizational concept to create a comprehensive program, school counselors should provide school counseling curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. Participant 1 discussed the need for role clarification by sharing, "instead of seeing us as a different tool and resource…it's that lack of knowledge." Participants shared that the misunderstanding of roles and responsibilities impacts the administrative supervision received, which can lead to ineffective supervision. Participant

5 shared that, the "least helpful supervision I had was the lack of feedback…had not received enough feedback to really know what I could improve." Participant 1 described it as "having someone that can actually give me feedback that actually knows what my job is supposed to be…you don't know who I am." Researchers found that principals or other administrators with little to no counseling training or experience often conducted administrative supervision (Wilson et al., 2015). Participants shared the importance of clarifying their roles and responsibilities not just with administrators but also at the state level and with the education community, in general, as a way to advocate for their roles and needed resources. Participants expressed the responsibility currently fell to them, but they wished they had additional support from other sources, such as state departments of education.

**Collaboration**

Throughout the interviews, participants described collaboration when discussing their supervision experiences as well as sharing what could enhance their supervision experiences. Walker (2015) noted professional identity, professional collaboration, and clinical supervision as factors influencing effective school counselor services and programs. All participants stated that they did not have a designated clinical supervisor, but many shared they collaborated with other school counselors, local mental health agencies, and prior internship supervisors to fill their need for supervision and improve their effectiveness. Participant 5 shared, "If I'm feeling blocked with a student and I need some help or feedback to help me figure out different ways to approach things, I'll seek out different school counselors for help." Participant 4 explained that a benefit of being in

a smaller rural school was ease of access to administration for collaboration, stating, “In a bigger school, I’m not sure I would have had that direct connection to the administration that I have now.” Overall, participants expressed collaboration was key in accessing needed support in the absence of adequate supervision and implementing effective programs.

**Desire for Increased Support**

Participants continually responded that they were not receiving adequate supervision and expressed an openness for more. Participants expressed a desire to increase their effectiveness as school counselors, an openness to feedback, and a willingness to implement new strategies to help students. Participants shared a belief in the value and benefits of supervision similar to that found in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. For example, researchers have shown the benefits of supervision for school counselors, such as helping counselors maintain and enhance their professional competence through clinical supervision; ensuring compliance with school policies and laws through administrative supervision; and preventing negative consequences, such as professional burnout and potential legal or ethical ramifications from a malpractice lawsuit (Herlihy et al., 2002). Some participants also mentioned supervision as a way to align their practice with ASCA (2020) guidelines. Through seeing the value and benefits of supervision, which have also been confirmed by previous research (e.g., Duncan et al., 2014; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015), participants recommended additional support and resources from state counseling associations or departments of education to assist in advocacy and accessing supervision as well as designated clinical supervisors in their

school districts. Participant 4 suggested, “I think if there was more collaboration regionally that would help.” Participant 5 also shared difficulty in accessing resources and that the individual initiative required “as a rural school counselor, I’ve really had to go out and seek it. Whereas, I feel like [in] some larger school districts… it can be a lot easier to access.” All participants continually expressed a desire for increased support and resources. Participants discussed a variety of strategies they have used to meet their needs that other school counselors could utilize along with ideas for additional support and resources.

## Limitations of the Study

The first limitation arose in meeting data saturation while also producing a manageable amount of data within a reasonable timeline. Mason (2010) stated that qualitative research has some limitations due to conflicts that can arise between time, energy, and funding constraints. One barrier I encountered was difficulty in recruiting participants for interviews. School counselors being hesitant to participate due to confidentiality concerns and my focus on school counselors located only in rural areas limited the number of available participants. Accessing participants in rural areas posed some challenges for face-to-face interviews due to the distance and time required for travel. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not an option and only phone interviews were conducted. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) recommended social distancing. Phone interviews limited the data collection process to exclude nonverbal communication.

Transferability may also be a limitation due to the scope of the study on the expectations and experiences of rural school counselors. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described transferability as applying qualitative findings to broader settings while still maintaining the context-specific results. The results of the study are limited to only rural school counselors and may not be applicable in other settings, such as urban areas or school counselors in general. Although participants practiced in multiple states and regions across the United States, this study was limited in the ability to transfer the results to a larger population. I used journaling and member checking to address researcher bias, which may be another potential limitation because I am also a rural school counselor.

## Recommendations

As participants shared their experiences of supervision, I found a disconnect between their expectations and experiences. The school counselors expressed that while some experiences were helpful, most of the supervision they received was lacking so they conveyed a desire for increased support. With this in mind, I have the following recommendations in the areas of research, resources, and training.

The first recommendation is in the area of research. All participants shared their unique experiences with supervision as rural school counselors and expressed the many barriers to adequate supervision they faced, including a desire for additional support and resources. More research is needed to capture the experiences of other rural school counselors or school counselors across other populations. As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature indicated that rural students have received less research attention compared to other populations and that further study is needed to capture their unique experiences and

develop best practices for rural students (Bright, 2018; Nichols et al., 2017; Schafft, 2016). In agreement with previous researchers, I think further inquiry into the rural school counseling experience is needed (see Grimes et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). Further research could also inform the need for policy changes and increased funding for additional resources to support school counselors and supervision.

The next recommendation is in the area of resources. Each participant shared their recommendations for increased support and resources for school counselors to improve school counselor supervision. Participants expressed a desire for the support and an openness to receiving additional supervision. Researchers have previously stated the benefits of supervision, including helping counselors maintain and enhance their professional competence through clinical supervision; ensuring compliance with school policies and laws through administrative supervision; and preventing negative consequences, such as professional burnout and potential legal or ethical ramifications from a malpractice lawsuit (Herlihy et al., 2002). Participants suggested resources to aid in the increased access and utilization of supervision included supervision resource lists provided from state counseling associations or departments of education, designated counseling supervisors trained in the school counselor's role or ASCA model, and time set aside for school counselors to participate in supervision that is supported by administration through removal or reallocation of some nonessential duties.

A final recommendation is in the area of training for school counselors and leadership. Participants shared a lack of clinical supervision, as well as, a need for clarifying roles and responsibilities. Wilson et al. (2015) found principals or other

administrators with little to no counseling training or experience often conduct administrative supervision. Participants in this study echoed those findings expressing concern that their evaluations were conducted by persons that do not understand the school counselor's role or that no one was available to provide clinical supervision. Participants shared a need for administrator training in school counselor roles and responsibilities to most effectively utilize and provide feedback to their counselors. Researchers have also found a need for increased supervision training opportunities for school counselors (Duncan et al., 2014; Ünal et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). Providing supervision training opportunities for school counselors will increase the availability of qualified supervisors particularly in rural areas where access to supervision is even more limited. Some participants also expressed a recommendation for increased training on the unique needs of rural areas and accessing supervision noting their lack of preparation to address those issues in their counselor education programs.

## Implications

Through conducting this research, a few implications for social change developed. The social change implications would be beneficial to school counselors, as well as, their students and other stakeholders. As shared in Chapter One, I sought to fill the gap in understanding the supervision experiences of rural school counselors, exploring the similarities and differences regarding expected and received administrative and clinical supervision, and how these school counselors manage to provide effective academic, personal/social, and career services for students in their areas. Through this study, I sought to implicate social change by addressing supervision challenges for rural school

counselors increasing the professional knowledge of successful strategies that school counselors can employ to effectively manage supervision needs. Additionally, insights from this study can aid counselor educators in better preparing future school counselors to work in rural areas, as well as, provide practicing school counselors with ideas on how to utilize available resources for supervision and advocate for their professional development.

**Supervision Challenges**

Participants provided important feedback on areas they found to be supervision challenges. Social change implications can result from addressing those challenges. For example, researchers have found supervision supports the personal and professional growth of counselors, as well as, ensuring client welfare (Duncan et al., 2016; Ünal et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). This research provided further conversations around understanding rural school counselors' experiences managing their supervision needs. Participants identified challenges as administrator and other stakeholders' lack of knowledge of school counselor roles and responsibilities, a lack of time, and a lack of access to supervision resources. Researchers have reported finding similar barriers to supervision for school counselors, but the positive results of supervision encourage addressing those challenges for the benefit of school counselors and students (Duncan et al, 2014; Wilson et al., 2015). School counselors need access to additional support such as easily accessible resource lists of supervision opportunities, continuing education, and guaranteed supervision programs in school districts.

**Preparation**

Another possible social change implication from this study focuses on school counselor preparation. Training in supervision, rural issues, and advocacy would all be beneficial. Participants continually mentioned the desire for additional supervision and access to clinical supervision. The participants noted the challenges of receiving supervision from supervisors with little to no training in counseling or understanding of the school counselor's role. Researchers have called for increasing supervision training opportunities for school counselors (Wilson et al, 2015). Additional school counselor supervision training could increase awareness of the supervision needs of school counselors and potentially provide additional avenues for support. Some participants also expressed a disconnect in their training during their counselor education programs and their actual experiences as a practicing rural school counselor. The results of this study could be used to further the conversation of providing additional training on the unique needs of rural school counselors and the realities rural school counselors face once in practice. Professional development trainings could also utilize the findings of this study to enhance practicing school counselors' opportunities with learning best practices for seeking out and utilizing supervision. Advocacy was another area mentioned by participants, but some expressed concern over how to best advocate for their roles and needs. The results of this study could be used to encourage counselor educators to train future school counselors on advocacy skills which will be necessary in their roles.

### Resources

A final significant social change implication would be to further discussion on providing additional resources for school counselor supervision. Ethical guidelines and accreditation standards validate the purpose and importance of supervision to the counseling profession for supporting the personal and professional growth of counselors, as well as, ensuring client welfare (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; CACREP, 2016). Teachers and other educators deemed continuing education as critical and, in some cases, is required by states to maintain certification, which furthers the necessity for effective supervision of school counselors (Crespi, 2003). Participants in this study, however, shared that supervision is either lacking or nonexistent in their experiences as rural school counselors and expressed a desire for increased resources. Collaboration was key for participants to meet their supervision needs. Additional collaboration efforts are needed to further the conversation about needed resources and strategies for successful supervision of rural school counselors. Developing easily accessible resource lists of supervision opportunities, continuing education, and guaranteed supervision programs in school districts is needed.

## Conclusions

School counselors have found clinical supervision to be important to professional growth and achieving positive student outcomes, but researchers have noted limited access to any form of supervision in rural areas (Duncan et al., 2014; Walker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). Results from this study highlighted this issue for rural school counselors and expanded the understanding of rural school counselors' expectations and

experiences of supervision. The lived experiences shared by participants included rich descriptions and anecdotal details to further the conversation of rural school counselors' supervision, increased awareness of challenges to school counselor supervision, and increased awareness of opportunities for support.

Four major themes emerged including disconnect in expectations versus experiences, clarifying roles and responsibilities, collaboration, and desire for increased support. The emerging themes explored the expectations and experiences of clinical supervision while implementing comprehensive school counseling programs and what could enhance their supervision experiences. Results from the data confirmed that many school counselors felt their supervision was not adequate with many barriers to helpful supervision, but expressed a desire for increased support and the importance of collaboration.

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# Appendix A: Interview Schedule

**Expectations**

1. As a rural school counselor, what expectations did you have for supervision as a practicing professional school counselor?

    a. How did you develop your expectations?

2. How were supervision methods explained to you in your current position as a rural school counselor (ex. during the interview or on-boarding process, employee evaluations, prior to receiving supervision)?

3. In what ways have your experiences matched your expectations for supervision?

4. In what ways have your experiences not matched your expectations for supervision?

**Experiences**

*Bernard and Goodyear (2014) define supervisors as using three different roles (teacher, counselor, and consultant) to support counselors with interventions, conceptualizations, and personalization of their work with clients. More specifically, Luke and Bernard (2006) explain that supervision should support school counselors with large group interventions, counseling and consultation, individual and group advisement, and planning, coordination, and evaluation.*

1. Given these definitions of supervision, describe your experience with administrative supervision in your rural school or district.

    a. What are some examples that support your response?

2. Given these definitions of supervision, describe your experience with clinical supervision in your rural school or district.

    a. What are some examples that support your response?

3. Tell me about your least helpful supervision experiences as a rural school counselor.

    a. Can you provide some examples?

4. If you do not have an assigned clinical supervisor, how do you seek out or receive clinical supervision, if needed, in your rural community?

5. How do you believe your rural location has impacted the supervision in which you have received?

**Enhancement**

1. As a rural school counselor, what would be necessary to improve your supervision experience?

2. How do you believe supervision can be improved for all rural school counselors?

3. What recommendations would you share to ensure supervision is more helpful to rural school counselors implementing comprehensive school counseling programs?

**Wrap Up**

1. What else would you like to share about your supervision experience as a rural school counselor?

# Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following demographic questions and return prior to the interview.

1. How many years' experience do you have as a school counselor?

2. What grade levels are served in your school?

3. In what state is your current school located?

4. What is your gender?

    Female

    Male

    Other (please specify)

5. What is your age?

    29 or younger

    30 – 39

    40 – 49

    50 – 59

    60 or older

6. What is your race/ethnicity?

    White

    Black or African-American

    American Indian or Alaskan Native

    Asian

    Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

    Other (please specify)