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# Predictive Relationships Between School Counselor Role Ambiguity, Role Diffusion, and Job Satisfaction

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Daya M. Patton

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2018

Abstract

Predictive Relationships Between School Counselor Role Ambiguity, Role Diffusion,  
and Job Satisfaction

by

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MEd, American Military University, 2012

MALS, East Tennessee State University, 2009

BA, Hampton University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

November 2018

## Abstract

Lack of clarity about professional roles and responsibilities of school counselors has resulted in role ambiguity and role diffusion among this group of professionals. Role ambiguity and role diffusion contribute to job dissatisfaction. The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine whether role ambiguity and role diffusion predicted school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor, and to examine whether role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction differed for school counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The theoretical framework was role theory, which conceptualizes how job roles within organizations serve as boundaries between individuals and organizations. Survey data were collected from 86 school counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Results of linear regression analysis indicated that role ambiguity and role diffusion were significant predictors of job satisfaction after controlling for years of school counselor work experience. Results of discriminant analysis indicated no significant differences in school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction based on school level. Findings may be used to advocate for aligning school counselors' duties and responsibilities with the training and education they receive, which may enable school counselors to be more satisfied in their jobs. The social change implication is that school counselors who are satisfied with their jobs could more effectively serve the children, schools, and communities in which they are assigned.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this to my daughters, Jordyn and Malaya, who have patiently watched and supported me throughout the doctoral process. I also dedicate this to my grandmother, Mary, who kept encouraging me to complete my doctoral degree no matter what challenges I faced.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The topic of study was the lack of clarity about the professional roles and responsibilities of school counselors. School counselors are educational and human services professionals who are facing a professional identity crisis because of the role ambiguity and role diffusion related to their professional roles and responsibilities (Cinotti, 2016). The findings from this research study may provide support for the school counseling profession. Findings may also provide evidentiary support for the professional autonomy of the school counselor and the school counselor's role as a social change agent. In this chapter I provide the background of this study, discuss the theoretical framework for the study, discuss the research methodology and design, and provide details about the data collection and analysis processes.

### **Background**

The requirements for school counselors to engage in non-counseling duties and responsibilities has contributed to low levels of job satisfaction among school counselors (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012). The role of school counselors has changed as the education system has changed (Dahir & Stone, 2015). Although the school counselor job has been defined as providing vocational guidance and career counseling, that role has been expanded to include individual and group counseling, family services, and mental health counseling Dahir (& Stone, 2015). Scholars and practitioners have debated whether school counselors are educators or counselors (Bain, 2012).

The changing role of the school counselor has contributed to role ambiguity and role diffusion among school counselors (Bain, 2012; Cinotti, 2016). Additional job responsibilities have made the school counselor role increasingly complex (Bain, 2012). The American School Counselor Association (2012) developed national standards for school counselors in attempt to provide a standard for all schools to follow as it relates to the roles and responsibilities of the school counselor. Despite many attempts to establish a structured set of roles and responsibilities for all school counselors, there has yet to be one standard that all school counseling positions follow (Cinotti, 2014). School counselor roles and responsibilities vary from state to state (Hepp, 2013). This variance in school counselor roles and responsibilities contributes to a lack of a standardized job description for the school counselor (Hepp, 2013).

Legislative educational reform has also impacted the work of school counselors. Educational reforms have placed more accountability and shared responsibility for student academic achievement on school counselors (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013). Counselors are now asked to engage in more non-counseling related duties such as scheduling, administering tests, classroom teaching, student supervision, data entry, and disciplinary actions (Astramovich, Hoskins, Gutierrez, & Bartlett, 2013).

Changing job descriptions and the addition of non-counseling duties has contributed to role ambiguity and role diffusion among school counselors (Bain, 2012). Role diffusion occurs when individuals misunderstand their specific roles in an occupation or social structure (Astramovich et al. 2013; Erikson, 1965). Although role

diffusion is a concept that has primarily been used in the field of psychology, the concept also applies to the school counseling profession. The increasing demand for school counselors to engage in noncounseling responsibilities has created role diffusion in the school counseling profession (Astramovich et al., 2013). Role diffusion has increased within the school counseling profession as school counselors have been required to assume responsibilities that individuals in other educational specialties are equally able to perform (Astramovich et al., 2013).

Role ambiguity is also present in the school counseling profession. Unclear expectations of the job duties and responsibilities of the school counselor have contributed to role ambiguity among school counselors (Bardhoshi, Schweinle, & Duncan, 2014). The lack of a standardized job description has also contributed to role ambiguity for school counselors (Hepp, 2013). Increasing demands for school counselors to engage in administrative duties has further perpetuated role ambiguity among school counselors (Curry & Brickmore, 2012).

Findings from studies have shown that role ambiguity and role diffusion negatively impact overall job satisfaction (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Oduh, 2016). Researchers have identified role ambiguity and role diffusion as a predictor of low job satisfaction in various professions; however, researchers have not addressed the predictive relationships between role ambiguity, role diffusion, and school counselor job satisfaction (Astramovich et al., 2013). The current study filled this gap in the literature by addressing the predictive relationships between role ambiguity, role diffusion, and

school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor.

### **Problem Statement**

School counselors have reported performing job duties that do not align with their career preparations, and those duties often prevent them from fulfilling their aspirations of helping students achieve academic success (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012; Cinotti, 2016). School counselors have also reported being pulled away from activities they are uniquely suited to provide, and they have been held accountable for tasks that are better suited for other school personnel (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012). Completing paperwork, performing administrative tasks, and engaging in other nonschool counseling-related duties have been identified as sources of role ambiguity and role diffusion among school counselors (Astramovich et al., 2013). School counselors perceive their jobs to be supportive in nature while school administrators and others perceive school counselors' jobs to be administrative in nature (Cinotti, 2014; Pyne, 2011). Role ambiguity, which is the lack of clarity in assigned roles, has been shown to negatively affect overall job satisfaction (Schmidt, Roesler, Kusserow, & Rau, 2014). Role diffusion, which is the assignment of job roles that other staff are equally qualified to perform, has also been shown to contribute to role ambiguity (Astramovich et al., 2013). Many school administrators are not aware of how non-counseling tasks limit a school counselor's ability to work on strategic school-wide initiatives or how role ambiguity affects the counselor's professional identity and job satisfaction (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012).



Bruce and Bridgeland (2012) showed that school counselors, on average, have high expectations for the achievement of their students, their schools, and the education system; however, school counselors' experiences in their occupations falls far short of their aspirations. Studies have revealed an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and performance of non-counseling-related activities among professional school counselors (Ahmad, Khan, & Mustaffa, 2015; Moyer, 2011). Several studies have indicated that role diffusion and role ambiguity are positively correlated with job burnout among school counselors (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Camelford, 2014). During my literature review, I did not locate any studies that addressed the predictive relationships between school counselor's role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction. The current study addressed the predictive relationships between role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction among school counselors. Findings from this study filled the gap in the literature and by indicating how role ambiguity and role diffusion affect the job satisfaction of school counselors.

The mediating variable in this study was years of work experience. Researchers have identified a relationship between years of work experience and job satisfaction. In the field of education, researchers have shown that the greater the number of years of work experience the lower the level of job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012). In other employment field, years of work experience has been associated with low levels of job satisfaction (Kardam & Rangnekar, 2012; Moss,

Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2013). Findings from research related to years of work experience and job satisfaction were addressed in the current study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine whether role ambiguity and role diffusion predict school counselors' job satisfaction. The study design was cross sectional. I also examined whether role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction differed for school counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. This quantitative study was exploratory in nature. I used survey methodology to collect data from participants who were recruited using a nonprobability, convenience sampling process. Social researchers have used nonprobability convenience sampling to select samples that appear to be representative of the population (Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias, & DeWaard, 2015). The sampling frame consisted of practicing elementary, middle, and high school counselors in the Southeastern area of the United States. The rationale for using a sample of elementary, middle, and high school counselors was to obtain an adequate survey sample of counselors across school levels, and to gather information from a diverse sample of school counselors. More details regarding the research design and methodology are provided in Chapter 3.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Years of experience as school counselor was the mediating variable in this study. The rationale for the mediating variable was that the years of experience as a school counselor could moderate the relationships between the variables. Newer counselors may

experience more role ambiguity and role diffusion because they may not have a clear idea of what their jobs entail. The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study:

Research Question 1: To what degree does school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion predict school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor?

*H<sub>0</sub>1*: School counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion, as measured by scores on the Public School Counselor Role Ambiguity Questionnaire (PSCRAQ), are not statistically significant predictors of school counselors' job satisfaction scores, as measured by scores on the Job Satisfaction Composite Measure (JSCM), after controlling for years of school counselor experience.

*H<sub>a</sub>1*: School counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion, as measured by scores on the PSCRAQ, are statistically significant predictors of school counselors' job satisfaction, as measured by scores on the JSCM, after controlling for years of school counselor experience.

Data for Research Question 1 were analyzed using a multiple linear regression analysis. The independent variables were role ambiguity and role diffusion scores obtained from the PSCRAQ. The dependent variable was school counselors' job satisfaction as measured by scores on the JSCM. School counselor years of experience was controlled.

Research Question 2: What are the differences in school counselors' role ambiguity scores, role diffusion scores, counseling experience, and job satisfaction scores based on school level where employed?

*H<sub>0</sub>2*: There are no statistically significant differences in school counselors' role ambiguity and role diffusion scores as measured by the PSCRAQ, job satisfaction scores as measured by the JSCM, and years of school counseling experience based on school level (elementary, middle, or high school) where employed.

*H<sub>a</sub>2*: There are statistically significant differences in school counselors' role ambiguity and role diffusion scores as measured by PSCRAQ, job satisfaction scores as measured by the JSCM, and years of school counseling experience based on school level (elementary, middle, or high school) where employed.

Data for Research Question 2 were analyzed using a descriptive discriminant analysis, which is a statistical technique used to measure multivariate differences between groups (Drost, 2011). This procedure was appropriate for the data analysis for the second research question because the goal was to determine whether there are differences among school teachers at various levels (elementary, middle, and high school) across three different variables (role diffusion, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction). The predictor variables were role ambiguity and role diffusion scores obtained from the PSCRAQ, job satisfaction as measured by the JSCM, and number of years working as a school counselor. School level where employed (elementary, middle, and high school) was the categorical variable.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

The theoretical framework for this study was role theory. Role theory was developed to study workplace behavior (Katz & Khan, 1978). Role theory has been used to examine how job roles in organizations serve as the boundary between individuals and organizations (Schuler, Aldag, & Brief, 1977). Role theory is based on the assumption that organizations are a network of employees who have specific job roles that are expected and required by others within the organization (Katz & Khan, 1966). According to role theory, when roles within organizations are incongruent, there is either role conflict or role ambiguity between the individual and the organization. Role conflict and role ambiguity leads to tension, job dissatisfaction, lower work performance, and anxiety for the employee (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Schmidt et al., 2014). Role ambiguity occurs when there is a lack of communication between individuals and organizations regarding the individuals' job role (Rizzo et al., 1970; Schmidt et al., 2014). When role ambiguity occurs, individuals become dissatisfied with their jobs and they perform less efficiently (Rizzo et al., 1970). According to role theory, role ambiguity increases the likelihood that a person will be dissatisfied with his or her job (Rizzo et al., 1970). Role theory was appropriate for my study because the theory addresses how role ambiguity and role diffusion could affect school counselors' job satisfaction.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a quantitative, descriptive/correlational, cross-sectional design. A quantitative approach was appropriate for this study because the goal was to gather

numerical data and generalize findings across groups of school counselors (see Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Sukamolson, 2007). A quantitative approach was appropriate because the study had clearly defined research questions that required objective numerical data to answer (see Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Tacq, 2011). A cross-sectional design was appropriate because data were collected once with the intention of establishing associations between variables (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Sukamolson, 2007). This study included a large sample so that generalized relationships between variables could be obtained (see Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015).

This quantitative study was exploratory in nature. I used survey methodology to collect data. Nonprobability, purposive sampling was used to target a predefined group (see Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Trochim, 2006). The sampling frame and population consisted of elementary, middle, and high school counselors in the Southeastern United States.

### **Definitions**

Various operational terms related to the school counseling profession were used in this study. Those terms are defined for the purpose of this study as follows:

*Job satisfaction:* An employee's contentment with his or her job experience (Madera, Dawson, & Neal, 2013).

*Role ambiguity:* The lack of information about what is required of employees with regard to their work responsibilities (Katz & Khan, 1978).

*Role diffusion*: A state of misunderstanding about an individual's specific role in a family unit, occupation, or social structure (Erikson, 1965).

*Role diffusion in school counseling*: This phenomenon occurs when school counselors are forced to assume roles and responsibilities that individuals from other educational specialties are equally qualified to perform (Astramovich et al., 2013).

### **Assumptions**

There were several assumptions related to this study. First, the study was based on the assumption the JSCM is a sound assessment tool for assessing job satisfaction. Research has shown that the JSCM has a high reliability composite measure  $\alpha = .85$  (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). Another assumption in this study was that the PSCRAQ is a psychometrically sound assessment tool for assessing public school counselor role ambiguity. Validity and reliability testing indicated that the PSCRAQ has a high reliability rating with a Cronbach's alpha of .63 (Ross & Herrington 2005). An additional assumption in this study was that the instruments used to collect data were appropriate for the study sample. The JSCM and the PSCRAQ were appropriate to measure school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction. Additional details regarding the psychometric properties of the JSCM and the PSCRAQ are included in Chapter 3.

I further assumed that the school counselors who completed the surveys would be capable of understanding and completing the survey questionnaire accurately. I also assumed that participants would be willing to participate in this study and that they would answer the survey questions honestly. Another assumption of this study was that

participants would be practicing school counselors at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. I assumed that results from this study would have construct validity because participants would be representative of the population of interest.

Another assumption was that the findings from the study would be generalizable to other school counselors working in other states (see Kukull & Ganguli, 2006). I also assumed that a nonexperimental, quantitative survey methodology was appropriate to evaluate the predictive relationships between school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction (see Trochim, 2006). I assumed that the assumptions for the multiple linear regression and descriptive discriminate analyses would be met in this study. The related assumptions for each statistical procedure are presented in Chapter 3. I tested the assumptions before performing any statistical analyses and presented the findings from the tests in Chapter 4. The validity of the results from this study would depend on the degree to which the assumptions of the multiple linear regression and descriptive discriminate analyses were met.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study was confined to surveying practicing elementary, middle, and high school counselors in the Southeastern area of the United States. The purpose of this study was to examine the predictive relationships between role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction among school counselors and to advocate for improved alignment between school counselor duties and responsibilities and their academic training. I collected participants' demographic data that may have impacted their survey responses,



including gender, years of experience, educational background (i.e., CACREP approved program or otherwise), the level that they counsel in, and the number of different school levels where the counselors have worked. Each of the respondents was given the same survey questionnaire to complete.

### **Limitations**

In this study there are several limitations that were taken into account. The study sample population was limited to elementary, middle, and high school counselors located in the Southeastern United States. Results from this study may not necessarily be generalized to other school counselors in other states (see Trochim, 2006). A purposive sample may not be representative of the entire populations of school counselors. The sampling frame included practicing elementary, middle, and high school counselors in the Southeastern United States.

Quantitative research methodologies are not able to fully capture the complexity of human perceptions or experiences. Quantitative research designs do not allow researchers to thoroughly explore the how's or why's of variable relationships (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Trochim, 2006). Individual surveys generally do not provide strong evidence of correlational relationships. In survey research, there is no experimental versus control group and the time sequence has not been manipulated; therefore, the researcher must make the case that the correlational relationships between variables exist and that the groups being compared are otherwise equivalent (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Trochim, 2006). Online surveys were used in this study. Online

surveys present computer access bias, and survey respondents may not be as truthful or forthcoming in their responses compared to a face-to-face format (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). Additionally, a threat to the validity of the study derived from the fact that an online survey participant self-selected to participate in the study; this requires the researcher to rely on voluntary participation, which can limit the range of responses and reduce broad application of study findings (Jurs & Glass, 1971; Olsen, Orr, Bell, & Stuart, 2013).

### **Significance**

School counselors are educational and human services professionals. As part of the educational and human services systems, school counselors can be powerful social change agents; however, many school counselors experience high levels of job dissatisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2015). The findings from this research may provide empirical data regarding how role ambiguity and role diffusion of school counselor duties and responsibilities affect counselor job satisfaction. The findings may be used to advocate for improved alignment between school counselor duties and responsibilities and the training and education they receive. The alignment between school counselors' duties and responsibilities and their training and education allows school counselors to provide comprehensive school counseling programs that promote the academic achievement, social development, and career development of students. When school counselors' duties and responsibilities align with their training and education, school counselors can become an integral part of the educational and human services process.

School counselors are educators and human services professionals who advocate for social change on a daily basis. The findings from this study may effect social change by providing evidentiary support to advocate for the professional autonomy of the school counselor and the school counselor's role as a social change agent, human services professional, and educator.

### **Summary**

Findings from previous studies have shown that the school counselor job description has become increasingly complex (Bain, 2012; Cinnotti, 2014). School counselors are asked to engage in non-counseling-related activities, which leads to burnout, frustration, and low job satisfaction (Bain, 2012; Cinnotti, 2014). The school counselor job description has changed as educational reform has changed (Dahir & Stone, 2015). The increasing amount of administrative, noncounseling tasks that school counselors are required to perform has contributed to role ambiguity and role diffusion among school counselors (Astramovich et al., 2012). The changing job description of the school counselor has created a misunderstanding of school counselors' role in their occupation and has created a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of a school counselor (Cinnotti, 2014).

Chapter 2 focuses on the theoretical framework that provided the foundation of this study and the literature related to school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction. Chapter 2 also provides an overview of the school counselor job

description and how educational reform has changed the school counseling profession.

The variables in this study are also discussed in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research has shown that school counselors, on average, have high expectations for success and achievement for themselves, their students, their schools, and the education system (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012; Cinotti, 2016). School counselors' experience falls far short of their expectations. Bruce and Bridgeland (2012) asserted that school counselor job satisfaction is low because counselors are being required to perform duties outside of the school counselor job description. School counselors have reported being pulled away from services they are uniquely suited to provide (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012; Cinotti, 2016). School counselors are also being held accountable for tasks that are better suited for other school personnel (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012; Cinotti, 2016).

The problem being addressed in this study was the role diffusion, role ambiguity, and job dissatisfaction caused by the lack of clarity about professional roles and responsibilities of school counselors. The purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which role diffusion and role ambiguity predict school counselor job satisfaction. The knowledge gained from this study may be used to advocate for better alignment between school counselor's duties and responsibilities and the training and education they receive.

This review of literature contains research related to school counselor roles and responsibilities, role diffusion, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. In the first section I highlight the changing role of the school counselor. In the next section I summarize

studies that have addressed factors that contribute to school counselor role diffusion and role ambiguity. I also describe my literature search strategy and the theoretical framework for this study. In the final section I present studies related to school counselor job satisfaction.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I conducted an electronic search of peer-reviewed and empirical literature published during the last 5 years through databases such as ProQuest, Sage and SocIndex, Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, EBSCOhost, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsycInfo, and PsycARTICLES. The key search terms I used to locate relevant literature included *role ambiguity, role diffusion, job satisfaction, school counselor role ambiguity, school counselor role diffusion, school counselor job satisfaction, school counselor job satisfaction by grade and or school level, elementary school counselors, middle school counselors, high school counselors, and secondary school counselors*. I categorized the articles by subject and read, summarized, and synthesized the sources in an effort to understand the research topic as a whole.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was role theory. Katz and Khan (1978) designed role theory as a framework to examine workplace behavior. Katz and Kahn defined *role* as a set of expected activities associated with a given position. Role theory focuses on individual roles within the organization, the interactions between those roles, and how the interactions between roles influence the achievement of organizational goals

(Katz & Khan, 1966). Role theory was developed to provide insight into how organizational processes affect the physical and emotional state of individuals in the workplace (Katz & Khan, 1978). Role theory conceptualizes how job roles within organizations serve as the boundary between individuals and organizations and how when boundaries are crossed role conflict and role ambiguity occur (Katz & Khan, 1978; Schuler et al., 1977).

Role theory has been used as a framework for examining work roles in various disciplines including business, human resource management, and psychology (Wickham & Parker, 2007). Role theory is based on the assumption that organizations consist of a network of employees who have specific job roles they are expected to fulfill in the organization. According to Katz and Khan (1966), when employees are required to perform their job roles in an unexpected manner, employees will become unhappy. Katz and Khan maintained that if employee job roles are not effectively managed, there is a high likelihood of job dissatisfaction, low levels of work commitment, reduced productivity, high rates of absenteeism, and increased likelihood of job resignation. Organizations define job roles based on expected behaviors associated with performing a job task (Brunetto, Farr-Wharton, Shacklock, & Robson, 2012). Role ambiguity occurs when employees are unclear about what behaviors are expected of them (Brunetto et al., 2012; Palomino & Frezatti, 2016).

Role theory has four major components: role taking, role consensus, role compliance, and role conflict (Katz & Khan, 1978). When any of the four components of

role theory are unclear, role ambiguity may occur. Role taking is the assumption that individuals accept the job roles that are given by their employer. Role consensus operates on the assumption that organizational roles are predefined, agreed upon by both employee and employer, and static. Role compliance is based on the assumption that each job role has a set of defined behaviors that employees are expected to perform in a consistent manner. Role conflict will arise if role expectations of one job role conflict with the expectations associated with another job role.

Katz and Khan (1978) also developed the concept of role stress as part of role theory. Katz and Khan theorized that there is a negative association between role stress and job satisfaction. According to Katz and Khan, there are two elements to role stress: role conflict and role ambiguity. According to classic role theory, role conflict occurs when work behavior expectations placed on an individual are inconsistent (Katz & Khan, 1978; Rizzo et al., 1970). According to classic role theory, role ambiguity is defined as the lack of information about what is required of employees with regard to their work responsibilities (Katz & Khan, 1978; Srikanth & Jomon, 2013). Role ambiguity occurs when information regarding job role expectations are not properly communicated (Schuler, 1975). The premise of role theory is that role ambiguity increases the likelihood that a person will be dissatisfied with his or her job (Katz & Khan, 1978; Rizzo et al., 1970).



### **Role Theory, Role Conflict, and Role Ambiguity**

Researchers in other fields have used role theory to examine the relationships between role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. Novriansa and Riyanto (2016) examined how role ambiguity and role conflict impacted the job satisfaction of 248 government auditors. Novriansa and Riyanto used a role conflict and role ambiguity questionnaires to collect data. The results showed that role ambiguity had a more negative impact on job satisfaction and job performance than role conflict (Novriansa & Riyanto, 2016).

Talib, Khan, Kiran, and Ali (2017) examined antecedents of job satisfaction among doctors serving in hospitals. Talib et al. used role theory as the theoretical framework to conduct a survey-based quantitative study using a sample of 135 doctors currently practicing in hospitals. Data were collected with surveys to measure role ambiguity and role conflict. Talib et al. used linear regression analysis and a multiple regression analysis to analyze the survey data. Talib et al. found that role ambiguity significantly impacted levels of job satisfaction among doctors who worked in hospitals. Talib et al. concluded that when there was a higher level of role ambiguity, doctors tended to have low levels of job satisfaction and that role conflict did not have as significant an impact on job satisfaction as role ambiguity.

Rageb, Eman, El-Samadicy, and Farid (2013) investigated the relationship among various roles stressors, including role ambiguity, on employee job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Rageb et al. used role

theory as the theoretical framework and used a structured questionnaire to collect data from 65 employees who worked at an academy for maritime science and technology. Rageb et al. used hierarchical regression analysis to evaluate the mediating effect of role ambiguity on job satisfaction among the maritime employees. Results revealed a statistically significant relationship between role stressors and employee job satisfaction; more specifically, role ambiguity had a negative impact on employee job satisfaction.

Carbonell and Rodriguez-Escudero (2013) conducted a quantitative study to investigate management controls related to role expectations. Carbonell and Rodriguez-Escudero examined the relationship between role conflict and role ambiguity and employee job satisfaction. Carbonell and Rodriguez-Escudero administered surveys regarding job satisfaction to 197 new product development teams and found that role ambiguity had a greater negative impact on job satisfaction of new product development teams than role conflict.

Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling (2013) examined the relationships between role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction among clergy professionals. Faucett et al. used the Ministerial Job Satisfaction Scale to measure facets of clergy job satisfaction related to role ambiguity. Faucett et al. found that role ambiguity had a greater impact on clergy job satisfaction than role conflict. Faucett et al. also found that the effects of role ambiguity affected job satisfaction in unrelated ministerial professions.

Additional studies have addressed how role ambiguity affects job satisfaction of workers in various job roles. Srikanth and Jomon (2013) conducted a quantitative study

of 176 employees of a large information technology organization to examine how role ambiguity affected work performance. Srikanth and Jomon used a feedback survey about the effect of role ambiguity on job performance. The results revealed that role ambiguity negatively affected employees' work performance (Srikanth & Jomon, 2013). The researchers also found that when employers gave employees better clarity about their job roles, the employees' work performance increased significantly.

Palomino and Frezatti (2016) used a multiple regression analysis to analyze the relationships between role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction among Brazilian accounting controllers. Palomino and Frezatti surveyed 114 Brazilian accounting controllers and found a statistically significant correlation between role ambiguity and job satisfaction. Palomino and Frezatti found that as role ambiguity increased, job satisfaction decreased; the same correlation was not found for role conflict.

In another quantitative study, Madera et al. (2013) collected survey data from 130 hotel managers to examine the relationships between role ambiguity, role conflict, job satisfaction, and manager perceptions of work roles. Results of a multiple regression analysis revealed a strong relationship between manager role ambiguity and managers' levels of job satisfaction. Madera et al. found that as role ambiguity increased among the hotel managers, job satisfaction levels decreased.

Findings from these studies informed the current study because I examined the relationships between role ambiguity and job satisfaction in the school counseling environment. The findings from previous studies that included role theory as a

framework and addressed relationships between role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction revealed that role ambiguity had a significant impact on employee job satisfaction. The findings from previous research regarding the relationship between role ambiguity and employee job satisfaction were relevant to the current study.

### **Historical Overview of Roles of School Counselors**

There has been ongoing debate regarding the roles of school counselors. This debate has centered on whether a school counselor is an educator first and a counselor second or a counselor first and an educator second (Cinotti, 2016). The origins of school counseling can be traced to Parson's (as cited in Dahir & Stone, 2015) examination of guidance counseling in the 1900s. Parson (as cited in Davis, 2014) created the Bureau of Vocational Guidance in 1908, which was designed to provide secondary students guidance in the transition from school to the workforce. In 1913, Davis was the first school superintendent to implement vocational guidance instruction for students in schools (Cinotti, 2014). In the early 1900s, the role of vocational guidance was fulfilled by teachers (Cinotti, 2014). Vocational guidance counseling involved career counseling with the primary focus on helping students make the transition from school to work (Dahir & Stone, 2015). As the demand for vocational guidance grew, it became apparent that teachers would no longer be able to perform both teaching responsibilities and vocational guidance duties (Cinotti, 2014). Over time, educators recognized vocational guidance as a specialized position that required specialized training and qualifications (Cinotti, 2014). The debate over the role of the school counselor began in early 1913 and

continues today among school counselors, school administrators, and counselor educators (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert, Williams, Morgan, Crothers, & Hughes, 2016).

The first signs of role ambiguity and role diffusion for school counselors began in the early days as vocational guidance professionals were inundated with clerical and administrative duties (Cinotti, 2014). The newly minted vocational guidance professionals were asked to engage in roles that could have otherwise been performed by other school personnel (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015). A debate over the role of the vocational guidance professional grew; and the debate was whether or not the vocational guidance professional was supplemental to classroom learning or a separate service with a distinctive goal that was separate from educating students (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016).

The role of the school counselor became more defined in the 1930's and 1940's. During that time, the role of vocational guidance expanded. School counselors became responsible for providing vocational and career guidance to students. School counselors also provided personal adjustment counseling as needed (Bain, 2012; Cinotti, 2014). However, in the 1950's the role of the school counselor changed to primarily pupil personnel services, which often overlapped with other newly created school professionals such as the school social worker, attendance officer, nurse and psychologist (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016).

The role of school counselors became stronger with the creation of the American School Counselor Association in 1952 (Bain, 2012). This organization lobbied for establishment of a unique professional identity for school counselors as well as the allocation of funds for school counseling services (Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016). In 1958, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 allocated funds to provide school counseling services to all high school students. The National Defense Education Act also provided for the training of gifted students, school counselors were to assist gifted students in the process of applying to colleges and universities (Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016). The National Defense Education Act also allocated money to colleges and universities to create school counselor preparation and training programs (Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016).

During the 1960's and 1970's, the school counselor's role was viewed as an ancillary support service to teachers and school administrators despite the fact that school counselors provided direct counseling services such as vocational and personal adjustment counseling (Davis, 2014, 2014; Kolbert et al., 2016). Due to the lack of clarity regarding whether the school counselor's roles and responsibilities should also include administrative tasks, school administrators during this time continually added administrative responsibilities to school counselors. The continued addition of administrative responsibilities to school counselor positions led to role diffusion, which forced school counselors to assume roles and responsibilities that others were capable of performing (Astramovich et al., 2013, Davis, 2014; Kolbert et al., 2016).

Role diffusion for school counselors was even greater in the 1970's due to decreases in student enrollment and educational budget funding (Davis, 2014). School counselors were forced to assume more administrative roles to increase the perception of school counselors as necessary school personnel (Davis, 2014). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 further expanded school counselor roles to include screening, adjustment, and counseling for special education students and collaboration in the development of individual education plans (Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 also expanded the school counselors' responsibilities in regards to record-keeping, and consultation, as well as the provision of counseling services to teachers, parents, and children with disabilities (Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016). It was during the 1970's that school counselors became viewed as an educator first and counselor second (Davis, 2014; Kolbert et al., 2016).

In the 1980's school counselor responsibilities grew exponentially to include testing, accountability, scheduling, record-keeping, and other administrative duties (Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016). School counselors were assigned standardized testing coordination responsibilities in addition to their existing roles and responsibilities (Davis, 2014). In addition, the idea of a comprehensive school counseling program grew in the late 1980's and 1990's (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016). The comprehensive school counseling program focused more on the school counseling program itself and not simply the school counselor position. The comprehensive school

counseling program was designed to prevent the ongoing assignment of administrative and non-counseling duties to school counselors (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015). It was not until the 1990's that the concept of a comprehensive school counseling was embraced (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016; Mau, Li, & Hoetmer, 2016).

The school counselor position has existed for over 100 years, and during the course of that time the roles for school counselors have been in a state of constant change (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016). Establishing a structured set of roles and responsibilities for school counselors has been a complex process that has frequently created role diffusion and lead to role ambiguity for school counselors (Cinotti, 2014; Kolbert et al., 2016; Mau, Li, & Hoetmer, 2016). The American School Counselor Association created a national model for the comprehensive school counseling program in 2001(Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015). The American School Counselor Association developed national standards in an effort to guide the creation of professional roles and responsibilities for school counselors (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013).

The American School Counselor Association (2012) national standards proposed that school counselors should have a broader focus on student and school success and be key players in accomplishing the schools' mission, fostering student academic success, and promoting overall student achievement. According to the American School Counselor Association national standards, school counselors are qualified to address students' academic achievement, their social and emotional development needs, and their



career needs (American School Counselor Association, 2012). With the creation of national standards for school counselors, there was still no specific standard for mental health counseling. Subsequently, a debate grew among school counselors and mental health professionals about whether or not school counselors should be tasked with providing mental health services within schools (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016). Despite national standards and recommendations set forth by the American School Counselor Association, some school counselors and school counselor educators believed that the provision of mental health services by school counselors were necessary to meet the needs of student (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016).

Although the national standards for school counseling programs has shifted emphasis to focus primarily on academic achievement, many school counselors and school counselor educators have remained resistant to abandoning the mental health aspect of their profession (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013). Some counselor educators have indicated that mental health counseling for individual students, families, and groups is one of the biggest responsibilities of school counselors within schools (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013). The ongoing debate about whether the primary focus of school counselors should be academics or mental health has contributed to role ambiguity regarding school counselor roles and responsibilities. Many school administrators and school stakeholders have begun to view school counselors as educators first and counselors second, this

viewpoint causes ongoing role diffusion and role ambiguity among school counselors (Hassard & Costar, 2012).

### **Current Roles of School Counselors**

School counselors work in an environment where accountability and shared responsibility for student achievement is expected (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013). School counselors are also seen as leaders and change agents within the educational system (Kolbert et al., 2016). The changing role of school counselors has required them to move from focusing on individual student issues to system issues (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013). School counselors are now required to use data to justify counseling interventions for students in the educational setting (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013).

The American School Counselor Association made efforts to develop a comprehensive school counseling program model, but the implementation of the model has remained slow (Kolbert et al., 2016). The lack of national standards has prohibited the development of a set of standardized school counselor roles and responsibilities, which has ultimately led to role diffusion for many school counselors (Dahir & Stone, 2015; Kolbert et al., 2016). Role diffusion continues as school counselors are often utilized as quasi-administrators in schools instead of being properly utilized as counseling professionals (Astramovich et al., 2013; Dahir & Stone, 2015).

The lack of uniform guidelines and standards for the roles and responsibilities of school counselors at local levels has created different views regarding the roles, responsibilities, and functions of school counselors within the school setting (Hepp,

2013). School counselors job descriptions vary from state to state, from building to building, and are largely influenced or determined by the school principal (Hepp, 2013). School counselor roles and responsibilities are often determined without any consideration about school counselor preparation, knowledge, or skill sets, which contributes to school counselor role diffusion (Hepp, 2013).

### **Role Diffusion and Role Ambiguity and School Counselors**

Researchers have only recently begun examining role diffusion in the field of school counseling (Astramovich et al., 2013). Role diffusion has generally been studied in the field of psychology. Role diffusion is a concept used to describe a state of misunderstanding about an individual's specific role in a family unit, occupation, or social structure (Erikson, 1965). The concept of role diffusion in the field of psychology is similar to that of role diffusion studied within the school counseling profession. The concept of role diffusion examines misunderstandings about an individual's specific role in an occupation (Erikson, 1965). The psychological concept of role diffusion is based on the premise that an individual receives unclear messages about the particular role they have in a social structure, occupation, or family setting thus causing a diffusion of identity (Erikson, 1965). Psychological role diffusion may cause an individual to engage in behaviors or responsibilities that someone else is supposed to be performing (Erikson, 1965). For example, in a family where the parents are divorced due to a lack of proper parenting structure a child may begin performing the responsibilities that a parent normally performs. While a child may be able to perform the responsibilities of the

parent just as well as the parent, it is not the child's role in the family structure to perform the responsibilities of the parent thus resulting in role diffusion for the child (Erikson, 1965). Likewise, in the educational setting school counselors are often asked to perform the responsibilities of other educational professionals. Although the school counselor may be able to perform those duties just as well as other educational professional, it is not the role of the school counselor in the educational system to perform those responsibilities thus causing school counselor role diffusion.

School administrators have different work expectations of school counselors at different school levels, these differing expectations create misunderstanding about school counselor's specific roles thus contributing to role diffusion. Zalaquett and Chatter (2012) conducted a quantitative study of middle school counselors regarding their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The researchers found that differing role expectations of administrators has contributed to school counselor role diffusion. The school counselors surveyed reported that they were required to spend too much time on administrative and clerical tasks and would prefer to spend more time providing direct services to students, this time spent on administrative tasks diffused the role of the school counselor (Zalaquett & Chatter, 2012).

Role diffusion in the school counseling profession occurs when school counselors are forced to assume roles and responsibilities that individuals from other educational specialties are equally qualified to perform (Astramovich et al., 2013; Cinotti, 2016). Astramovich et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study on role diffusion among school

counselors. Findings from the study revealed that school counselors' roles were often diffused due to repeated requests for them to engage in activities that other school personnel are uniquely qualified to perform. For example, results from the study revealed that school counselors were responsible for school wide testing even though the American School Counselor Association has indicated that such testing is outside of the school counselors' roles and responsibilities. Although a school counselor may be capable of coordinating achievement testing, doing so diffuses the role of the school counselor because continuous engagement in non-counseling responsibilities does not utilize the unique graduate-level training specific to the school counselor role (Astramovich et al., 2013). Because the topic of role diffusion among school counselors is a recent topic of interest in the profession, there is limited research related to the topic. Astramovich et al. (2013) recommended future research on role diffusion by surveying practicing school counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Other research has revealed that role ambiguity can result in role diffusion (Hoskins, Gutierrez & Bartlett, 2013). Role diffusion occurs when an individual is forced to assume roles and responsibilities that other individuals are more uniquely qualified to perform. For instance, Hoskins et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative, survey based study of 109 school counseling graduate students to examine levels of role diffusion among school counselors. The researchers found that school counselor roles in personal social, academic, career, and support domains were significantly diffused as compared to other school personnel. The researchers found that the school counselors were required to

assume roles and responsibilities that other school personnel were qualified to perform. Researchers also found the role ambiguity further contributed to role diffusion among school counselors.

Roberson, Lloyd-Hazlett, Zambro, and McClendon (2016) conducted a qualitative study that examined the lived experiences of eight school counselor directors to capture their experiences with role diffusion. Results from the interviews with the school counselor directors revealed that although the school counselors were highly motivated to perform their roles, they felt their effectiveness had been diluted due to role diffusion. Role diffusion was evident in the experiences of the directors as they reported they were continually asked to engage in tasks that individuals from other fields were equally qualified to perform.

Role diffusion is a relevantly new concept in the school counseling profession, however elements of role diffusion have been present within the school counseling profession for years. Gibson, Dooley, Kelchner, Moss, & Vacchio (2012) completed a review of literature to examine how role diffusion has influenced the professional identity of school counselors. The researchers found that incongruent job expectations for school counselors has diffused the professional identity of school counselors. Gibson et al. maintained that the failure of school administrators to define and communicate a clear set of professional roles and responsibilities for school counselors has contributed to role diffusion and lack of professional identity among school counselors.

### **Role Ambiguity and Job Satisfaction in School Counselors**

Bardhoshi, Schweinle, and Duncan (2014) conducted a mixed methods study to investigate the relationship between burnout, job satisfaction, and job performance of non-counseling related activities among professional 286 elementary, middle, and high school counselors. Results revealed that performing non-counselor duties was positively related to school counselor burnout and job dissatisfaction. Another finding was that school administrators grossly underestimated the time school counselors spent on administrative and non-counseling duties. Results also revealed that school administrators often placed more importance on the performance of administrative non-counseling duties than on counseling related duties. Consequently, school counselors reported being overwhelmed in their work environments. School counselor's also reported not having adequate time to provide direct counseling services to their students.

Bain (2012) conducted a literature review to determine how school counselors related personally and professionally with their position, as well as how they dealt with their ever changing roles and functions. Bain concluded that current issues in education, job challenges, and student needs make the school counseling job extremely complex. Bain also maintained that the increasing complexity of school counselors' roles has contributed to school counselor role ambiguity and negatively impact their job satisfaction.

In another study Oduh (2016) examined whether competing job expectations and role ambiguity contributed to school counselor job dissatisfaction. Results revealed that

continuous engagement in non-counseling duties created school counselor role ambiguity which negatively affected school counselor job satisfaction. Findings from the Oduh study of Nigerian school counselors can be generalized and applied to this study, as well as to counselors in general, because results revealed how role ambiguity and engagement in non-counseling activities affects school counselor job satisfaction.

Hassard and Costar (2012) examined differences in school counselors' and school administrators' perceptions of the school counselors' role and school counselor job satisfaction. Hassard and Costar found there was a significant difference between the perception of the ideal school counselor role as held by principals and school counselors. Results revealed that overall there was significant agreement between school counselors and principals about the functions of the school counselor; however, there was a great deal of disagreement as to the school counselors' specific roles and job descriptions. These disagreements over school counselor specific roles and job descriptions also influenced school counselor job satisfaction. Disagreements over school counselor specific roles and job descriptions contributed to school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion. Hassard and Costar found that school administrators and principals viewed the school counselors' role as largely one of administrative support, school administrators and principals believed that it acceptable for school counselors to engage in administrative non-counseling duties which diffuse the role of the school counselor. The school administrators viewed the school counselors' role from an institutional perspective but the school counselors viewed their roles in terms of what they needed to do to meet



the needs of their students. Results from the Hassard and Costar study highlighted how the disconnect between school administrators and school counselors job perceptions of school counselors' roles in the schools contribute to role ambiguity and impact school counselor job satisfaction.

In another study Curry and Brickmore (2012) conducted a qualitative study to determine which factors impacted job satisfaction of school counselors. The researchers conducted a multi-case study across three different school districts in southeastern Louisiana by interviewing seven school counselors. Curry and Brickmore specifically found that role ambiguity and institutional stressors affected job satisfaction among school counselors. Results also revealed that the antiquated model of the school counselor occupation was linked to role ambiguity.

### **Work Experience and Job Satisfaction**

In a qualitative research study conducted by Moss, Gibson and Dollarhide (2013) researchers investigated counselor's professional identity development over the course of their career. In the course of their investigation the researchers also examined job satisfaction at various points in a counselor's career. Moss, Gibson, and Dollarhide interviewed 26 licensed counselors, 15 school counselors, and 11 community based counselors. The researchers used focus group interviews to collect data. The results of the focus group interviews revealed that experienced counselors, those who had been counselors the longest, were frustrated about their lack of professional identity which in turn contributed to lower overall job satisfaction.

Although there is limited literature related to the relationship between years of experience and school counselor job satisfaction, there are studies related to other educators and the relationship between years of work experience job satisfaction which can be generalized to the current study. A quantitative study examined whether years of teaching experience was a mitigating factor in overall job satisfaction of teachers across 80 secondary schools in Belgium (Maele & Houtte, 2012). Researchers used anonymous written questionnaires to collect data from a sample of 80 secondary schools (Maele & Houtte, 2012). The researchers use the Job Descriptive Index to measure teacher job satisfaction (Maele & Houtte, 2012). The results of the study showed that the more years of experience a teacher had, the less satisfied he or she was with their job, the researchers attributed this to career exhaustion (Maele & Houtte, 2012).

In a quantitative research study researchers examined the relationship between teacher's years of experience, teacher characteristics, and self-efficacy, and job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). The researchers administered surveys to 1,500 teachers. The results of the study showed that the more years of experience a teacher has, the lower the level of job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). The researchers identified various factors one of the main ones being possible motivation decline as teachers go further into their careers (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Another study investigated the functions of experience and education level on job satisfaction. Kardam and Rangnekar (2012) administered the Job Satisfaction Scale questionnaire to 200 middle and senior level executives at private sector organizations to

examine the relationship between years of work experience and job satisfaction. Kardam and Rangnekar received 160 suitable completed questionnaires. The researchers found that there was a correlation between job satisfaction and years of work experience specifically across several dimensions such as pay, operating procedures, work itself, and communication. Kardam and Rangnekar concluded from their findings that there is a direct correlation between years of work experience and overall levels of employee job satisfaction.

### **Summary**

Previous literature related to school counselor burnout and job satisfaction has identified role ambiguity as an ongoing issue of concern since the 1970's, but there has been limited research as to how role diffusion and role ambiguity predicts school counselor job satisfaction in recent years (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2015). Although there have been studies related to school counselor burnout, job stress, and turnover, I have only been able to locate a limited research related to how role diffusion and role ambiguity factors into job satisfaction of school counselors (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Camelford 2014; Moyer, 2011). Research has identified the impact of role ambiguity on school counselors' levels of burnout, but not on overall job satisfaction of school counselors by school level. Current research suggests that school counselors are still engaging in non-counseling and administrative duties while simultaneously experiencing role diffusion and role ambiguity (Astramovich et al, 2013; Cinotti, 2016, Hassard & Costar, 2012). Despite current research, I have not located any studies that examined the

impact of role ambiguity as a predictor variable of the overall school counselor job satisfaction or examine how role diffusion or role ambiguity impacts job satisfaction by school counselor school level.

The methodology for this study will be addressed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 3 I will address the rationale for choosing a quantitative research design, the data collection instruments and data collection strategy. In Chapter 3 I will also provide details about the study sample, the sample selection process, and the study data analysis process. The research study ethical standards and practices applied to maintain study participant protection will also be explained in Chapter 3.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the degree to which school counselors' role ambiguity and role diffusion predict school counselors' job satisfaction. The problem addressed in this study was how the lack of clarity about the professional roles and responsibilities of school counselors negatively affects school counselors' job satisfaction. This chapter comprises six sections. The first section outlines the research design and approach used in the study. In the second section I describe the research sample and setting. The third section includes a description of the instrument used in the study as well as instrumentation procedures. The data collection and data analysis procedures are explained in the fourth section. The fifth section details ethical considerations and guidelines that I followed to ensure the anonymity of participants. The final section includes a chapter summary.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

I conducted a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional study. The research approach is predicated on survey methodology. The independent variables were school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion, and school level (elementary, middle, high school). The dependent variable was school counselor job satisfaction. The mediating variable was the years of experience of the school counselor.

A quantitative approach was used because the goal of the study was to gather numerical data with the intent of generalizing the results to a broader groups of school counselors (see Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Tacq, 2011). A quantitative design was

appropriate because the study had clearly defined research questions that required objectively quantified data to answer (see Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Tacq, 2011). A quantitative design is used for the purpose of broader study involving a larger number of subjects to enhance generalizability of findings (Williams, 2007). A quantitative design involves the application of well-established standards that allow research to be replicated, the data to be analyzed, and the results to be compared with findings from similar studies (Sukamolson, 2007). The quantitative design chosen for this study was consistent with research designs needed to advance knowledge in the discipline of human services (see Tacq, 2011; Williams, 2007). A quantitative design was chosen for this study so that results could be generalized to a broad population.

A cross-sectional design was appropriate for this study because data were collected once with the intent of assessing the associations between variables (see Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Sukamolson, 2007). The goal of a cross-sectional study is to obtain an overall picture of the population at one particular point in time (Shahar & Shahar 2013; Williams, 2007). In a cross-sectional study, a subset of participants from the targeted population is recruited, data are collected, and the data represent constructs or variables of interest at one point in time (Markovitz et al., 2012). A cross-sectional study focuses on identifying the prevalence of a particular problem, issue, or phenomenon by capturing the presence of a particular phenomenon among a cross-section of the targeted population (Shahar & Shahar, 2013). Cross-sectional research usually involves one contact with the targeted participants (Markovitz et al., 2012; Shahar

& Shahar, 2013). Data in a cross-sectional study can be collected using a questionnaire (Sukamolson, 2007; Williams, 2007). The cross-sectional study is a snapshot of a population at a specific point in time, which allows for generalization of the conclusions about a particular phenomenon to be drawn across a wide population (Markovitz et al., 2012; Shahar & Shahar, 2013).

A correlational design is a research method in which there are two or more quantitative variables from the same group of participants and the researcher examines whether there is a relationship between two variables (Sukamolson, 2007; Williams, 2007). A correlational design was appropriate for this study because I collected quantitative data for four variables from the same group, and I examined the predictive relationships between the variables (see Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). A correlational study enables a researcher to understand what kind of relationships occur between variables (Sukamolson, 2007; Williams, 2007). In a correlational study, causality cannot be determined because the design is not experimental; researchers can only conclude that variables are related (Sukamolson, 2007; Williams, 2007). Correlational studies do not establish a causal relationship between variables; however, correlations can be used to support a theory or to measure test-retest reliability (Sukamolson, 2007; Williams, 2007).

Survey research is an effective means of exploring current issues in the field of social science and education (Ponto, 2015; Trochim, 2006). Surveys are an effective means of exploring issues among large sample of individuals of interest relatively quickly (Ponto, 2015). Self-administered online surveys were used to collect data from the

sample population in the current study. Self-administered online surveys were used because surveys are cost and time efficient and because online surveys allow for a higher degree of anonymity among respondents (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Ponto, 2015). Additionally, online surveys allow respondents more time to think about their answers and provide greater access to a geographically dispersed respondent sample (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Ponto, 2015).

A qualitative design could have provided in-depth information about the research participants' lived experiences regarding the phenomenon being studied; however, the qualitative approach could not be used to statistically determine the extent to which such lived experiences affect participants' job satisfaction (see Yoshikawa, Wesner, Kalil, & Way, 2013). Qualitative research was not feasible for the study due to the time-consuming process related to a qualitative research (Choy, 2014). Additionally, there is no result verification process in a qualitative study because the questions are mostly open ended and participants have more control over the content of data collected (Choy, 2014). A qualitative approach was not appropriate for the current study because it would have been impossible to investigate the correlational relationship between variables using a qualitative design (see Choy, 2014).

## **Methodology**

### **Population**

The targeted population for this study was practicing school counselors across the United States at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The subset of the



accessible population from which a sample of participants was recruited was school counselors in the Southeastern area of the United States. The sample population consisted of approximately 2,700 practicing school counselors in the state of North Carolina.

The setting for this study was the Southeastern United States, specifically the state of North Carolina. North Carolina has approximately 2,592 public and charter schools that are divided among 115 school districts (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2016). North Carolina schools serve approximately 1,459,852 students per year, the combined graduation rate across North Carolina school districts is 82.5% (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2016). The average dollar amount of spending per student in North Carolina schools is \$8,390 a year (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2016). In North Carolina school districts, one school counselor is assigned to each school (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2016). In some instances, there may be two counselors in the middle and high school schools (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2016).

### **Sampling and Sampling Procedures**

The sampling frame for the study was practicing elementary, middle, and high school counselors in the Southeastern United States, specifically the state of North Carolina. I recruited participants using a nonprobability purposive sampling process. Nonprobability purposive sampling is a technique that assists the researcher in recruiting units from a population of interest (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2013). Social science researchers have used nonprobability purposive sampling and snowball

sampling to select samples that appear to be representative of the population (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). A nonprobability purposive sampling method was chosen for the current study to target a predefined group (see Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015).

Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). I used snowballing sampling by asking participants to forward the survey link to other practicing school counselors in North Carolina.

Approximately 2,700 practicing school counselors in the state of North Carolina were e-mailed anonymous online survey questionnaires. Participants were assured anonymity to encourage participation. No personally identifying information for the participants was collected, recorded on the questionnaires, or entered in SPSS. A copy of the demographic questionnaire used in the study is located in Appendix H.

### **Sample Size**

G\* Power 3, a free downloadable software, was used to determine the optimal sample size based on predesigned effect size, alpha, and power level (see Charan & Biswas, 2013). G\* was also used to determine the minimum sample size needed to have adequate power to determine whether true difference existed in the data (Charan & Biswas, 2013). The parameters used to calculate the minimum sample size consisted of the following: medium effect of .20, power of .80, and alpha level of .05. The G\* Power analysis indicated that the minimum sample size needed for the study was 65. The

justification for using effect size, alpha, and power level chosen in this study was to avoid Type II error and an underpowered study (see Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

### **Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

I obtained approval from the Walden IRB (06-05-18-0535885) to conduct the study. Next, I obtained permission from two professional school counselor organization leaders for them to forward the survey questionnaire link to their organization members. Invitations to participate in this study were sent to members of the two professional school counselor organizations by the professional school counselor organization leaders. I provided written letters to the leaders of the professional school counselor organizations to request permission for them to forward the link to the study questionnaire to their organization's members. The letter provided information about the purpose of the research, the method of data collection, the right to withdraw at any time, and anonymity associated with participation in the study. Copies of these letters can be located in Appendices C & D.

The participant recruiting materials included two e-mail notification requests. The first e-mail notification contained a notice of informed consent and a summary of the purpose of the study. The e-mail also included a link to the anonymous survey questionnaire. A copy of the first e-mail is located in Appendix D. The second reminder e-mail was sent to the professional school counselor organization leaders at the beginning of the second week of the survey response period as a second request to forward the

survey questionnaire link to their members. A copy of the second e-mail can be located in Appendix E.

Data for this study were collected via online surveys. Online surveys are cost effective, provide greater accessibility to target populations, allow researchers to collect a larger number of responses, and contain less bias compared to an in-person interview (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). SurveyMonkey, an online platform in which researchers can create survey tools that can be sent to multiple participants, was used to collect the data. SurveyMonkey allows survey participants to asynchronously complete the survey within a specified time frame. The survey completion time was approximately 15 to 25 minutes. Participants were given access to the survey for 2 weeks, or until the minimum sample size had been obtained.

A notice of informed consent was included at the beginning of the survey, and participants' acknowledgment of informed consent was assumed by their completion of the survey. Participants who complete the survey were not asked for identifiable information beyond the demographic questions asked at the beginning of the survey. The demographic information included years of experience as a school counselor, age, gender, race and ethnicity, and school level.

After the data has been collected and analyzed, a summary of the study results will be shared with the leaders of the professional school counselor organizations. A summary of the study results will also be shared with study participants upon their request.

## **Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs**

Participants will be asked to complete an online survey that will be comprised of two existing surveys. Those two surveys are the Public School Counselor Role Ambiguity Questionnaire (PSCRAQ) and the Job Satisfaction Composite Measure (JSCM). Details regarding each questionnaire are presented below.

### **Public School Counselor Role Ambiguity Questionnaire (PSCRAQ)**

The independent variables school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion will be measured using the Public School Counselor Role Ambiguity Questionnaire (PSCRAQ). The PSCRAQ was developed and published by William Ross and David Herrington in 2005 (Ross & Herrington, 2005). The PSCRAQ was developed to measure the concept of role ambiguity and diffusion among school counselors (Ross & Herrington, 2005). Herrington and Ross (2005) developed the PSCRAQ to understand the gap between the ideal and actual role that the school counselor assumes on a day-to-day basis. The PSCRAQ consists of demographic questions that gather information regarding age, gender, current occupation, years of experience, and ethnicity (Ross & Herrington, 2005). The PSCRAQ contains 16 questions to which participants respond using a five point Likert Scale (Ross & Herrington, 2005). The response options for the PSCRAQ range from strongly agree to strongly disagree where 1 = strongly agree (SA); 2 = agree (A); 3 = don't know or unsure (DK); 4 = disagree (D); and 5 = strongly disagree (SD (Ross & Herrington, 2005).

### **Validity and Reliability of the PSCRAQ**

The items within the PSCRAQ were developed using a comprehensive literature review of school counselor's attitudes towards the role of the school counselor. A review of the PSCRAQ was conducted by a panel of school counseling professors to determine the face validity of the survey items and the content validity of the survey. The face and content validity of the PSCRAQ was found to be strong with the direct and explicit questions used in the questionnaire.

Ross and Herrington (2005) field tested the PSCRAQ instrument on 30 graduate students in school counseling graduate programs and 25 graduate students in school counseling and educational programs. The results of the PSCRAQ field test yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .63 for the graduate students in the counseling program and .59 for the graduate students in educational administration. Ross and Herrington then administered the PSCRAQ to 534 graduate students where 225 students were enrolled in principal preparation programs and 309 graduate students enrolled in school counselor preparation programs to determine the face validity of the questionnaire. Ross and Herrington's found a statistically significant difference in the mean scores on the PSCRAQ between principal candidates and school counselor candidates regarding their views of school counselor roles and responsibilities. Because the PSCRAQ's validity and reliability has only been tested in one study, the validity and reliability of the PSCRAQ will be tested in this study as well.

### **Job Satisfaction Composite Measure (JSCM)**

The dependent variable of school counselor job satisfaction will be measured using the Job Satisfaction Composite Measure (JSCM). The job satisfaction composite measure was first used by Scarpello and Campbell (1983) in a research study to explore the usefulness of single item global measures of job satisfaction in job satisfaction research. The JSCM is designed to measure overall job satisfaction among employees (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bret et al. 1994; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). The JSCM consist of three item measures (Scarpello & Campbell). The item measures of the JSCM consist of three items adapted from prior studies (Maurer & Chapman, 2013; Scarpello & Campbell). The first item is an adapted Gallup Poll measure, the second item was adapted from the G. M. Face Scales, and the third item was adapted from the Fordyce Percent Time Satisfied Scale (Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 1999; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). Because the three item measures in the JSCM use different response formats, the JSCM is standardized to create a job satisfaction composite (Maurer & Chapman, 2013). The reliability measure for the JSCM is  $\alpha = .85$  (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). The first JSCM item is, "All things considered are you satisfied with your job", the response format is a yes or no (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). For the second JSCM item, "How satisfied are you with your job in general", the response uses a scale of 1 to 5, 1 = very dissatisfied, 2 =somewhat dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat satisfied, and 5= very satisfied (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). And the final JSCM item measure, "What percent time are you happy, neutral, or unhappy with your job on average?" is a percentage estimation

(Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). The final JSCM measure percentage estimate is scored as exactly the percentage that the participant provides (Judge et al., 1994; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983).

### **Reliability and Validity of the JSCM**

Scarpello and Campbell (1983) sampled 185 employees to test their theory regarding single item global measures of job satisfaction and the face validity of the JSCM. Scarpello and Campbell's study yielded an internal consistency of .80 for the JSCM. The JSCM measure was also administered to a sample of 1388 executives working in the United States, the score using the JSCM in the study yielded a reliability of  $\alpha = .85$  (Judge et al., 1994). In another research study evaluating job satisfaction, the JSCM was administered to a sample of 1,885 American and 1,872 European executives yielding a high reliability of  $\alpha = .83$  for an American sample and  $\alpha = .78$  for European sample (Boudreau et al., 1999).

Both the Public School Counselor Role and Ambiguity Questionnaire and the Job Satisfaction Composite Measure are appropriate for this study because they measure and reflect the conceptualization of the phenomenon of school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction being examined in this study (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

### **Operationalization of Variables (IV) Role Ambiguity and Role Diffusion**

Role ambiguity and role diffusion will be measured using the Professional School Counselor Role Ambiguity Questionnaire (PSCRAQ). Role ambiguity in this study is defined as a phenomenon that results from unclear expectations of the job duties and



responsibilities (Bardhoshi, Schweinle, & Duncan, 2014). Role diffusion in this study refers to an individual's misunderstanding about his or her specific role in an occupation or social structure (Erikson, 1965). The PSCRAQ is comprised of 16 questions based on a Likert scale designed to measure public school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion. Role ambiguity and role diffusion will be calculated by school counselor's responses to the PSCRAQ on a scale where 1 = strongly agree (SA); 2 = agree (A); 3 = don't know or unsure (DK); 4 = disagree (D); and 5 = strongly disagree (SD). Items 8,14,15,16,17 and 20 of the PSCRAQ represent the professional counselor orientation. Items 7, 10, 11,12,13,18 and 19 are recoded to reflect the opposite direction of that indicated on the PSCRAQ, the scores are totaled to reflect a scale score for each respondent. A higher score on the scale indicates higher levels of school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion. A lower score on the PSCRAQ scale indicates less school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion and a view of a school counselor as a professional specialist.

The mean scores (M) and standard deviations (SD) of role ambiguity and role diffusion will be retrieved and reported for descriptive purposes. Sample items on the PSCRAQ include:

- I am satisfied with the current duties and job responsibilities of public school counselors;
- Public school principals don't understand the duties and job responsibilities of public school counselors;

- Public school counselors should be involved in the administrative function of student course scheduling”.

### **Job Satisfaction (Dependent Variable)**

The Job Satisfaction Composite Measure (JSCM) is designed to measure overall job satisfaction (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). The JSCM has three items each of the three items are scored on a different scale therefore the three items are standardized so that they are on the same scale and then the three standardized items are added to comprise the composite score (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). When scoring the JSCM the higher the composite scores the higher the level of overall job satisfaction, conversely the lower the composite scores the lower the level of overall job satisfaction (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). To obtain a composite score for the JSCM the scale scores for items 1 and 2 are added then multiplied by 10, then the percent score for the percent of time satisfied with present job is added and the sum divided by two (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983).

### **Data Analysis**

The survey responses will be downloaded from SurveyMonkey® into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software Program Version 21 data file. I will use the SPSS software program to analyze the data. I will then review the data entered to identify any missing data or possible data entry errors. Descriptive statistics including standard deviations, range, and median will be computed for interval variables. Before

conducting any statistical analyses, I will prescreen the data. The specific procedures I will use to prescreen the data will consist of checking for missing data, addressing missing data, testing statistical assumptions for each statistical procedure, and a reliability analysis for the PSCRAQ.

### **Prescreening Data**

The data in this research study will be pre-screened and cleaned using SPSS data screening and cleaning feature in order to identify and correct errors, and increase the reliability of the data used in the study. The researcher will use the SPSS Analyze-Descriptive-Statistics-Explore option to identify data outliers, normality, skewness, and kurtosis (SPSS Manual, 2014). The survey questionnaire responses will be inputted by the researcher into SPSS using the Analyze-Descriptive-Statistics-Frequency option in order to generate descriptive and frequency tables (SPSS Manual, 2014). The SPSS Analyze Scale Reliability analysis will be used to determine the internal consistency of the study instruments, results from the reliability analysis will be reported in Chapter 4 of this study.

Missing data can cause flaws in research data outcomes and reduce the generalizability of the research findings (Zhang, 2016). I will assess the data set for missing data. Any errors made in data entry will be corrected. Missing data will be managed first through a visual assessment of data. If a case is missing 10% or more of responses to survey items, then it will be excluded from the data analysis process (Bennett, 2001). A SPSS listwise deletion will be conducted for participant surveys that

have missing data and a case will be dropped from data analysis if it has a missing value in at least one of the specified variables. Incomplete sets of data will be deleted so long as the number of cases is not large. Additionally, a frequency count will be administered for every variable to check for any missing data entries (Zhang, 2016). The use of multiple imputations the data analysis software can generate values constructed for correlations for missing data which then average is replicated data set by including random errors in the prediction (Zhang, 2016).

There are several statistical assumptions related to a multiple linear regression. It is assumed in a multiple linear regression that there is independence of observations. Prior to performing a statistical analysis, the following assumptions will be tested for a multiple linear regression analysis independence of scores, linearity between the independent and dependent variables, multivariate normality of scores, homogeneity of variance, and lack of multicollinearity between predictor variables. Additionally, it is also important to check for outliers that could skew the multiple linear regression analysis. The multicollinearity assumption will be tested using correlation matrix. The linear relationship between the outcome variable and the independent variables will be tested using a scatterplot to show whether there is a linear or curvilinear relationship. Multivariate normality will have tested using a through a quantile-quantile (Q-Q) probability plot in SPSS. Homoscedasticity will be tested a using scatter plot between residuals and predicted or independent variables to show whether points are equally distributed across all values of the independent variables.

The standard multiple linear regression enter method will be used for this study, all independent variables will be entered simultaneously into the equation. The enter method is appropriate for this study because there is a small set of predictor variables and this researcher does not know which independent variables will create the best prediction equation (Cramer, 2012). The mediating variable, years of school counseling experience, is being used in this study to examine whether years of school counseling experience is part of the correlational relationship that explains the predictive nature of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: To what degree does school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion predict school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor?

$H_01$ : School counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (scores on the PSCRAQ) are not statistically significant predictors of school counselors' job satisfaction (scores on the JSCM) after controlling for years of school counselor experience. The equation for this null hypothesis can be presented as:  $H_0: B_1=B_2= 0$

$H_a1$ : School counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (scores on the PSCRAQ) are statistically significant predictors of school counselors' job satisfaction (scores on the JSCM) after controlling for years of school counselor experience. The equation for this alternative hypothesis can be presented as:  $H_0: B_1=B_2\neq 0$

For Research Question 1 the independent variables will be role ambiguity and role diffusion scores obtained from the PSCRAQ. The dependent variable will be school counselors' job satisfaction as measured by the JSCM. School counselor number of years' experience as a school counselor will be the mediating variable. A multiple linear regression analysis will be used to determine the predicative relationships between the continuous dependent variable and the independent variables and determine how much the dependent variable changes when the independent variables are changed (Yale University, 2017). One aim of this research study is to evaluate if the independent variables school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion are statistically significant predictor of the dependent variable school counselor job satisfaction therefore a multiple linear regression analysis is appropriate for this research question.

Research Question 2: What are the differences in school counselors' role ambiguity scores, role diffusion scores, counseling experience, and job satisfaction scores based on school level where employed?

*H<sub>0</sub>2*: There are no statistically significant, differences in school counselors' role ambiguity scores, role diffusion scores (as measured by the PSCRAQ), job satisfaction scores (as measured by the JSCM), and years of school counseling experience based on school level (elementary, middle, or high school) where employed. The equation for this null hypothesis can be presented as:  $H_0: B_1=B_2= B_3=B_4= 0$

*H<sub>a</sub>2*: There are statistically significant differences in school counselors' role ambiguity and role diffusion scores (as measured by PSCRAQ), job satisfaction scores

(as measured by the JSCM), and years of school counseling experience based on school level (elementary, middle, or high school) where employed. The equation for this alternative hypothesis can be presented as:  $H_0: B_1=B_2=B_3=B_4 \neq 0$

For Research Question 2, the data will be analyzed using descriptive discriminant analysis, which is a statistical technique that measures multivariate differences between groups (Stephens, 2009). This procedure is appropriate as the data analysis for the second research question because the goal of Research Question 2 is to determine whether there are differences among school teachers at various levels (elementary, middle, and high school) across three different variables (role diffusion, role ambiguity, and role job satisfaction). The predictors will be role ambiguity and role confusion scores obtained from the PSCRAQ; job satisfaction as measured by the JSCM; and number of years working as a school counselor. School level where employed (elementary, middle, and high school) will be the categorical variable.

### **Threats to Validity**

Validity refers not only to the soundness of the research study overall, it also applies to the research design and the methods used in the research (Campbell & Stanley, 1966; Cook & Campbell, 1979). Validity also applies to the data collection procedures and processes utilized throughout the research process (Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias, & DeWaard, 2015). In this research study validity refers to whether or not the research study actually measures what it set out to measure and if the research outcomes truly represent what they claim to represent.

### **Threats to External Validity**

One external threat to the validity of the proposed study is selection bias (Campbell & Stanley, 1966; Trochim, 2006). The process used to recruit study participants can affect research outcomes. An additional external threat to validity in this study is whether or not the study findings will be able to be generalized to all school counselors. It can be difficult to generalize sample results to a larger population because there is no guarantee that each sampling unit is included (Kukull & Ganguli, 2006; Olsen et al., 2013). While there are advantages to the online survey format, I must acknowledge that the use of online surveys does present computer access bias and respondents may not be as truthful or forthcoming in their responses compared to a face-to-face format (Frankfort- Nachmias & Nachmias). An additional threat to the validity of the study derives from the fact that an online survey participant can self-select to participate in the study therefore leaving the researched to rely on voluntarily participation which can limit the range of responses and reduce broad application of study findings (Jurs & Glass, 1971; Olsen et al., 2013).

### **Threats to Internal Validity**

Internal threats to the validity of the proposed study include the question as to whether or not I can conclude that changes in the independent variable caused the observed changes in the dependent variable (Brossart, Clay, & Wilson, 2002). Causal relationships are typically only proven in experimental research designs, however the current research is not an experimental design (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Another threat



to internal validity in this study may be extraneous variables that may compete with the independent variable in explaining the outcomes of a study. A statistical regression threat occurs when some participant's scores are extremely high or low (Brossart et al., 2002). Instrumentation bias can occur in a study when the instrument used to collect data changes over time (Brossart et al., 2002).

### **Statistical Conclusion Validity**

Statistical conclusion validity threats occur when conclusions from the study are not based on accurate data collection or accurate data analysis process (Garcia-Perez, 2012). A statistical conclusion validity threat could stem from not having enough statistical power to truly detect effect (Parker, 1993). A type II error can occur when the statistical power is too low which results in a false effect measure (Garcia-Perez, 2012). Inadequate sample size can also contribute to a statistical conclusion validity threat (Adams, 2008; Dross, 2011). Additionally, an inappropriate research design may create statistical conclusion validity threats (Drost, 2011). To reduce threats to statistical conclusion validity in this study a minimal power of .80 and significance level of .05 will be specified. Additionally, a multiple linear regression analysis was used to analyze data in this study which is a proper statistical method for evaluating predictive relationship variables (Adams, 2008).

### **Ethical Considerations**

When collecting data from human subject's, ethical considerations in research are especially important (Behi & Nolan, 1995; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). No personally

identifying information was included in the data collection process. Steps to maintain confidentiality were taken to protect the identity of research participants. The Walden University Institutional Review Board requirements for research studies with human participants will be observed, and I will obtain approval from the Walden IRB Office prior to conducting this research. Participants will be provided information about the background of the study, informed consent, and given the option to opt out of participation without any penalty. The risks of participation in this study are minimal. Participants will not be enticed to complete the study survey questionnaires.

The researcher's personal contact information will be given to all participants in case of any participant questions or concerns regarding their participation in the study. A summary of the study results will be shared with the leaders of the professional school counselor organizations. A summary of the study results will also be shared with study participants upon request. All data collected in the course of this research study will be kept secure and confidential and used solely for the purpose of this study. Analyzed data will be stored on an external hard drive that will be passcode protected and kept in a secure locked file cabinet. Collected and analyzed data from this study will be destroyed after period of 5 years. After a period of five years, to prevent file sharing or file access the researcher will clean (e.g., sanitize) the hard drive or other media by performing a data wipe or over-write. The utility called Darik's Boot and Nuke (DBAN) will be used to sanitize the hard it will allow the researcher conduct the cleaning process without needing to install any other software on the computer.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology that will be utilized in this research study. This research will use a quantitative research design. The study is correlational in nature and the sample population is practicing school counselors in the Southeastern United States. Online surveys will be used to collect data from the sample population in this study. The research variables for this study are school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, school level, and job satisfaction. The mediating variable in this research study is years of counseling experience. Chapter 4 will discuss the data collection process, sample population demographics, and the data analysis results.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine whether role ambiguity and role diffusion predicted school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor. In this chapter I discuss the data collection process, share the results of the data analysis, and discuss the outcomes from testing the null hypotheses for the research questions. The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study:

Research Question 1: To what degree does school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion predict school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor?

$H_01$ : School counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (scores on the Public School Counselor Role Ambiguity Questionnaire(PSCRAQ) are not statistically significant predictors of school counselors' job satisfaction scores on the Job Satisfaction Composite Measure (JSCM) after controlling for years of school counselor experience.

$H_a1$ : School counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (scores on the PSCRAQ) are statistically significant predictors of school counselors' job satisfaction (scores on the JSCM) after controlling for years of school counselor experience.

Research Question 2: What are the differences in school counselors' role ambiguity scores, role diffusion scores, counseling experience, and job satisfaction scores based on school level where employed?

*H<sub>0</sub>2*: There are no statistically significant differences in school counselors' role ambiguity and role diffusion scores (as measured by the PSCRAQ) job satisfaction scores (as measured by the JSCM), and years of school counseling experience based on school level (elementary, middle, or high school) where employed.

*H<sub>a</sub>2*: There are statistically significant differences in school counselors' role ambiguity and role diffusion scores (as measured by PSCRAQ) job satisfaction scores (as measured by the JSCM), and years of school counseling experience based on school level (elementary, middle, or high school) where employed.

### **Data Collection**

I collected survey data from members of two professional school counselor organizations in North Carolina. The directors of the two North Carolina professional school counselor organizations sent a link to the online survey that was used to collect the data. The link to the survey was sent to the members of the two professional school counselor organizations through the e-mail listservs of the professional organizations. The link to the survey was initially sent on June 6, 2018, and a follow-up reminder e-mail with a link to the survey was sent on June 20<sup>th</sup>. The link to the survey was disabled on June 27, 2018. There were no discrepancies in the data collection plan as outlined in Chapter 3.

### **Demographics**

I completed a frequency count to obtain descriptive statistics for the demographic data for the participants. Table 1 presents a summary of the results. There were more

female than male school counselors who participated in the study. The answers to the demographic questions on the survey indicated that most of the participants were White, followed by Black/African American, and then Hispanic/Latino. Years of experience for the school counselors ranged from 0 to 15 or more years. The mean years of school counselor experience was 10 years. The school counselors were almost equally distributed at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

		<i>n</i>	Percentage of respondents
Gender	Male	11	12.1%
	Female	80	87.9%
Ethnicity	Black or AA	25	27.5%
	White	64	70.3%
	Hispanic	2	2.2%
	Other	0	0%
Years of experience	0 to 5 years	18	19.8%
	6 to 10 years	22	24.2%
	11 to 15 years	18	19.8%
	15 + years	33	36.3%

**Preliminary Data Analysis**

As part of the preliminary data analysis, I screened the data for missing values. I also tested the statistical assumptions related to each data analysis procedure. Additionally, I ran a reliability analysis to assess the reliability of the data collected via the surveys. A summary of results is presented in the following sections.

### **Missing Data**

Missing data can distort results and reduce the generalizability of the research findings (Zhang, 2016). The first step of the data cleaning process was to determine whether any of the surveys contained missing data. If a survey was missing 10% or more of responses, then that survey was excluded from the data analysis process (see Bennett, 2001). In SPSS listwise deletion, a case is dropped from an analysis because it has a missing value in at least one of the specified variables. The listwise deletion procedure in SPSS was conducted for participant surveys that had missing data. The data set originally contained 91 cases. The missing data analysis resulted in 5 surveys being excluded from the sample because they were missing 10% or more of responses to the survey items, which left 86 valid surveys for case processing.

### **Testing for Outliers**

Outlier detection is important for effective modeling because outliers can potentially skew or bias any analysis performed on the data set (Field, 2011). I used a scatterplot generated by SPSS to check the data for outliers. An outlier in a data set is a value that is far away from the rest of the values in the data set (Field, 2011). The scatterplot revealed a basic linear relationship between the independent variables. The scatterplot indicated that there were no data outliers and there was no gap in the connecting line indicating missing data.

### **Testing for Assumptions of Multiple Linear Regression**

After the data were checked for missing data and outliers, I assessed whether the assumptions for multiple linear regression had been met. A probability plot was used to test for multivariate normality. A quantile-quantile plot showed that points were reasonably close to the diagonal line of best fit. The close proximity to the diagonal line indicted normality of error distribution (see Field, 2011). Homoscedasticity and linearity were tested using a scatterplot. Standardized residuals (ZRESID) was plotted against the standardized predicted values (ZPRED) to test for homoscedasticity, and the scattered nature of the plot demonstrated that the variances of the residual were constant (Field, 2011).

To assess the data for multicollinearity for the independent variables, I used a bivariate correlation matrix. A correlation of 1.00 means two variables are perfectly correlated; a correlation of 0.00 means there is absolutely no correlation (Field, 2011). Results from the correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant correlation between the PSCRAQ and the JSCM ( $r = -.377$ ). The Pearson correlation between the JSCM and PSCRAQ was negative, which indicated that higher scores on the PSCRAQ were related to lower scores on the JSCM. Additionally, there was a negative correlation between years of work experience and the JSCM scores, which indicated that as years of school counselor work experience increased, the scores on the JSCM (overall job satisfaction scores) decreased. A summary of the correlational analysis is found in Table 2.



Table 2

*Correlations Matrix of Independent Variables*

Variables		JSCM	Years of experience	PSCRAQ
JSCM	Pearson Correlation	1.00	-.045	-.377
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.338	.000
Years of experience	Pearson Correlation	-.045	1.00	.066
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.338	.	.267
PSCRAQ	Pearson Correlation	-.337	.066	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.267	.

Table 3 presents a summary of the descriptive statistics from the surveys used to collected data on the independent and dependent variables. The mean and standard deviations for the data for the sample of participant for this study were consistent with those reported in previous studies. The means and standard deviations for the PSCRAQ in previous literature were  $M = 41.44$  and  $SD = 5.163$  for individuals in school counselor preparation programs. The PSCRAQ means and standard deviations for practicing school counselors in the current study were  $M = 49.93$  and  $SD = 5.15$ . The means and standard deviations of the independent variables years of experience and the PSCRAQ are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviation of Independent Variables*

	Mean	SD
JSCM composite	85.4023	23.98568
Years of experience	2.7253	1.15533
PSCRAQ	49.9341	5.15278

**Reliability Analysis**

**Reliability of the PSCRAQ.** The initial reliability analysis for the PSCRAQ revealed that there were three negative interitem correlations for items on the survey. The negative interitem correlations produced a lower reliability estimate for the PSCRAQ than indicated in previous literature. The initial reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .318 for the 16 items. This initial reliability measure was inconsistent with previous literature that yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .63 and .59 (see Ross & Herrington, 2005). The presence of negative values indicated that some items on the PSCRAQ may have needed to be reverse coded before being computed for scale scores. I reviewed the original scoring instructions for the PSCRAQ and found a discrepancy in the instructions for the reverse coded items. I contacted Dr. William Ross, a cocreator of the PSCRAQ, and confirmed that in the literature for the original scoring of the PSCRAQ there were no indicators for Question 7 of questionnaire to be reversed scored. Additionally, for the

original PSCRAQ, Questions 9, 21, and 22 were not listed in the original scoring or the reverse score instructions, which indicated that the total scale score should be based on 13 questions not 16.

I reran the reliability analysis without reverse coding Item 7 and after deleting the three items that obtained negative interitems total correlations. The second reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha of .57 based on a total of 13 items. The new reliability analysis yielded a score consistent with literature regarding the PSCRAQ (see Ross & Herrington, 2005).

**Reliability of the JSCM.** I also ran a reliability analysis for the JSCM, which yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .81. The Cronbach's alpha for the JSCM for this study was consistent with the previous literature. which indicated Cronbach's alphas of .83 and .78 (see Boudreau et al., 1999; Judge et al., 1994).

## **Results**

Results from the data analysis are presented in the following sections. The results are presented separately for each research question.

Research Question 1: To what degree does school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion predict school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor?

*H*<sub>0</sub>1: School counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (scores on the PSCRAQ) are not statistically significant predictors of school counselors' job satisfaction scores on

the Job Satisfaction Composite Measure (JSCM) after controlling for years of school counselor experience.

*H<sub>a1</sub>*: School counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (scores on the PSCRAQ) are statistically significant predictors of school counselors' job satisfaction (scores on the JSCM) after controlling for years of school counselor experience.

Data for Research Question 1 was analyzed using a multiple linear regression analysis. Data were entered using the enter procedure. The independent variables were role ambiguity and role diffusion scores obtained from the PSCRAQ. The dependent variable was school counselors' job satisfaction as measured by the JSCM. Years of experience was entered as the control variable. A summary of the ANOVA results for the overall model are presented in Table 4. This table shows that two models were generated for the multiple regression analysis. The first model only included years of experience and the constant, but the model was not statistically significant. The second model included scores for the independent variables, which were role diffusion and role ambiguity scores as measured by the PSCRAQ. Results from the overall ANOVA summary revealed that the regression model was statistically significant  $F(2, 84) = 6.981, p = .002$ .

Table 4

*Regression Analysis ANOVA Summary*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	101.924	1	101.924	.175	.676 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	49374.995	85	580.882		
	Total	49476.920	86			
2	Regression	7051.566	2	3525.783	6.981	.002 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	42425.353	84	505.064		
	Total	49476.920	86			

a. Dependent Variable: JSCM Composite

b. Predictors: (Constant), Years of Experience

c. Predictors: (Constant), Years of Experience, PSCRAQ

A summary of the results for the multiple regression procedure after adding scores for the independent variables are presented in Table 5. The data revealed a statistically significant change in  $p$  values from Model 1 to Model 2. The significance when adding the PSCRAQ in model 2 changed from  $p = .676$  in model 1 to  $p = .002$  in model 2. The  $R^2$  valued in Model 2 was .14, which indicates that the independent variables in the model accounted for 14% of the variance in the dependent variable. The PSCRAQ scores also explained a significant proportion of variance in JSCM scores,  $R^2 = .140$ ,  $F(1, 84) = 42.64$ ,  $p < .001$ . Results indicated that higher score on the PSCRAQ indicates higher levels of school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (Ross & Herrington, 2005).

Table 5

*Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Model Summary*

Model	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.002	-.010	24.10150	.002	.175	1	85	.676
2	.143	.122	22.47362	.140	13.760	1	84	.000

Table 6 presents a summary of the results from the linear regression analysis. The results revealed that school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (scores on the PSCRAQ) were statistically significant predictors of school counselor job satisfaction (scores on the JSCM) after controlling for years of school counselor experience.

PSCRAQ scores measuring role ambiguity and role diffusion significantly predicted JSCM scores measuring overall job satisfaction,  $b = -1.748$ ,  $t(84) = -3.709$ ,  $p < .001$ ; therefore, I rejected the null hypothesis for Research Question 1. The regression equation for Model 1 is presented below:

job satisfaction scores =  $(-.376)$  role diffusion/role ambiguity + years of experience + c.

Results from the multiple linear regression analysis indicated that school counselors with higher scores on the PSCRAQ had lower scores on the JSCM. Because the beta coefficient was negative, the outcome variable will decrease by the beta coefficient value.

Table 6

*Linear Regression Predicting School Counselor Job Satisfaction*

	$\beta$	t	Sig
Years of experience	-.021	-.203	.839
PSCRAQ	-.376	-3.709	.000

a. Dependent Variable JSCM Composite

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .001.

Research Question 2: What are the differences in school counselors' role ambiguity scores, role diffusion scores, counseling experience, and job satisfaction scores based on school level where employed?

$H_{02}$ : There are no statistically significant differences in school counselors' role ambiguity and role diffusion scores (as measured by the PSCRAQ) job satisfaction scores (as measured by the JSCM), and years of school counseling experience based on school level (elementary, middle, or high school) where employed.

$H_{a2}$ : There are statistically significant differences in school counselors' role ambiguity and role diffusion scores (as measured by PSCRAQ) job satisfaction scores (as measured by the JSCM), and years of school counseling experience based on school level (elementary, middle, or high school) where employed.

A descriptive discriminant analysis was run for the second research question to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion and years of school counseling experience based on the

school level where the school counselor was currently employed. The prior group probabilities for the overall group can be found in Table 7. The prior group probabilities chart shows the probability of accurately classifying group membership based on chance. The number of cases correctly and incorrectly assigned to each of the groups based on the discriminant analysis. The overall classification accuracy then would be 33% if left to chance.

Table 7

*Prior Group Probabilities*

Prior Probabilities for Groups			
Current School Level Work In	Prior	Cases Used in Analysis	
		Unweighted	Weighted
elementary school	.333	31	31.000
middle school	.333	28	28.000
high school	.333	28	28.000
Total	1.000	87	87.000

A summary of the descriptive statistics presented in Table 8 shows high school counselors had the highest average number of years of work experience. Elementary school counselors had the highest average score on the PSCRAQ. High school counselors had the highest average score on the JSCM.



Table 8

*Means and Standard Deviation of Groups*

		Mean	SD
Elementary School	Years of experience	2.7419	1.29016
	PSCRAQ	51.4516	4.94529
	JSCM Composite	83.9677	25.81438
Middle School	Years of experience	2.6429	1.09593
	PSCRAQ	50.4286	4.88708
	JSCM Composite	81.5179	23.64219
High School	Years of experience	2.7701	1.15840
	PSCRAQ	49.9195	5.21897
	JSCM Composite	85.4023	23.98568

Table 9 shows the canonical correlations, which represents the correlations between the two discriminant functions and the levels of the dependent variable. These are the canonical correlations for the predictor variables. The values for the dimensions or the discriminant were not statistically significant. Coefficients for each variable in each discriminant function show the contribution of the respective variable to the discrimination between groups, the larger the standardized coefficient, the greater the contribution of that variables to the discriminant function (Field, 2011). The role ambiguity and role diffusion score measured by PSCRAQ is the only significant correlation within Function 1.

Table 9

*Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients*

	Functions	
	Function 1	Function 2
Years of experience	-.301	.423
PSCRAQ	.182	.111
JSCM	-.006	.037

Table 10 shows the classification function coefficients which indicate the relative importance of the independent variables in predicting the dependent variable. Table 11 shows how many of the school counselors in each school level group were actually predicted to be in that group, based on the functions being applied to each school counselor's pattern of data. The classification table shows the percentage and the actual number of school counselors' whose group is correctly predicted by those functions.

Table 10

*Classification Function Coefficients*

	Current School Level Worked In		
	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Years of experience	1.414	1.351	1.613
PSCRAQ	2.583	2.530	2.434
JSCM composite	.344	.335	.345

The original grouped cases correctly classified was 42.5%. Cross validation was done only for cases in the analysis in cross validation, each case is classified by the functions derived from all cases other than that case. The original model had the highest accuracy for predicting elementary school, followed by middle and high school. The cross validated model was most accurate for predicting classification for middle school counselors and had relatively equal accuracy for classification of elementary and high schools. The original model was more accurate than a chance prediction of 33%.

Table 11

*Classification Results*

Classification Results						
		Current School Level Work In	Predicted Group Membership			Total
			elementary school	middle school	high school	
Original	Count	elementary school	13	9	9	31
		middle school	10	8	10	28
		high school	7	5	16	28
	%	elementary school	41.9	29.0	29.0	100.0
		middle school	35.7	28.6	35.7	100.0
		high school	25.0	17.9	57.1	100.0
Cross- validated	Count	elementary school	8	13	10	31
		middle school	13	5	10	28
		high school	7	6	15	28
	%	elementary school	25.8	41.9	32.3	100.0
		middle school	46.4	17.9	35.7	100.0
		high school	25.0	21.4	53.6	100.0

- a. 42.5% of original grouped cases correctly classified.
- b. Cross validation was done only for those cases in the analysis.
- c. 32.2% of cross-validated grouped cases correctly classified.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter the data analysis process for the research hypotheses in this study was presented. There were 91 school counselors who responded to the survey request for this study and data from 86 school counselors was analyzed using a linear regression and discriminant analysis. The results of the linear regression analysis supported the hypothesis that the PSCRAQ variable is a significant predictor of the JSCM controlling for years of work experience. The results of the discriminant analysis did not support the hypothesis that there are the differences in school counselors' role ambiguity scores, role diffusion scores, counseling experience, and job satisfaction scores based on school level where employed. Chapter 5 will discuss how this study's findings correlate with current literature on school counselor job satisfaction. The social change implications of this study's findings and recommendations for future research will also be discussed in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine whether role ambiguity and role diffusion predicted school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor. Results of the linear regression analysis indicated that the scores on the PSCRAQ, a measure of school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion, were significant predictors of scores on the JSCM, a measure of counselor job satisfaction, after controlling for years of school counselor work experience. Results of the discriminant analysis indicated that there were no significant differences in the scores on the measures of school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction based on the school level where the school counselor was employed. This chapter includes my interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications of the study.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

#### **Findings for Role Ambiguity, Role Diffusion, and Job Satisfaction**

Findings from previous studies showed that across the United States, school counselor job satisfaction is low (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012). School counselors are often required to perform duties outside of the school counselor job description, and school counselors are being held accountable for tasks that are better suited for other school personnel (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012; Cinotti, 2016). Since its inception, the school counseling profession has been plagued by role diffusion and role ambiguity (Astramovich et al., 2014; Davis, 2014; Kolbert et al., 2016). In the following sections I

discuss the findings from this study as they relate to the independent variables of role ambiguity and role diffusion and the dependent variable of school counselor job satisfaction. I also discuss how results relate to previous studies on school counselor job satisfaction. There were two major findings in this study. The first finding was that there was a statistically significant relationship between school counselor scores on the PSCRAQ and JSCM after controlling for years of work experience. The second finding was no statistically significant relationship between school counselor scores on the PSCRAQ and JSCM after controlling for years of work experience by level where school counselors are employed.

### **Findings Related to School Counselor Role Ambiguity, Role Diffusion, and Job Dissatisfaction**

Results from the linear regression analysis for this study were consistent with findings from previous studies on school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (Astramovich et al., 2013; Cinotti, 2016; Hepp, 2013). In previous studies school counselors reported being overwhelmed and not having adequate time to provide counseling to their students due to the engagement in administrative noncounseling duties (Bardhoshi et al. 2014). Bain (2012) found that the frequent changes in school counselor roles and responsibilities has contributed to an increase in school counselor role ambiguity. Findings from previous studies also indicated that the increase in requirements for school counselors to engage in noncounseling activities has negatively impacted school counselor job satisfaction (Oduh, 2016). Hassard and Costar (2012) found that a

disconnect between school administration and school counselor perceptions of counselor job responsibilities also contributed to role ambiguity, which negatively impact school counselor job satisfaction.

Results from this study were consistent with the previous literature related to school counselor role ambiguity and job satisfaction. I examined the predictive relationship between role ambiguity, role diffusion, and school counselor job satisfaction as measured by scores on the PSCRAQ and JSCM. The results revealed that school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (scores on the PSCRAQ) were statistically significant predictors of school counselor job satisfaction (scores on the JSCM) after controlling for years of school counselor experience. Elementary school counselors had the highest overall scores on the PSCRAQ, which indicated they had higher levels of role ambiguity and role diffusion than middle school or high school counselors. High school counselors had the highest scores on the JSCM, which indicated that they had the highest levels of overall job satisfaction. Results from the multiple linear regression analysis indicated that school counselors who had higher scores on the PSCRAQ had lower scores on the JSCM.

### **Findings Related to Work Experience and Job Satisfaction**

The control variable in this study was school counselor years of work experience. Previous studies indicated that experienced counselors were frustrated by their lack of professional identity, which contributed to low job satisfaction (Moss et al. 2013). Van Maele and Van Houtte (2012) found that as educators' years of work experience

increased, their overall job satisfaction levels decreased. Klassen and Chiu (2010) found that the longer that teachers worked, the more their work motivation declined and the lower their job satisfaction levels. The findings from the current study related to work experience and job satisfaction are consistent with previous studies on work experience and job satisfaction. The results from the correlational analysis in the current study revealed a negative correlation between years of work experience and scores on the JSCM (overall job satisfaction). The negative correlation between years of work experience and the JSCM indicated that as the years of school counselor work experience increased, overall job satisfaction decreased.

### **Findings Related to Role Ambiguity, Role Diffusion, and Job Satisfaction Across School Levels**

School counselors' roles and responsibility vary based on the school level where they work (American School Counselor Association, 2017). In this study I also whether school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, job satisfaction, and years of school counseling experience differed based on the school level where the school counselor was employed. I anticipated that there would be a statistically significant difference in school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction controlling for years of school counseling experience based on differing roles for school counselors by school level where employed.

Research has shown that role diffusion and role ambiguity exist across elementary, middle, and high school counseling roles (Bardhoshi et al., 2014). Although



school counselor job roles differ among school levels, results from this study did not indicate a difference between role ambiguity and role diffusion, job satisfaction, and years of school counseling experience by school level (American School Counselor Association, 2017). Ahmad et al. (2015) found that secondary counselors are continuously overwhelmed by large student caseloads and increasing administrative expectations placed on them. Zalaquett and Chatters (2012) found that middle school principals continue to perceive test coordination, clerical tasks, and substitute teaching as a function of middle school counselors. Elementary school counselors are often the only counselor in their schools, and school administrators place a great deal of noncounseling responsibilities on them (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012). The findings from the current study supported the null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant difference in school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction based on school level where counselors are employed. This was an unexpected result because previous research indicated that role ambiguity and role diffusion exist for school counselors at all school levels. This unexpected finding may indicate the need for more research to understand the relationship between school counselor job satisfaction and the roles and responsibilities of school counselors based on the school level where the school counselor is employed. In the discriminant analysis in this study, only 42.5% of the school counselors were correctly classified, indicating that the discriminant function was not significant because it was less than 50%. Despite the discriminant analysis not showing significance, the number of school counselors correctly classified was more accurate than what would

have been predicted by chance at 33.3%. This finding also indicates that there may be a need for further research regarding school counselor job satisfaction by school level where the school counselor works.

### **Findings Related to the Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study was role theory. Role theory conceptualizes how job roles within organizations serve as the boundary between individuals and organizations, and when boundaries are crossed role conflict and role ambiguity occur (Katz & Khan, 1978; Schuler et al., 1977). The premise of role theory is that role ambiguity increases the likelihood that a person will be dissatisfied with his or her job (Katz & Khan, 1978; Rizzo et al., 1970). I examined the predictive relationship between role ambiguity and role diffusion and job satisfaction among school counselors. The findings aligned with the premises of role theory. As proposed in role theory, I found that there was a positive correlation between increased role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job dissatisfaction among school counselors.

Among school counselors in this study, when role ambiguity and role diffusion increased, overall job satisfaction decreased. According to role theory, when employees are required to perform their job role in an unexpected manner, they become unhappy (Katz & Khan, 1966). Findings from this study support this premise. Novriansa and Riyanto (2016) used role ambiguity questionnaires to collect data about role ambiguity and job satisfaction among employees, and the results of multiple regression analysis showed that role ambiguity had a negative impact on job satisfaction. Talib et al. (2017)

used surveys to measure role ambiguity among doctors and found that role ambiguity significantly impacted levels of job satisfaction. Rageb et al. (2013) conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to evaluate the mediating effect of role ambiguity on job satisfaction among maritime employees. Rageb et al. found a statistically significant negative relationship between role ambiguity and employee job satisfaction. Madera et al. (2013) found a statistically significant relationship between increased role ambiguity and decreased levels of job satisfaction among hotel managers. The results from the current study also showed statistically significant predictive relationships between role ambiguity, role diffusion, and school counselor job satisfaction.

### **Other Findings**

School counselors in this study responded to survey questions regarding school principals' understanding of and involvement in defining the job responsibilities of school counselors and a question relating to principals' understanding of the duties and job responsibilities of a school counselor. Results showed that 66% of participants indicated that school principals do not understand the duties and job responsibilities of school counselors. In addition, 60% of participants indicated that school principals had too much involvement in defining the job responsibilities of school counselors. These findings support those from previous studies, which indicated that school principals and school counselors have different perspectives of school counselor roles and responsibilities. Bardhoshi et al. (2014) found that school administrators placed more emphasis on school counselors performing noncounseling duties than on counseling-

related duties. Hassard and Costar (2012) found a significant difference between principals' and counselors' perceptions of the ideal role of school counselors. Hassard and Costar also found a great deal of disagreement between principals and school counselors as to what school counselors' specific roles and job descriptions should entail. The disagreement between principals and school counselors regarding school counselor roles creates frustration for school counselors. This frustration contributes to school counselor job dissatisfaction.

The findings from this study have implications for practicing school counselors. One possible explanation for the results could be that the continued requirement of school counselors to engage in noncounseling activities has diffused their job role to the point where school counselors are no longer satisfied with their jobs. School counselors' jobs are becoming more complex, and school counselors are asked to assume more roles and responsibilities outside of school counselor training and expertise (Bain, 2012). Instead of school administrators removing some of the noncounseling activities from school counselors' responsibilities, administrators continue to add more noncounseling activities to school counselors' daily job responsibilities. New school counselors have expressed frustration about role ambiguity in their job descriptions. For some school counselors, there is no standardized job description; therefore, school administrators use them for all types of non-school-counseling activities. The lack of clear job roles and responsibilities for school counselors has increased disillusionment with the job. School counselors complain that they have very little time to counsel students because they are asked by

school administrators to perform tasks that are better suited for other school personnel. My experience as a school counselor led me to pursue this research topic because I have experienced firsthand role ambiguity regarding my job description. Each school year, my job responsibilities have changed as a school counselor.

School counselors are asked to engage in administrative tasks and other duties that are better suited for other educational personnel. Instead of engaging in daily activities that align with school counseling standards, school counselors are often asked to engage in student testing, planning field trips, managing parent teacher communication and parent teacher associations, coordinating school clubs, developing and implementing interventions for special education students, supporting the professional development of teachers, engaging in student discipline, and coordinating fundraisers. These factors can contribute to school counselors losing their desire to remain in the school counseling profession.

School counselor's daily responsibilities do not align with their graduate level training. School counselors go through graduate level training and are expected to be prepared to provide services to meet the social, academic, emotional, and career needs of students. The increasing addition of job responsibilities outside of the social, academic, emotional, and career domains has diffused the school counselor role. In some schools the school counselor roles are so diffused they rarely engage in any interventions with students in the social, academic, emotional, and career domains. Instead some school counselors are relegated to performing administrative tasks. School counselors' express

frustration because the work they do on a daily basis is not what they were trained for. Being required to continually engage in tasks they were not trained for could cause school counselors to lose the desire to be a school counselor.

When school counselors are repeatedly asked to engage a non-counseling responsibilities not only do school counselors suffer but so do the students they serve. When school counselors are consistently pulled away from providing the necessary supports for students' counselors are not able to effectively provide services for students. When school counselors have to engage in a non-counseling tasks instead of providing group counseling supports and interventions, individual counseling, crisis counseling, academic counseling, social and emotional interventions, and career advising for students there is no one else to provide the services. The diffusing of school counselor roles prohibits them from providing the necessary services that students need from a school counselor. The school counselors' inability to provide services to students creates a ripple effect across schools and school districts. Many students are suffering with mental health, substance-abuse, and social and emotional learning issues and need the supports only school counselors provide.

According to premises of role theory, when individuals envision one job role but that vision does not align with the actual job responsibilities, individuals become dissatisfied with their jobs (Brunetto et al., 2012). For many school counselors this is the case as indicated by the results of this study. The misalignment of job expectations and actual job responsibilities fosters job ambiguity which correlates to low job satisfaction

within the school counseling profession. The results of this study found a correlation between school counselor role diffusion, role ambiguity, and low job satisfaction. The implications of the correlation between school role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction if not addressed, are critical as many states are already experiencing school counselor shortages (Bryant, 2015). The continued role ambiguity and role diffusion present in the school counseling profession has caused some school counselors to leave the profession altogether. Some school counselors do not feel like they are adequately equipped to provide all the additional non-counseling services that they are asked to provide; therefore, some school counselors leave the profession. Other school counselors leave the profession because they are frustrated because they are repeatedly given more and more non-counseling job responsibilities. Since I became a school counselor I have witnessed many colleagues leave the profession because they said the actual job is not what they expected it would be.

School counselor job dissatisfaction can potentially affect school counselor work engagement. According to role theory when an employee is dissatisfied with their job, work motivation and engagement wain (Brunetto et al., 2012). For school counselors who are increasingly dissatisfied with their job responsibilities work engagement declines because there is no motivation to perform their job. The lack of motivation and work engagement among school counselor negatively affects students and schools. School counselors who have no motivation to perform their jobs shortchange students and schools.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are some limitations of this study that may affect the generalizability of the findings to other populations. First, participation in the study was limited to practicing school counselors in the state of North Carolina; as a result, there was lack of demographic diversity among the school counselors surveyed. The lack of demographic diversity is attributed to the geographic location and population of the State of North Carolina which is not as diverse as possible other geographic locations. A second limitation pertains to gender of the participants. Results showed that 87% of the participants were females, and therefore the findings may not accurately reflect the views of male school counselors. A larger proportion of males in the data may have generated different results. A third limitation relates to the race/ethnicity of participants. Data revealed that 70% of the participant were Caucasian. Consequently, responses to the surveys may not necessarily be generalized to school counselors in other racial or ethnic groups.

Use of a convenience sample to recruit study participants for the study presents another limitation therefore survey responses may be subject to sampling bias. Convenience sampling is vulnerable to sampling bias because particular groups within the sample may be over-represented or under-represented, this can affect the quality of data being collected (Field, 2011). When using a convenience sample, the sample is not chosen at random, the inherent bias in convenience sampling means that the sample is unlikely to be representative of the population being studied (Field, 2011).



Online surveys were used to collect data for this study. The types of questions asked in the online survey were close-ended. Close-ended questions do not allow for a further explanation or additional details which could limit the validity of the study (Drost, 2011). Another limitation of the study is related to response bias, which occurs survey when participants respond to items on a survey according to how they assumed the researcher wanted them to respond (Drost, 2011). In this study self-report measures via online surveys were used which can limit study participant's objectivity and honesty creating response bias (Drost, 2011). Response bias is also the tendency of a person to answer questions on a survey untruthfully or misleadingly (Drost, 2011).

The overall methodology also posed limitations to the results. This study was correlational, non-experimental and therefore causality cannot be shown (Frankfort-Nachmias, et al.,2015). Correlation between variables can be shown but the findings from this study cannot definitively demonstrate that one variable determined another (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). Finally, as this was a quantitative research study, the research results are limited to quantitative data only which may not fully explore complex personal experiences related to role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction among practicing for school counselors.

The instrumentation used to collect data on job satisfaction for this study may pose a limitation to the results. The Job Satisfaction Composite Measure survey only contains three survey items, and a three item survey can only collect limited information on a construct. Although the Job Satisfaction Composite Measure has been identified as

having good content validity as indicated by high internal consistency and reliability ( $\alpha = .85$ ), it is possible that the instrument was too narrow in scope to adequately measure varied aspects of school counselors' job satisfaction. Construct validity is the degree to which a test measures what purports to be measuring (Frankfort-Nachmias, et al., 2015). A different instrument with a broader scope may have yielded different results.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

This study provided evidence of a predictive relationship between school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction after controlling for years of work experience. I recommend that additional studies be conducted to confirm these results. This study could be repeated with school counselors in different geographical locations and school settings. The repetition of the study could provide additional data to further understand the phenomenon of role ambiguity, role diffusion, and school counselor job satisfaction. A recommendation for future study might be to examine the relationship between school counselors and school principals in regards to defining school counselor job responsibilities

Additionally, a mixed method study may be a way to gather more quantitative data and in addition qualitative data about school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction. Qualitative data would allow the exploration of complex personal experiences associated with role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction among school counselors. A qualitative research study could provide a better understanding through first hand experiences of school counselors as it relates to role

ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction. Also further examination through a qualitative research method may provide more in-depth information regarding the nature of the differences, if any, in role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction for school counselors by school level. For instance, that high caseloads and expectations for high school counselors serve in administrative roles contributes to high school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion (Camelford, 2014). Middle school counselors surveyed felt that they were required to spend too much time on administrative and clerical tasks which contributed to role diffusion (Zalaquett & Chatter, 2012). Elementary school counselors are forced to work in isolation, particularly at a time of constrained resources which impacts elementary school counselor job satisfaction (Bruce et. al, 2012). The differences in job expectations and working environments for school counselors by school levels creates differences in role ambiguity and role diffusion which may impact overall job satisfaction. One recommendation from the results of this study would be to examine how school counselor job satisfaction impacts school counselor engagement.

School counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion can contribute to job burn out among school counselors. A recommendation for future studies may be to examine the correlation between a school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and school counselor burnout. Additionally, school counselor compensation is another variable that might affect overall school counselor job satisfaction. A recommendation for a further study would be to look at the relationship between school counselor compensation and overall school counselor job satisfaction.

### **Implications for Practice and Positive Social Change**

Through the nature of their jobs, school counselors are social change agents. School counselors are both educational and human services professionals who are facing a professional identity crisis because of the role ambiguity and role diffusion associated with their occupation (Cinotti, 2016). Findings from this research revealed a predictive relationship between school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction. Creating awareness about how role ambiguity and role diffusion impact school counselor job satisfaction may provide evidence of the need for more defined roles and responsibilities for school counselors. School principals could use the findings from this study to foster dialogue with school counselors in order to get a clearer definition of school counselor roles and responsibilities from the perspectives of the school counselors. Principals and school administrators could also use the findings from this study as evidence of the need to explore ways to reduce school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion among school counselors.

School counselor educators and advocates could use the findings from this study to advocate for clearer job descriptions and responsibilities for school counselors. School counselors could present the findings from this study to school administrators to advocate for dialogue about more defined job descriptions for school counselors. School counselors could also use the findings from this study to support requests to be relieved of duties that contribute to school counselor role diffusion such as duties other school personnel are more suited to perform.

Based on the role ambiguity and role diffusion scores from school counselors in this study, a practical implication that could emerge from this study is principals and school counselors having discussions around the assigned roles and responsibilities of school counselors.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this quantitative, correlational study was to examine the degree to which role ambiguity and role diffusion predict school counselors' job satisfaction. School counselors are change agents who work with students and families to provide interventions in academic, social, and emotional domains. Past research has indicated that the lack of clarity about the professional roles and responsibilities of school counselors has resulted in role ambiguity and role diffusion among this group of professional. This study was guided by two research questions. The first research question examined the degree to which school counselor role ambiguity and role diffusion predicted school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor. The second research question examined whether there were differences in school counselors' role ambiguity scores, role diffusion scores, counseling experience, and job satisfaction scores based on school level where employed. Results from the data analysis revealed that role ambiguity and role diffusion did predict school counselor job satisfaction after controlling for years of experience as a school counselor; the greater the role ambiguity and role diffusion the lower the job satisfaction level. The study data analysis also revealed that there were no differences in school counselors' role ambiguity

scores, role diffusion scores, counseling experience, and job satisfaction scores based on school level where employed. This study confirms results from other empirical studies regarding the predictive relationships between employee role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction. Knowledge gained from this study may be used to advocate for aligning school counselor's duties and responsibilities with the training and education they receive. Such an alignment could contribute to social change because the proper alignment of school counselors' roles and responsibilities could enable them to be more effective social change agents. Findings from this study extends the literature on school counselor role ambiguity, role diffusion, and job satisfaction by providing evidence that supports the need for more clearly defined school counselor job roles and responsibilities.

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## Appendix A: Request to use PSCRAQ

On May 8, 2017, at 1:56 PM, Daya Patton <[daya.patton@waldenu.edu](mailto:daya.patton@waldenu.edu)> wrote:


Hello Dr. Ross,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am requesting permission to use the Public School Counselor Role Ambiguity Questionnaire as part of my dissertation study. This survey will be very useful to my research. As I am requesting your permission to use this survey, I am also requesting any additional information pertaining to the administration, scoring, and validity and reliability of the instrument.

Thanking you in advance for your support and contribution.

Daya Patton, M.A, M.Ed., LCAS  
Ph.D. Candidate Human and Social Services Program  
Family Studies and Intervention  
Walden University

## Appendix B: Permission to Use the PSCRAQ

Re: Survey Use Request Inbox x **Ross, William**

May 8 (3 days ago) ★



to me ▾

You have permission to use the survey.

***Dr. William Ross, LPC-S, LSOTP***  
Associate Professor  
Educational Leadership and Counseling  
Prairie View A&M University

## Appendix C: Request for Participation

### Cover Letter

To: Professional School Counselor Organization Leader

My name is Daya Patton and I am a doctoral candidate student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on school counselor role diffusion, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction by school level. I am writing to request permission to solicit participation from the school counselors who are members of your organization or who subscribe to your email listserv to participate in my survey research study. My specific request is that you forward the link to my research study questionnaire to your organizations members.

The survey for my research study will be an online survey that takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey will be administered via SurveyMonkey® and a notice of informed consent in the right to opt out will be provided to all participants. Participant anonymity will be maintained. Please let me know if you have any additional questions or concerns thank you in advance for assisting in completing my doctoral research study.

Sincerely,

Daya Patton

## Appendix D: Follow-up Email

Dear School Counselors,

My name is Daya Patton and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I previously sent you a request for your participation in my doctoral research study which is designed to examine the relationship between school counselor role diffusion, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction by school level. If you would like to participate in the survey, please follow the link provided below. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. All of your information will be kept confidential. If you have already completed the survey, please accept my deepest thanks for your assistance with my doctoral research study. If you would like you may forward the survey link to other practicing school counselors in the state of North Carolina.

Link to survey:

Sincerely,

Daya Patton

## Appendix E: Public School Counselor Role Ambiguity Questionnaire

**Public School Counselor  
Role Ambiguity Questionnaire**

**Instructions:** Please respond to the following questions by checking the appropriate category for each item. Thank you.

1. **Major Area:**  Counseling      2. **Age:**  Below 25 years old  
 Administration       26-34 years old  
       35-44 years old  
       45 or above
3. **Gender:**  Male      4. **Current Occupation:**  Teacher  
 Female       Ass't Principal  
       Counselor  
       Other: \_\_\_\_\_
5. **Years of Experience:**  0-5 years      6. **Ethnicity:**  African American  
 6-10 years       Anglo  
 11-15 years       Latino/Latina  
 Over 15 years       Other: \_\_\_\_\_

From a counselor or administrative perspective, please respond to each question by circling the number that best represents your professional opinion. The scale is 1 = strongly agree (SA); 2 = agree (A); 3 = don't know or unsure (DK); 4 = disagree (D); and 5 = strongly disagree (SD).

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
7. I am satisfied with the current duties and job responsibilities of public school counselors.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Public school principals should have the task of assigning the duties and job responsibilities of public school counselors.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Public school principals have too much involvement in defining the job responsibilities of public school counselors.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Public school principals don't understand the duties and job responsibilities of public school counselors.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Public school counselors should be involved in determining the duties and job responsibilities of public school counselors.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Public school counselors should only be engaged in those activities that are traditionally recognized as counselor duties.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Public school counselors should dialogue with administrators when permanently assigned non-counseling duties and job responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5



From a counselor or administrative perspective, please respond to each question by circling the number that best represents your professional opinion. The scale is 1 = strongly agree (SA); 2 = agree (A); 3 = don't know or unsure (DK); 4 = disagree (D); and 5 = strongly disagree (SD).

	SA	A	DK	D	SD
14. Public school counselors should be used as substitute Instructors when teachers don't show for work.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Disruptive students should be sent to the counselor when they have discipline problems (classroom acting-out).	1	2	3	4	5
16. Public school counselors should be engaged in scheduling school field trips.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Public school counselors should be involved in the administrative function of student course scheduling.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Public school counselors should be conducting in-school personal counseling sessions.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Public school counselors should be required to develop and conduct in-school group counseling sessions.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Public school counselors should be assigned parent involvement and PTA job responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Public school counselors don't have the time to provide in-school counseling services.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Public school counselors don't conduct counseling sessions because human service agencies are on-site and provide counseling services.	1	2	3	4	5

Any Additional comments you want to make concerning the duties and job responsibilities of public school counselors.

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Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix F: Job Satisfaction Composite Measure



doi: 10.1037/t28608-000

**Job Satisfaction Composite Measure****Items**

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All things considered, are you satisfied with your current job? Yes or No (reversed coded)

How satisfied are you with your current job in general?

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*Note .* The response scale ranged from "Very dissatisfied (1)" to "Very Satisfied (5)".

---

What percent time are you happy, neutral, or unhappy with your job on average?

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## Appendix F: Job Satisfaction Composite Measure (Continued)



**Job Satisfaction Composite Measure**  
Version Attached: Full Test

Note: Test name created by PsycTESTS

PsycTESTS Citation:

Maurer, T. J., & Chapman, E. F. (2013). Job Satisfaction Composite Measure [Database record]. Retrieved from PsycTESTS. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t28608-000>

Instrument Type:

Test

Test Format:

This 3-item measure utilizes the following response formats: Yes/No, 5-point rating scale (1 = Very dissatisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied), percentage estimation. All items are standardized (due to differing response scales) and summed to create a job satisfaction composite.

Source:

Maurer, Todd J., & Chapman, Elizabeth F. (2013). Ten years of career success in relation to individual and situational variables from the employee development literature. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol 83(3), 450-465. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2013.07.002, © 2013 by Elsevier. Reproduced by Permission of Elsevier.

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## Appendix G: Demographics Questionnaire

Are you a practicing school counselor in the State of North Carolina? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

What is your current age?

What is your gender? Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnicity?

- \_\_\_\_ White
- \_\_\_\_ Hispanic or Latino
- \_\_\_\_ Black or African American
- \_\_\_\_ Native American or American Indian
- \_\_\_\_ Asian / Pacific Islander
- \_\_\_\_ Other

What school level do you work in?

- \_\_\_\_ Elementary
- \_\_\_\_ Middle
- \_\_\_\_ High School

What school levels have you worked in? (mark all that apply)

- \_\_\_\_ Elementary
- \_\_\_\_ Middle
- \_\_\_\_ High School

Years of Experience as a School Counselor?

- \_\_\_\_ 0-5 years
- \_\_\_\_ 6-10 years
- \_\_\_\_ 11-15 years
- \_\_\_\_ Over 15 years

## Appendix H: Human Research Protections

