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An Exploration of Self-Compassion and Wellness Behaviors Among Practicing School Counselors

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An Exploration of Self-Compassion and Wellness Behaviors

Among Practicing School Counselors

A Qualitative Study

by

Anjanette Todd

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Counselor Education

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing family. Your unending belief in me has made all the difference. Thank you and this is for all of us!
Acknowledgements

I want to extend my deepest thanks and gratitude to the many individuals who have helped and supported me along this journey. Thank you Dr. Exum for your guidance and encouragement throughout this entire program. Your wisdom and kindness have made all the difference and I am so grateful for all that you have done to mentor me in this process. Thank you Dr. Topdemir, your support has been invaluable throughout my doctoral program. Your encouragement has helped me to stay focused and moving forward towards achieving my dream. To Dr. Tan, I truly appreciate you always making time to meet with me. You have a great way of helping me to organize my thoughts and keep things in perspective. To Dr. Kromrey, thank you for your patience and thoughtfulness in providing me with the feedback I need in order to keep improving my work. You have such a calming presence that I truly appreciate.
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Abstract

According to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2010), school counselors are charged with meeting the academic, social/emotional and career needs of all students (2010). In addition, school counselors serve as the front line in dealing with trauma and crisis in their schools. Those counselors who understand the importance of their own wellness and practice healthy lifestyle behaviors are better equipped to meet these demands.

Unfortunately, not all school counselors are practicing what they advocate for their students relative to promoting wellness in their own lives (O'Halloran & Linton, 2000). This lack of congruence, where school counselors are not modeling the positive lifestyle and self-care behaviors they expect of their students, may take a toll on counselors’ emotional health.

Research has been conducted exploring counselor wellness through the lens of compassion fatigue and burnout, but there has been limited research from a strength-based perspective specifically with school counselors. This study aims to add to the literature and explore the experiences of individual school counselors who can prioritize and integrate wellness principles and self-compassion behaviors and have been able to persist in the profession for 10 years or more.

Seven school counselors participated in semi-structured interviews that explored their experiences regarding wellness behaviors and the practice of self-compassion. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. Results indicated school counselors do integrate self-compassion and positive wellness behaviors. All participants shared several wellness practices such as, scheduling and modeling self-care, seeking out opportunities to increase their knowledge in the area of wellness as well as the practice of self-compassionate behavior.
Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2003, the American Counseling Association initiated a task force that specifically examined the needs of counselors who were not functioning at optimal levels of professional performance and were suffering from impairments such as compassion fatigue and burnout (Lawson, Venart, Hazler & Kottler, 2007). The goal of this initiative was to provide awareness and resources in order to benefit counselors and to assist them in building resiliency and to increase wellness (Lawson et al., 2007).

Halbert Dunn (1959) was the first to describe the concept of wellness as an active process where one strives towards a higher state of functioning. Researchers, (Ardell, 1982; Cowen, 1991; Dunn, 1959; Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000; Travis, 1978) have since expanded upon the concept and definition of wellness. In this study, wellness is defined as a healthy lifestyle with the aim of integrating body, mind and spirit in order to move towards optimal health and well-being (Myers et al., 2000). A health-promoting lifestyle is a positive approach to day-to-day life, and is an active process towards enhancing wellness and fulfilling one’s full potential (Walker, Sechrist & Pender, 1987).

The American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) has provided guidelines in their code of ethics to address counselor wellness. For example, the guidelines discuss counselors professional responsibility to be active participants in monitoring and sustaining their own well-being while integrating wellness as part of their lifestyle (ACA, 2014).

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2016) ethical standards also reflect similar guidelines, asserting school counselors are responsible for promoting and
maintaining high levels of wellness while practicing in the profession. When counselors’ actions and behaviors demonstrate the high regard they have for their own wellness, this can be the catalyst for cultivating wellness in others (Lawson, et al., 2007).

**Background of the Problem**

Based on the ACA and ASCA standards and guidelines outlined above, it stands to reason counselors should be expected to engage in activities that encourage wellness, balance and harmony. Unfortunately, not all school counselors are practicing what they advocate for their students relative to promoting wellness in their own lives (O'Halloran & Linton, 2000). This lack of congruence, where school counselors are not modeling the positive lifestyle and self-care behaviors they expect of their students, may take a toll on counselors’ emotional health. When wellness and positive lifestyle behaviors are not a priority for counselors, their average professional career span is approximately 10 years (Grosch & Olsen, 1994). Therefore, although counselors strive to promote wellness in the lives of others, if they neglect to prioritize their own wellness, negative career and emotional health consequences may result (Grosch & Olsen, 1994).

Lawson’s (2007) national survey examining counselor wellness (n=501) among ACA members also found that school counselors in K-12 settings suffered more from compassion fatigue and burnout than those counselors working in private practice. These findings further support how vulnerable school counselors are to stressors due to the emotional demanding needs of the school environments. As role models for promoting wellness within the school environment, school counselors require self-care strategies that are effective, can be implemented easily within the school setting and can serve as a pathway to increase wellness.
Thus, a need exists to explore how some practicing school counselors are able to successfully balance caring for others’ while also prioritizing the practice of self-care into their own lives.

**Self-Compassion**

An effective therapeutic relationship involves the infusion of empathy and compassion as integral components in the counseling process and allows counselors to briefly see the world as their client’s do (Figley, 2002). However, the cost of being empathic and compassionate over time can leave some counselors vulnerable to experiencing compassion fatigue (Figley, 2002). Compassion fatigue can be defined as “a combination of physical, emotional and spiritual depletion associated with caring for patients in significant emotional pain and physical distress” (Lombardo & Eyre, 2011 para.1). This type of impairment, that is directly related to the suffering of the client, emotionally drains the counselor and can result in a diminished capacity or desire in being empathic towards another (Figley, 2002). Fortunately, compassion fatigue can be successfully addressed in counselors as long as it is recognized and strategies are implemented (Figley, 2002). Therefore, it is important for counselors, who are suffering from compassion fatigue, to acknowledge and treat this type of impairment. Compassion fatigue may be the first sign that counselors’ level of wellness is at-risk and if left untreated has been associated as a precursor to burnout (Figley, 2002). Counselor burnout, which has been described as a “breaking of the spirit” (Grosch & Olsen, 1994, p. x), is a similar construct to compassion fatigue. Burnout is defined as “a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations" (Figley 1995). Burnout typically occurs over an extended period of time. Unlike compassion fatigue that can be treated with early intervention, professionals suffering from burnout usually end up changing jobs, or leaving their profession in order to address this level of impairment (Figley, 2002).
Therefore, in order to mitigate these impairments, school counselors must notice when they are beginning to feel out of balance and then choose to comfort and care for themselves, so that they can once again feel emotionally nourished and continue to practice at their optimal level of effectiveness. Kristen Neff (2011) calls this process self-compassion and has been leading the research in this growing area. Self-compassion is a healthy, caring and kind attitude that is directed toward oneself in times of suffering (Neff & Dahm, 2014).

The practice of self-compassion among school counselors may be one avenue to wellness, as previous research has connected high levels of self-compassion to healthy lifestyle behaviors and greater levels of psychological health (Neff, 2003a). Self-compassion can be regarded as a shift in perspective about how one views oneself when struggling with circumstances that cause emotional, mental, or physical discomfort (Neff & Dahm, 2014; Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). Just as compassion, involves an acute awareness of the experience of another’s suffering, self-compassion involves the awareness and acceptance of one’s own suffering (Neff, 2003b; Neff & Dahm, 2014).

Self-compassion is especially important for those in the helping professions (Neff, 2011) such as, licensed mental health counselors and professional school counselors who, by the very nature of their work, are exposed to the emotional suffering of the clients and students they serve. Thus, the practice of self-compassion can be viewed as a protective construct and is comprised of three interrelated main elements: mindfulness, common human experience and self-kindness (Neff, 2003b). These three constructs will be briefly discussed below.

**Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is derived from Buddhist Philosophy; however, in Western society, mindfulness has emerged as a more therapeutic application (Davis & Hayes, 2011). Mindfulness comes from the translation of the Pali word “Sati” (Siegel, Germer & Olendzki
Sati connotes awareness, attention and remembering (Siegel et al., 2009). Mindfulness is the capacity to be fully conscious and aware and is described as non-judgmental, paying attention on purpose of the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). Mindfulness in everyday life involves reminding oneself throughout the day to pay attention to what is happening in the present moment without changing normal routines (Brown, Marquis & Guiffrida, 2013). It involves using the five senses to appreciate the beauty and uniqueness of everyday ordinary experiences. Mindfulness, as it is related to self-compassion, encompasses awareness of the present moment while paying particular attention to experiences of pain and suffering that presents in an individual’s thoughts and feelings (Neff & Dahm, 2014). Thus, once one acknowledges and is mindful that they are suffering, they can then begin to provide themself with the care and compassion needed in order to handle the situation that arises (Neff & Dahm, 2014).

**Common humanity.** The second construct of common humanity relates to the idea that everyone, at some point in one’s life, has made a mistake and/or failed at attempting something. Being human does not equate to being perfect. In fact, imperfection is completely normal and it is what binds us in our shared human experience. Kristen Neff (2003b) defines common humanity as “seeing one’s experience as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separating and isolating” (p. 89).

**Self-kindness.** The third construct is self-kindness. In Western culture, treating others kindly is typically a foundational characteristic that is taught early in one’s life (Neff, 2003b). However, the idea of practicing self-kindness is not as prevalent. Individuals have reported that they often treat others’ more kindly than they do themselves (Neff, 2003a). Neff (2003b) defines
self-kindness as “extending kindness and understanding to oneself rather than harsh judgment and self-criticism” (p. 89).

Therefore, the practice of self-compassion creates a space, in times of suffering, where counselors can admit they are struggling, or have made a mistake and feel empowered to create change in order to learn and grow (Neff, 2009). As a result, the practice of self-compassion provides opportunities for counselors to promote their own well-being.

Interestingly, no known studies have been conducted that examine wellness behaviors in relation to the construct of self-compassion in practicing school counselors. Therefore, wellness as it relates to practicing school counselors’ level of self-compassion is unknown. This is an area that requires further investigation in order to provide school counselors with more pathways to integrate wellness into their professional and personal lives.

**Statement of the Problem**

According to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2010), school counselors are charged with meeting the academic, social/emotional and career needs of all students (2010). In addition, school counselors serve as the front line in dealing with trauma and crisis in their schools. School counselors who understand the importance of their own wellness are better equipped to meet these demands. Counselors who prioritize their own emotional and physical wellness are at a lower risk for burnout and compassion fatigue (Lawson et al., 2007). Burnout and compassion fatigue are associated with negative emotional outcomes in some counselors (Figley, 2002), and may even put students at risk for harm (Lawson & Myers, 2011).

Counselors who integrate and prioritize positive lifestyle behaviors serve as an exemplary for understanding how to maintain optimal wellness. Accordingly, it is important to develop a
deeper understanding of how these exemplary school counselors are able to address and optimize their own wellness, so that others can learn how they can continue to serve others effectively.

Assumptions

There are several assumptions that have guided my thinking relative to this research. First, I believe the reason some school counselors may be able to make wellness a priority and integrate positive lifestyle behaviors into their lives is because they possess certain innate characteristics such as strong self-efficacy, that fosters the development and sustainability of how these individuals think, behave, and feel about wellness. Second, school counselors who consistently apply wellness behaviors such as, the practice of self-compassion, may feel more prepared to cope with the stressors and struggles that manifest in one’s everyday personal and professional life. I also believe that as a result of this study some key positive psychology constructs such as gratitude, hope and optimism (Seligman, 2002) may emerge as ways to sustain and increase wellness among practicing school counselors. In addition, the ability to maintain a positive work-life balance and the practice of contemplative practices among these counselors are anticipated areas that will be discussed by counselors as pathways to wellness.

In addition to my personal assumptions the Theory of Work adjustments, which is the theoretical framework guiding this study also carries some assumptions and propositions worth noting. For example, this framework has 17 propositions that outline the foundational elements included in this theory and describes adjustment as cyclical process, which begins when the individual begins to feel dissatisfied (Dawis, 2005). Further information on this theoretical framework will be discussed below.
Conceptual Framework

The Theory of Work Adjustment serves as the basis for the conceptual framework for this study. The Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) is a theory that came out of the work from the University of Minnesota’s Work Adjustment Project in 1964. The purpose of the project was to better understand and measure how individuals who participated in vocational rehabilitation adjusted to their work environments (Dawis, 2005). The Theory of Work Adjustment began looking at how the biological and psychological needs of the person/worker (P) satisfy, or are satisfied by, the work environment (E) (Dawis, 2005). This person-environment fit model has since expanded and includes the process model and prediction model (Dawis, 2005). The process model refers to the ongoing interactions to describe behaviors in work contexts and the prediction model refers to the match between the individual’s abilities and environment (Dawis, 2005).

Abilities can be described as an individual’s assortment of skills that fit, or match, an occupation’s needs. Values can be described as representing a grouping of needs such as: achievement, comfort, status, altruism, safety and autonomy that come from the work environment (Swanson & Fouad, 2014). These two dimensions are viewed as reciprocally interacting constructs: (1) abilities -ability requirements lead to an individual’s levels of satisfactoriness (2) occupational values - occupational reinforcers lead to an individual’s levels of satisfaction (Swanson & Fouad, 2014). Satisfactoriness can be thought of in terms of how satisfactory of a worker an individual is (Swanson & Fouad, 2014). Satisfaction can be thought of in terms of how sufficiently a worker’s needs are met by the job.

The Theory of Work Adjustment emphasizes the more one’s abilities corresponds with his or her work environment and/or work environment corresponds with abilities the more likely
job satisfactoriness will occur (Swanson & Fouad, 2014). When this mutual satisfactoriness occurs, a likely outcome is retention in one’s profession and this has also been linked to well-being in individuals (Eggerth, 2008). Conversely, when there is a lack of correspondence (dis-correspondence) between an individual’s abilities and his or her environment this can lead to dissatisfaction and is the catalyst for adjustment behavior (Swanson & Fouad, 2014).

This theory concentrates on the variability of an individual rather than focusing on one’s typical behavior. This focus on differences highlights the unique aspects of behavior that differentiates individuals from each other; thus, allowing for explanations of different outcomes for individuals who are experiencing similar situations (work environments) (Dawis, 2005). For example, a school counselor who understands the importance of self-care and also prioritizes their own wellness may have a satisfactory experience in their work environment and as a result stay in their position for longer. In contrast, a school counselor in the same school, who may either not prioritize their own wellness or lack the skills necessary to provide self-care, may have an unsatisfactory experience in the same work environment and as a result leave the school or the profession as a whole.

Individual’s moderate adjustment behavior through the use of adjustment styles (Dawis, 2005). Adjustment styles consist of four variables: activeness, reactiveness, flexibility and perseverance. Flexibility is seen in one’s ability to handle dis-correspondence in an environment between needs and job reinforcers, before moving forward to make an adjustment (Swanson & Fouad, 2014). Perseverance is seen when an employee continues on a job even after a lack of correspondence is noticed and the employee works to adjust to reduce this dis-correspondence (Swanson & Fouad, 2014). If the employee is unable to successfully adjust to this new situation, separation from employment may likely ensue (Swanson & Fouad, 2014).
The lack of correspondence that has initiated this adjustment behavior to begin may cause an individual to respond using the following two adjustment modes: (1) activeness, where the individual may try to change aspects of their work environment, or (2) reactiveness, where the individual may try to change as aspect of the self to reduce this dis-correspondence (Dawis, 2005). For example, a school counselor with an ever-increasing student caseload, who displays an active adjustment mode, may speak to their administrator regarding a decrease in the amount of non-essential duty assignments such as bus duty or lunch duty. Whereas, a school counselor who displays a reactive adjustment mode, may choose to come in to work earlier and/or leave work later in order to have more time in the day to see students and fulfill other aspects of their job.

The Theory of Work Adjustment argues when there is a lack of an alignment between tasks (promote wellness in others) and abilities (promote wellness in self), job dissatisfaction, job stressors and possible attrition may ensue. Therefore, this theory will provide the foundation for me to better understand how some school counselors are able to prioritize wellness and consequently have continued in the counseling profession, where other counselors have chosen to leave the job or the profession as a whole. The conceptual framework for this study is depicted below.
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Rationale

Therefore, the aim of this qualitative case study is to explore the experiences of individual school counselors, who are successful in delivering high quality services at their schools and who are also successful at integrating wellness practices into their daily lives.

These school counselors’ will serve as positive examples demonstrating to other counselors the behaviors and techniques they have used to successfully prioritize and maintain wellness and balance. As a result of this strength-based exploration of counselors’ positive lifestyle behaviors, strategies and techniques will be identified in order to increase and sustain wellness among practicing counselors. Consequently, the application of these positive wellness strategies and techniques may impact current school counselors’ ability to continue in the counseling profession beyond the counselors’ 10-year average career span.

Past literature has highlighted factors such as compassion fatigue and burnout to address the issue of counselor wellness (Exum, 2002; Figley, 2002; Harnois, 2015; Thompson, Amatea, & Thompson, 2014; Wells, 2008). However, the research is sparse when examining positive wellness behaviors among practicing school counselors (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Evans & Payne, 2007; Lawson, 2007; Lawson & Myers, 2011) and even more limited when exploring wellness as it relates to school counselors’ level of self-compassion. Therefore, this research will help to fill the gap in this area as well as provide school counselors with strategies to increase their level of self-compassion that will then impact their overall wellness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore, through the use of a semi-structured interview, the experiences of individual school counselors who can prioritize and integrate wellness principles and behaviors into their professional practice. School counselors will be
interviewed in order for me to learn and to understand their health and wellness behaviors and strategies. I also seek to examine the possible level of impact of the construct of self-compassion in their lives. The knowledge obtained from this process will provide a more complete picture of the individual experiences of school counselors’ wellness behaviors. The information gathered in this study will be made available to other school counselors for them to use in order to create, increase, or sustain their own wellness.

**Questions Guiding the Inquiry.** There are three major exploratory questions that guide this research:

1. How do practicing school counselors achieve and maintain wellness?
2. What factors contribute to school counselor wellness?
3. To what extent is the concept of self-compassion related to school counselors achieving wellness?

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for multiple reasons. School counselors are continuously seeking new programs and techniques in order to address the social/emotional needs of students. However, few if any of these programs/techniques include exercises for school counselors to use in conjunction with, or even in preparation for the delivery of these resources to the student. School counselors most often are the only tool that is used in the delivery of the intervention. Therefore, it makes sense to provide care, attention and maintenance of this tool (counselor) in order for him or her to continue to operate at optimal levels.

As discussed previously, if school counselors persists in their work and neglect self-care this can result in counselor burnout and/or compassion fatigue. Counselors often feel emotionally drained due to the effort that goes into trying to understand the point of view of others who are
suffering (Figley, 2002). Therefore, the counselors’ ability to care for and nourish their own emotional state can either positively or negatively impact the manner in which students social/emotional needs are addressed and met by the counselor. Thus, it is vital that counselors have developed positive wellness behaviors, such as the practice of self-compassion. The act of practicing self-compassion is a way for counselors to care for and address their own suffering, so that the counselor can then care for the student.

Furthermore, there are additional occupational stressors unique to the K-12 school setting that also exist for school counselors. For example, school counselors are the only professional counselors who have non-counselors as their supervisors. In a school setting, the school principal is the counselor’s supervisor, and if that person was not previously a school counselor before becoming the principal she or he may have a limited understanding of the role of the school counselor in this setting. Thus, counselors’ growing level of job related stress due to supervision concerns, plus increasing student case loads combined with the lack of clearly defined job roles within the school setting can add to the perceived stress of a school counselor (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Wells, 2008). As a result, unhealthy lifestyle behaviors may manifest, and if left untreated, job stress and negative lifestyle behaviors can lead to burnout and attrition as school counselors either leave their school or the profession as a whole.

Although school counselors may not have direct power over the organizational structure and hierarchy within the school environment, they do have power to create, increase or sustain their own level of wellness and well-being. In order for school counselors to advocate for their students, for themselves and for their role in the school setting, they need to come from a position of emotional strength. One way to accomplish this is by engaging in self-care including focusing on positive lifestyle behaviors and by practicing self-compassion. Thus, there is a need
within the counselor education literature to acknowledge the importance of promoting school
counselor wellness. Additionally, there is also a need to gain insight from counselors who are
successfully integrating wellness behaviors into their lives as these can provide examples for
others as to what is working for them.

**Definition of Terms**

**Burnout:** Burnout can be defined as “a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion
caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations” (Figley 1995).

**Compassion fatigue:** Compassion fatigue can be defined as “a combination of physical,
emotional and spiritual depletion associated with caring for patients in significant emotional pain
and physical distress” (Lombardo & Eyre, 2011 para.1).

**Counselor Impairment:** According to the ACA Task Force on wellness, counselor impairment
occurs when there is a reduction in the counselor's professional performance. Some examples
include: mental health concerns, substance abuse, illness and personal crisis. This can
compromise client care as well as potentially cause harm to the client. However, impairment in
and of itself does not imply unethical behavior. (ACA, n.d.).

**Health-promoting Lifestyle:** A health-promoting lifestyle is a positive approach to day-to-day
life, and is an active process towards enhancing wellness and fulfilling one’s full potential
(Walker, Sechrist & Pender, 1987).

**Mindfulness:** The power to be fully cognizant and aware and is described as non-judgmental,
paying attention on purpose of the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness can be
operationally defined by a total mindfulness mean score of 3.86 or higher on the MAAS. Higher
scores equal greater levels of mindfulness.
Self-care: Self-care is a broad term, which relates to how an individual’s promotes well-being in themselves and encompasses areas such as physical, psychological, spiritual, professional and personal support systems (Richards, Campenni & Burke, 2010).

Self-compassion: A healthy, caring and kind attitude that is directed toward oneself in times of suffering (Neff & Dahm, 2014). Self-compassion consists of three constructs (mindfulness, common humanity and self-kindness and can be operationalized through the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003). Higher mean scores on the SCS result in higher levels of overall self-compassion.

Wellness: A lifestyle with the aim of integrating body, mind and spirit in order to move towards optimal health and well-being (Myers et al., 2000). Wellness can be operationally defined from a total overall mean wellness score of 2.5 or higher on the HPLP-II.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

In this study, participants will be limited to professional school counselors who have been practicing in the profession for at least ten years and who currently work in a K-12 school setting in one state in the southeastern United States. Based on the literature reviewed, the average professional career span of a counselor is 10 years (Grosch & Olsen, 1994). Therefore, the inclusion criteria of school counselors having at least 10 years of practice was chosen to provide evidence that these identified counselors who successfully integrate wellness behaviors have found a way to persist past this average career span.

Licensed mental health counselors working in private practice were intentionally not included because the review of the literature supported the argument that school counselors are exposed to additional occupational stressors that are unique to the school setting. These stressors can include having supervisors that are not counselors, high counselor to student ratios, role
ambiguity, assignment of inappropriate job tasks, feeling unappreciated and/or competing job demands (Bryant & Constantine, 2006). Thus, licensed mental health counselors working in private practice were purposefully not included in this sample.

**Summary of this Chapter**

Chapter one presented background information related to the study, the statement of the problem, study significance, purpose, conceptual framework as well as the study scope and delimitation.

Chapter two provides an overview of the concept of wellness as well as provide a review of the relevant literature related to wellness, self-compassion and positive psychology research in counseling.

Chapter three presents the research design and methods for this qualitative study. It will provide a discussion of the participants, selection criteria, instruments and procedures for data analysis.

Chapter four begins by explaining the process used to analyze the data. The participant demographics are then presented, followed by the introduction of each participant as its own individual case. A cross-case analysis is then presented.

Chapter five will be a discussion and present the implications for school counselors as well as school districts in regards to the retention of school counselors.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter will provide a review of the counseling literature related to different definitions of wellness, the wellness research in the area of counseling, positive psychology and self-compassion research as it relates to counseling.

Overview of Wellness

The concept of wellness, introduced in 1959 by Halbert Dunn, was originally described as an active process in which one moves towards balance and actualizing a higher state of functioning. This view of wellness as an evolutionary process in which one moves purposefully in a positive direction, was a new concept during that time and set the stage for the wellness movement of today (Strohecker, 2006).

In the 1970’s Donald Ardell’s work echoed that of Dunn (1959), viewing wellness as being more than just the absence of illness. Ardell (1982) believed that wellness involved the five main lifestyle elements and encompassed the physical, environmental, stress management, nutrition, and self-responsibility areas of an individual’s life. The premise of Ardell’s approach involved individuals striving to take responsibility for their own health behaviors in order to improve their quality of life (Kirkland, 2014).

Travis (1978) was another forerunner in the shift towards considering optimal health as the goal of wellness and defined wellness as an unending progression of choices that falls on a continuum of health to illness. Travis’ approach was the first to highlight that wellness occurs on a spectrum, and the lifestyle choices one makes impacts where on this wellness spectrum that individual will fall.
Similar to Travis (1978), Cohen’s (1991) view of wellness involves a continuum where lifestyle factors can either restrict wellness or promote wellness. Cohen’s (1991) described wellness as having the opportunity to fulfill one’s potential, having the capacity to bounce back from life stressors, having an understanding of how social structures impact wellness outcomes, and having a feeling of control over one’s life. These interconnected factors were viewed as integral to positive health promotion and wellness (Cohen, 1991).

As discussed earlier, Myers et al. (2000) have conducted research in the area of wellness as it relates to counselors and defined wellness as a lifestyle having the aim of integrating body, mind and spirit in order to move towards optimal health and well-being.

Historically wellness has been aligned with growing in a purposeful direction and creating positive change in one’s life (Dunn, 1959). These concepts were also supported by the early core elements of the counseling profession. The ACA’s 1988 mission statement highlighted the importance of enhancing the potential for growth over one’s lifespan (Myers, 1992). This was also reflected in ACA’s 1991 strategic plan where this emerging emphasis on wellness was highlighted in that year’s theme entitled “Wellness Throughout the Lifespan.”

Even more recently wellness has been formally addressed as a core component of counseling as is evident in the definition of counseling that came about out of the initiative 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014). The development of a unified description of professional counseling was a priority of this initiative, and the following was the definition that was developed: “Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals” (Kaplan et al., 2014, p. 368). Therefore, this integration of
wellness among professional counseling organizations and initiatives has highlighted the importance of making wellness a priority.

**Wellness Research in Counseling**

School counselors are often so busy caring for the needs of the students, that they may neglect to monitor their own social/emotional needs. When this occurs, wellness is often not viewed as a priority and this unbalance may impact counselors’ life satisfaction.

Bryant and Constantine (2006) conducted a study examining to what extent life satisfaction scores in women school counselors were influenced by the multiple roles they balance and their job satisfaction levels. Bryant and Constantine (2006) used Role Balance Theory as the theoretical framework to guide this study. Marks & MacDermid (1996) discussed how Role Balance Theory encompasses how it is typical for individuals to assume multiple roles during the course of their lives’. What is important is how these roles are organized within one’s environmental context that can impact an individual’s overall wellness and well-being.

The researchers hypothesized that higher life satisfaction scores would be observed in those counselors who demonstrated a greater ability to balance roles and had higher job satisfaction scores (Bryant & Constantine, 2006). Participants (n = 133) were members of the ASCA and ranged in age from 24-61 years with 80% of the sample identifying as White (Bryant and Constantine, 2006). Three scales involving the Role Balance Scale (RBS; Marks, 1994), the Job Satisfaction Blank-Revised (JSB-R; Crutchfield, & Borders, 1997), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) were used in order to measure the constructs of role balance, job and life satisfaction (Bryant & Constantine, 2006). The researchers used hierarchical regression analysis to analyze the data and found that their hypothesis was supported. Multiple roles and employment satisfaction were significantly
positively predictive of the participants’ life satisfaction scores (Bryant & Constantine, 2006). These findings have implications for women counselors in that they make some possible connections how certain job characteristics in counseling such as, sense of control, autonomy and perceived meaningful work, may positively impact overall life satisfaction and thereby increase overall wellness (Bryant & Constantine, 2006).

Counselors must take responsibility for preserving their own wellness as it can impact both their personal and professional lives. Evans and Payne (2007) examined the work-life balance of school counselors in New Zealand through the examination of their professional narratives ($n = 6$). The purpose of this study was for the researchers to gain deeper insights into how school counselors integrated self-care into their lives and how this knowledge could be used in counselor training programs. The school counselors in this study included four women and two men whose counseling experience was reported as ranging from 8 to 16 years and whose ages ranged from 35 to 59 years old (Evans & Payne, 2007).

Evans and Payne (2007) conducted semi-structured interviews and used the following two prompts to guide the conversation with participants: “tell me what you find most satisfying in your work?” and “what are the barriers that interfere with doing satisfying work?” The researchers discussed how the concepts of stress and work-life balance were purposefully not included in the interviews as to not influence the direction or content of the participants’ stories (Evans & Payne, 2007). To present the data, a thematic format was utilized and the following themes emerged: the need for self-care, collegial support from colleagues, support from supervisors and the need for work-life balance.

Similar to Bryant and Constantine (2006), participants in this study understood the privilege of meaningful work and connected this to being able to impact youth in a positive way.
Interestingly, the counselors also recognized that part of the job inevitably involves feelings of perceived stress and discussed the importance of having strategies to manage these occurrences while in the school setting (Evans & Payne, 2007). As participants in this study discussed, these strategies could include, exercising after work, meeting friends for lunch, taking a vacation, or even just having a supportive fellow counseling colleague/supervisor at school that can empathize with their experience (Evans & Payne, 2007). Regardless of the strategy chosen, some form of holistic self-care is essential for counselors to recharge so they can manage the stressors that will arise within their school environment more effectively.

Interestingly, this study also provided a glimpse into how these school counselors envisioned their future job outlook. For example, all six of the participants discussed how they saw themselves as leaving the school counseling profession before retirement (Evans & Payne, 2007). Although feelings of burnout and compassion fatigue were not specifically cited as reasons for their stance, it is insightful that these counselors all included in their narrative a future career change that included leaving the counseling profession entirely. Similarly, Baggerly and Osborne (2006) conducted a study that examined 1,280 school counselors level of satisfaction and job commitment and found over 23% of school counselors also planned to leave the profession, quit, retire, or were unsure of their future career plans.

Similar to Bryant and Constantine (2006) the idea of having role balance was a theme that transcended through each of the participants narratives. Balance was the metaphor used to describe how the participants were able to navigate through the multiple personal and professional roles these counselors encountered throughout their everyday lives. Some of the participants discussed balance in terms of having hobbies/exercise in their lives that was separate from their work, whereas others discussed balance as having professional and emotional
boundaries as they related to self-care (Bryant & Constantine, 2006). In addition, some participants even discussed how the lack of support from administration, due to not understanding the professional role of a school counselor contributed to their stress. Thus, at times making it difficult to manage the multiple roles they were juggling (Bryant & Constantine, 2006).

Therefore, a need exists to bring to light the multiple personal and professional roles that school counselors manage. As a result, counselors may be able to prepare for these experiences by proactively integrating self-care strategies into their work and life in order to foster balance. Additionally the early and ongoing integration of these strategies to help manage stress may possibly impact school counselor’s perception of continuing in this profession for many years to come.

Lawson (2007) conducted a study to provide a better understanding of the variables that contributed to counselor wellness. The purpose of the study was to look more closely at the behaviors and strategies that add to the overall well-being in counselors. Participants were randomly recruited from the ACA membership directory (n = 501). Of the total sample, 77.6% were women and 71.8% identified as White, with a mean age range of 48.8 years old (Lawson, 2007). Two instruments were used in this study. The Career Sustaining Behavior Questionnaire (CSBQ; Stevanovic & Rupert, 2004) measures how counselors view the importance of specific behaviors in their work. The Professional Quality of Life Scale-III-Revised (PQLS-III-R; Stamm, 2005) that measures the constructs of compassion satisfaction/fatigue and burnout. Overall results indicated that counselors surveyed found their work to be meaningful and were satisfied with their career choice (Lawson, 2007). However, the Lawson (2007) data also revealed that there were counselors who were well under the cutoff mark for compassion
satisfaction (14%) and who were well over the cut-off mark for compassion fatigue (10.8%) and burnout (5.2%). These scores provided evidence that there are counselors who are currently practicing that are not at their optimal levels of wellness and may possibly be at-risk for impairment (Lawson, 2007).

One surprising finding that came out of this research was the relationship between hours of supervision and burnout and compassion fatigue reported by counselors (Lawson, 2007). For example, the results showed that counselors who reported more hours receiving supervision scored significantly higher in the areas of compassion fatigue and burnout than those who reported receiving less hours participating in supervision (Lawson, 2007). As a possible explanation of this phenomenon, Lawson (2007) offered that novice counselors may be the ones experiencing this as they receive more hours of supervision due to their novice status may consequently be feeling more susceptible to factor related to burnout.

Another interesting result in this study found that counselors in K-12 school settings scored higher in the areas of compassion fatigue and burnout than those counselors who worked in a private practice setting (Lawson, 2007). A possible explanation for this could be explained by the additional occupational stressors that are unique to school counselors in the K-12 school setting such as, role ambiguity. For example, role ambiguity may manifest when school counselors are inappropriately tasked with functions that are not related to their primary roles (i.e. clerical tasks); consequently, resulting in additional stressors that private practice counselors may not experience. However, Lawson’s (2007) study also discussed how certain career sustaining behaviors (CSB) such as, exhibiting work-life balance, quality time with family, maintaining perspective, self-awareness and a sense of humor, are all viewed as the top behaviors that can help counselors to function at their optimal levels of wellness. These CSB can
be viewed through the lens of Role Balance Theory, as they provide counselors with positive behaviors that highlight different roles in their lives but are all equally as important as the other. These CSB’s also connect to Bryant and Constantine (2006) and Evans and Payne (2007) as they also viewed the importance of school counselors being able to positively balance multiple roles within their environment.

Richards et al. (2010) conducted a study investigating the relationship of self-care to well-being in counseling professionals while also considering the impact the constructs of self-awareness and mindfulness have in this process. The researchers hypothesized that a significant relationship would exist between self-awareness and mindfulness. Also, that mindfulness would play a significant role in the path from self-care to well-being (Richards et al., 2010).

Participants \( n = 148 \) included professional counselors working in a community agency, college counseling center, or private practice with 77.1% women and 94.3% identified as White (Richards et al., 2010).

Four measures were used in this study in order to assess the researchers hypothesis. Self-care was measured by having participants rate themselves on a Likert scale in four categories that included: physical, psychological, spiritual, and support (Richards et al., 2010). The researchers used the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS; Grant, Franklin & Langford, 2002) to evaluate the participants’ thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) was utilized to gauge mindfulness levels in participants. The Schwartz Outcomes Scale-10 (SOS-10; Blais, Lenderking, Baer, DeLorell, Peets, Leahy & Burns, 1999) was used to understand well-being levels among participants in this study. Unlike Bryant and Constantine (2006), Evans and Payne (2007) and Lawson (2007), this study did not include school counselors in their sample, choosing only to look at licensed mental
health counselors who were in current practice. Although, some of the organizational stressors that are unique to school counselors in a school setting are not addressed, this study still provided insight into how counselors could address and engage in the practice of self-care and wellness. A meditational analysis was conducted and findings supported most of the researchers predictions. For example, the constructs of mindfulness and self-awareness were positively correlated to one another (Richards et al., 2010). In addition, mindfulness was also found to serve as a mediator when examining self-care importance and well-being (Richards et al., 2010). These findings brings to light the value of practicing mindfulness as it looks to be a necessary precursor in order to reap the full benefits of wellness as it relates to the perception of the importance of self-care held by counselors. However, the researchers did not find significant results when examining the relationship between mindfulness and self-care frequency. This non-significant finding could mean that an increase in self-care activities by counselors could also impact well-being without the construct of mindfulness being needed. These findings are all important because they provide counselors with information regarding the importance of integrating wellness into one’s life. Thus, counselors can choose to increase the frequency of self-care practices and this can increase well-being. Counselors can also integrate the construct of mindfulness into their lives, as this in itself is a form of self-care. Additionally, mindfulness can also be seen as a pathway that may enhance the likelihood that self-care is viewed as important and consequently integrated into an individual’s life to impact wellness.

Lawson and Myers (2011) conducted a study with counselors that examined professional quality of life factors and career sustaining behaviors and explored how these factors and behaviors connected to counselors levels of wellness. Consistent with the previous studies reviewed, participants (n = 506) were majority female (78.8%) with (89.1%) identifying as
White. Additionally, (20.6%) reported to be employed in a K-12 school setting (Lawson & Myers, 2011). Similar to Lawson (2007), the CSBQ was used to measure behaviors as they related to occupational tasks and the PQLS-III-R was used to examine the dimensions of compassion fatigue/satisfaction and burnout. The third instrument was the 5F-Wel and this was used to measure five separate component of wellness: Essential Self, Social Self, Creative Self, Physical Self and Coping Self (Lawson & Myers, 2011). The results indicated the group of counselors in this study exhibited high levels of overall wellness. Additionally, the participants reported higher professional quality of life factors along with greater identification of career sustaining behaviors than previous studies found (Lawson & Myers, 2011). Interestingly, the counselors working in a private practice setting, scored higher in total wellness and second-order wellness than those counselors who worked in the K-12 school environments (Lawson & Myers, 2011). Although the authors did not offer any reasons as to why this may have occurred, similar to the Lawson (2007) study a possible explanation could be that there are some environmental factors unique to a K-12 setting that may contribute to the diminished levels of wellness found in these school counselors. When examining the results from the PQLS-III-R, counselors’ caseloads stood out as a significant variable. For example, Lawson and Myers (2011) discussed how those counselors who had survivors of trauma included in their caseloads, displayed a greater potential for exhibiting signs of burnout (Lawson & Myers, 2011). Moreover, higher levels of wellness were found in counselors who identified greater career sustaining behaviors in this study (Lawson & Myers, 2011).

Burnett (2012) examined school counselors’ perceptions of preparedness to implement wellness concepts into school counseling programs. Participants (n = 156) consisted of school counselors with the majority (87.8%) identifying as Caucasian and (94.3%) female (Burnett,
The researchers created a survey specifically for this study in order to measure school counselors’ total preparedness levels. The survey included the sub areas: education, assessment, planning, follow-up, consultation/collaboration and diversity (Burnett, 2012). Results of this study found no significant differences between counselors’ total level of preparedness and years of experience, or graduation from a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (Burnett, 2012). However, there was a significant positive correlation between the amount of hours counselors delivered wellness strategies to students and their total level of preparedness. Thus, increasing the amount of time spent teaching wellness strategies and techniques to students augmented the counselors’ own perception of preparedness in this area (Burnett, 2012). Interestingly, this study also found that compared to elementary and middle school counselors, some high school counselors did not perceive themselves as having a role in promoting wellness in their school settings (Burnett, 2012). One possible explanation could be that some high school counselor may gravitate towards a more academic and career focus due to the occupational priorities (grades, schedule changes, testing and career planning) that align with the demands of a high school counselor. However, even if counselors are not able to teach wellness strategies due to time constraints in their educational setting, counselors at all levels can still model the importance of wellness through their behaviors. Serving as a role model who practices positive wellness behaviors may be just as impactful as teaching wellness strategies to the students.

This study focused on how prepared school counselors viewed their ability to deliver a curriculum with a wellness focus into their school settings. Although, it was comprehensive in gathering perceptions on counselor preparedness, it did not address the counselors’ own view of wellness, or even what types of wellness behaviors the counselors currently practice in his or her
own life. Knowing counselors own wellness behaviors may provide insight into their level of preparedness and also may provide an understanding in how their own level of wellness impacts his or her counseling practice. Therefore, it is important to recognize the wellness behaviors of practicing school counselors and how these behaviors impact them personally and professionally. This information may inform and provide an example for others counselors on how to successfully prioritize and integrate positive wellness behaviors for themselves.

More recently, Stender (2013) examined counselor’s perceptions of self-care, identifying strategies that were used by counselors. The main aim of this research was to understand how counselors maintain optimal health and well-being while mitigating burnout (Stender, 2013). The researcher met with participants (n = 12) one time for in-depth semi-structured interviews. The participants (10 females and 2 males) were asked a series of questions in order to identify self-care practices that helped to augment wellness in the context of their professional counseling practice (Stender, 2013). The interviews were analyzed using Lincoln and Guba’s constant comparison method and the following themes related to self-care strategies emerged: exercise, social supports and mindfulness (Stender, 2013). Stender (2013) also found that many of the participants discussed how their form of self-care had changed and evolved over time in response to their life situation. Finally, three major themes emerged related to how participant’s defined self-care and included participants: self-awareness, self-reflection and taking of action/doing something (Stender, 2013). Interestingly, caseload concerns and lack of autonomy were not brought up by any of the participants in this study. One possible explanation for this omission could be that all 12 of these counselors were not school counselors working in a K-12 setting. Providing further support for the occupational stressors that are unique to those counselors working in the school system. As a recommendation, Stender (2013) proposed the integration of

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self-care training into college counseling programs in order to create sustainable positive habits that may then be carried into a counselor’s professional lives. However, this does not address the counselor’s who are already practicing in the field.

**Self-Compassion Research in Counseling**

Counseling professionals desire self-care techniques that can be implemented easily and as needed. As discussed in the Stender (2013) study, self-care can be described in terms of self-reflection, awareness and action and these concepts are meant to be integrated into one’s life completely, not put off until a person has the time to focus on them. Meaning that once an individual is aware he or she requires self-care, strategies and techniques should be initiated, as opposed to waiting until a later time begin care. The concept of self-care should be addressed as the need arises; however, there is also value in the proactive planning of opportunities and experiences such as exercise, social interactions and vacations that help to cultivate conditions that create a balance between work and play (Evans & Payne, 2007). In the Stender (2013) study some of the most common self-care themes that emerged were self-care activities that were performed outside of the workplace (exercise/physical activity), and/or required others’ in order to carry it out (spending time with friends and family). However, to complement these external (i.e. exercise, vacations etc.) self-care activities, Richards et al. (2010) and Stender (2013) both offered the addition of mindfulness, an internal practice that fosters a deeper understanding of self as a result of being in the present moment, as an important strategy in self-care among counselors.

A similar, yet distinct internal construct that has limited exposure in the counseling literature, but does have empirical evidence of impacting wellness and decreasing stress is the practice of self-compassion (Neff, 2003b; 2011). Patsiopoulos and Buchanan (2011) conducted a
study and examined how practicing counselors’ integrated self-compassion into their work. Participants (n = 15) were all licensed mental health counselors and included 12 women and three men who all identified as Caucasian (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). The study utilized a narrative inquiry approach involving three interviews in order to study how the construct of self-compassion was practiced in the context of the participant’s work as a counselor (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). Several probes were used in this study to prompt discussion and included the challenges and benefits of using self-compassion as a counselor (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). The authors utilized a holistic-content approach to analyze the transcripts making sure to highlight key elements of each participants life-story as it related to conceptualizing how they experienced self-compassion as a counselor. Additionally, a cross-narrative thematic analysis resulted in the identification of three themes: attitudes of self-compassion during sessions, self-compassion in relation to the workplace and balance through self-care (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). In the first theme counselors discussed several different ways self-compassion was practiced during a session and included: acceptance, compassion toward inner voice, humility, mindfulness, creating time for self and acknowledging fallibility (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). The second theme was related to job satisfaction, specifically working with people who are compassionate and having a caring work environment. Being genuine at work towards colleagues regarding one’s actions and boundaries and shortcoming was also discussed (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). The final theme that emerged involved the need for counselors to have balance and included holistic self-care practices such as, time for leisure, time for solitude and time for family, friends and activities that one chooses. All of these practices offered support and help to enhance counselor wellness and possibly ward off stress (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011).
Newsome, Waldo and Gruszka (2012) examined the stress and self-compassion levels of students in helping profession programs after participating in a mindfulness group intervention. The group met for 90-minute sessions once a week for a total of 8 weeks. The group consisted of several core contemplative techniques such as: qigong, yoga, formal meditation (in group and outside of group) as well as body scan exercises (Newsome et al., 2012). Participants included 27 women and four men (n = 31) and were divided in half where 15 participated in the group during fall semester and 16 participated in the group with same content and same leader in spring semester. Unlike the previous studies reviewed (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Evans & Payne, 2007; Lawson, 2007; Lawson & Myers, 2011; Burnett, 2012; Richards, et al., 2010; and Patsiopoulos & Buchanan 2011), the majority (n= 17) of participants in this study identified as Latino (Newsome et al., 2012). There were three measures used in this study: the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983) to measure the perception of stress associated with current life events, MAAS to measure present moment awareness and the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003) to measure the total levels of self-compassion in participants (Newsome et al., 2012). Independent t-tests were conducted and results indicated there were no significant differences between the two (fall and spring) intervention groups (Newsome et al., 2012). However, there were significant differences found within each group from pre to post intervention where both mindfulness levels and self-compassion significantly increased and perceived stress significantly decreased (Newsome et al., 2012). A strength of this study is also in the inclusion of a more diverse participant sample. An additional strength of this study is in the inclusion of follow-up measures after post-intervention to assess the long-lasting impact of a mindfulness intervention in a group setting. At one-month follow-up the results for self-compassion and perceived stress remained consistent to where they were at post-intervention.
and mindfulness significantly increased (Newsome et al., 2012). These results suggested the participants may have found the mindfulness exercises learned during the intervention useful, and continued to develop them autonomously. Although the level of self-compassion at follow-up did not decrease, a possible explanation for why self-compassion did not increase the way mindfulness had, may be because participants were not taught exercises (as they were with mindfulness) that specifically related to self-compassion. Thus, the lack of explicit training of self-compassion techniques to participants impacted the continuation of this construct to be continued and is seen as a limitation in this study design.

**Self-Efficacy**

A study conducted by Woods (2009) examined whether self-efficacy served as a mediator between non-school counseling duties and counselor wellness. School counselors were included from the elementary, middle and high school levels in this study. The findings did not support the hypothesis regarding the role of self-efficacy, as there was no significant relationship found between non-counseling activities and counselor wellness. However, when a different model was employed that focused on professional counseling activities, and excluded focusing solely on non-counseling activities, self-efficacy demonstrated a mediating effect on counselor wellness. Self-efficacy and school counselor wellness were found to have a strong positive relationship (Woods, 2009). Therefore, the results revealed that those school counselors who established a strong self-efficacy would also be more likely to demonstrate wellness. The professional counseling activities examined in this study included the areas of: counseling, consultation, curriculum, coordination and were based on the ASCA National Model and derived from the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS; Scarborough, 2005). These findings provide support for a more strength-based approach to understanding school counselor wellness.
Additionally, findings demonstrated the positive relationship between years of experience and the self-efficacy levels of school counselors, where the longer school counselors were in the profession, the higher their level of self-efficacy.

**Positive Psychology**

Positive psychology is a growing field that has garnered much attention in recent years (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Positive psychology is a strength-based approach of understanding the human condition and is associated with constructs that promote positive emotions and traits (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Constructs such as gratitude (appreciating and being thankful of what one has), hope (having an expectancy of a beneficial outcome and working towards this goal) (Seligman, 2002) can lead to positive states in individuals’ and thereby support the adoption or continuation of wellness behaviors that leads to a healthy lifestyle. Therefore, research using positive psychology as a pathway to increase wellness in individuals will be reviewed.

**Gratitude.** Lanham, Rye, Rimsky and Weill (2012), examined the role of gratitude as it related to burnout and job satisfaction in professionals who work in the mental health field (n = 65). Participants completed demographic (age, sex, degree) and contextual (type of work, length of employment in job and field) questions as part of this study design (Lanham et al., 2012). All participants also completed the Maslach’s Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Weis, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967), the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6; McCullough, Emmons, & Tang, 2002), and the Adult Trait Hope Scale (Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Holleran, Irving, Sigmon & Harney, 1991). The researchers examined both dispositional and situational gratitude and found that dispositional gratitude, after controlling for demographic/contextual variables, significantly predicted the sense of
individual’s personal accomplishment (Lanham et al., 2012). Similarly, when controlling for demographic/contextual as well as the construct of hope, workplace-specific gratitude was predictive of burnout and work-related satisfaction (Lanham et al., 2012). These findings demonstrate how the practice of gratitude impacts work environment satisfaction levels as well as one’s sense of accomplishment. In the workplace, having a sense of accomplishment and a positive level of satisfaction may also impact an individual’s overall well-being (Lanham et al., 2012).

Hope. King (2001) explored the impact a hope-centered writing intervention would have on college students (n = 81). The majority (69) of the sample (n = 81) were women and predominantly European-American (87%). Participants were randomly given one of four themes to write about: (1) future best possible self (hope intervention), (2) traumatic experience, (3) both theme 1 and 2, (4) given a control/neutral theme. Students were then asked to write about this theme for 20 minutes over the course of the 4-day intervention (King, 2001). The future best possible self (hope intervention) consisted of having the students visualize their life in the future. Students were told as a result of their hard work, all of the goals they had set for their life had come to fruition. Once the students were able to imagine this scenario, they were instructed to write about what they imagined in detail for 20 minutes. In order to assess mood states of participants, the level of positive and negative affects were assessed before and after the intervention (King, 2001). Additionally, after each writing event, participants rated the following areas: importance, emotional, difficult, and upsetting on a scale from 1= (not at all) to 5= (extremely much) (King, 2001). Post treatment (3-week) follow-up consisted of the completion of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS: Diener et al., 1985) and the Life Orientation Scale (LOT; Scheier & Carver, 1985). These instruments were combined by
averaging the scores for the two scales in order to create a total participant well-being score (King, 2011). Results revealed those participants who wrote about their future best possible self, demonstrated significantly higher scores in subjective well-being than those participants who wrote about trauma. Therefore, intentionally designing a hope-centered intervention that is focused on a future positive goal, only impacts mood, but also overall well-being levels in individuals.

Summary of the Literature

As found in Lawson (2007) and Lawson and Myers (2011), school counselors working in the K-12 settings are suffering from lower levels of wellness possibly due to the unique stressors that come with working in the school system. These stressors can include having supervisors that are not counselors, high counselor to student ratios, role ambiguity, assignment of inappropriate job tasks, feeling unappreciated and/or competing job demands (Bryant & Constantine, 2006). As highlighted in this review, the studies that look specifically at school counselor’s wellness behaviors are sparse. Lawson and Myers (2011) called for future studies to offer specific interventions that would be useful for counselors in different settings to enhance wellness outcomes. Therefore, a need exists to provide school counselors targeted strategies for addressing wellness specific to his or her unique educational context. Some recommendations that were highlighted in this review included finding holistic ways to integrate strategies that are specific to caring for oneself. The self-care strategies ranged from exercising creating social supports in the workplace, taking a vacation (Evans & Payne, 2007), to the idea of just maintaining a sense of balance. This balance could be discovered through the infusion of contemplative exercises such as mindfulness (Richards et al., 2010; Stender, 2013) and the practice of self-compassion (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). In addition, the practice of
gratitude, hope and other positive psychology constructs may provide additional paths for wellness in school counselors.
Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore, through the use of a semi-structured interview, the experiences of individual school counselors who can prioritize and integrate wellness principles and behaviors into their professional practice.

There are three major exploratory questions that guide this research:

1. How do practicing school counselors achieve and maintain wellness?
2. What factors contribute to school counselor wellness?
3. To what extent is the concept of self-compassion related to school counselors achieving wellness?

Chapter three will open with a statement regarding the researcher and then move on to describe the instruments used in the study. It then will delineate the methods that were employed to identify and select participants as well as to collect and analyze data that pertains to the positive lifestyle behaviors of school counselors who consistently prioritize their own wellness.

About the Researcher

My interests personally and professionally are grounded in a desire for wellness and improving overall well-being in individuals. When I first began working as a school counselor, I found stress management to be an area where I would work with students on a continual basis. Before working in the school setting, I never fully realized the high level of stress and anxiety that can manifest as a result of a student’s educational experience. I also began to work more closely with the student’s teachers. I would observe the students in their classroom setting and
consult with the student’s teachers often regarding the stress management techniques the students were learning while working with me.

While observing the students in their classrooms, I could not help but witness how the feelings of being overwhelmed and stressed seemed to permeate the entire school as a result of the increasing demands placed on students and staff. For example, in the 13 years I worked in the schools, I witnessed the exponential increase in student testing, teacher’s academic loads increase, my own counseling caseload rise, increasing accountability tied to student testing outcomes, loss of autonomy, role ambiguity and all of this combined with more specific guidelines on how teachers and counselors were being evaluated. It was difficult for me to see teachers and counselors, who had such a passion for helping kids and such a desire to make a difference in the lives of students, suffer from chronic stress and signs of burnout.

Most of my years in education I served as the only counselor in the schools in which I worked. As the only counselor, of at times, up to 800 students and up to 45 teachers, I worked hard at being a person the students, faculty and staff knew they could always come to for guidance, compassion and kindness. While it was my honor to be that person for anyone who needed solace, at times, I felt an emotional toll where feelings of overwhelming stress would manifest in myself. In addition, I often spoke to fellow school counselors, at meetings and conferences, who shared similar stressors regarding the emotional and occupational demands that were being placed on school counselors due to our unique and often misunderstood role in the school system.

As a result of these experiences, I began to wonder “who is caring for the counselor?” Although I believe that my role as a school counselor is to serve as an advocate for all students, I also believe that as counselors we must nourish and care for ourselves so we can function at our
optimal level of effectiveness and also serve as positive role models for others. Practicing those healthy lifestyle behaviors that we as counselors promote for our students and staff is one pathway for promoting and modeling wellness.

Therefore, the culmination of my experiences have led me to research how other school counselors, in an ever-demanding educational environment, have managed to successfully care for themselves through the integration of self-compassion and positive wellness behaviors.

**Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative interview approach. This format was intended to enhance the engagement of readers by providing opportunities to vicariously experience another’s unique circumstances (Stake, 2010). Additionally, this approach was intended to provide detailed insight into each individual case being studied (Lichtman, 2013).

**Selection Criteria**

The criteria used to select school counselors to participate in this study were:

1. Participants were current practicing school counselors.

2. Participants were screened using the Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile II (HPLP II) (Walker & Hill-Polerecky, 1996) and the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) (Neff, 2003a). The HPLP II is a 52-item questionnaire that provides an overall total wellness. The SCS is a 26-item questionnaire that provides a total self-compassion score. Only participants with mean scores of 2.5 and higher on the HPLP-II and the SCS were chosen to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Mean scores of 2.5 or higher indicated average to high levels of total wellness and self-compassion.

3. Participants had 10 or more years experience as a practicing school counselor.
Participants

Participants were drawn from a population of practicing K-12 school counselors, having 10 or more years of professional experience and an interest in participating in a study on self-care and wellness, were recruited from the Florida School Counseling Association’s website. Interested school counselors accessed the study through a link provided in the website post. The link directed potential participants to Survey Monkey and consisted of the informed consent document followed by contact information (email). The link also contained the two screening instruments (HPLP-II and SCS) that were used to identify the final pool from which the participants were selected.

Two requests were sent via the website one week apart requesting participation in this study. After one week, only one counselor had responded to the survey. Therefore, network sampling was also employed in order to increase participant recruitment. A counselor educator professional who has access to professional school counselors in surrounding counties also served to recruit school counselors and direct them to the link on the Florida School Counseling Association’s website. Thirteen school counselors completed the screening tool (HPLP-II, SCS). Eleven of the 13 participants met the inclusion criteria of scoring a 2.5 or higher mean score on both surveys (HPLP-II, SCS) and were then contacted through email and invited to participate in the semi-structured interview portion. Seven participants responded to the request to participate in the semi-structured interview.

The seven semi-structured interviews were all conducted by Skype/Face Time and by phone at a time that was convenient for the participant. Each meeting lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interview began with answering any questions the participants may have had regarding the interview process. The purpose of the interview was to further explore wellness
and self-compassion behaviors in practicing school counselors. The interviews were all audiotaped and were then transcribed verbatim. Participants were given a copy of the transcripts for their review and provided approval of the final version for inclusion in the study. This member checking strategy allows for clarification, editing, or elaboration regarding any part of the participant’s interview (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). Although only seven out of the eleven eligible participants responded to the request to participate in the semi-structured interview portion of the study, thematic saturation seems to have been reached, as no new themes had emerged during the coding of the last interview. The data generated was kept secure on a password-protected computer.

Instruments

Two instruments were used as screening tool in order to identify only those participants that score average to high (2.5 or higher) in total wellness and self-compassion.

The Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile II: The Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile II (HPLP II) (Walker & Hill-Polerecky, 1996) was comprised of 52 questions scored on a 4-point scale (1= never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4= routinely) with results yielding an overall total health promoting lifestyle score. Additionally, the questionnaire provides six categorical scores in the following healthy lifestyle dimensions: spiritual growth, interpersonal relations, stress management, nutrition, physical activity and health responsibility. The inclusion of this questionnaire was important because it provided a holistic view of each individual counselor’s total wellness as was reported in the HPLP-II’s total scale score. Higher mean scores on the HPLP-II indicated higher levels of total wellness (2.5 or higher). Walker and Hill-Polerecky (1996) established this scale as valid and reliable where the Cronbach’s alpha for the overall score was .94 and alpha coefficients for the six categorical scores ranged from .79 to .97. In
addition, the HPLP-II has been used in health and wellness promotion research that measures lifestyle behaviors in health professionals (Stark, Manning-Walsh, & Vliem, 2005) where the Cronbach’s alpha total scale score was .91. This instrument has also been used in wellness research that included school-based personnel in school settings where the Cronbach’s alpha for the total scale was .93 and the six dimensions ranged from .77 to .89 (Leung, Yim Wah, Ying Yu, Chiang, & Lee, 2009).

The HPLP-II questionnaire lifestyle dimensions were as follows: (physical activity, nutrition, health responsibility, stress management, interpersonal relations, spirituality) (Walker & Hill-Polerecky, 1996).

Health responsibility. Taking ownership for one’s actions and being an informed consumer when it comes to areas that are related to health and well-being.

Physical activity. Includes the moderate to vigorous deliberate moving of one’s body with the intent to promote health and fitness.

Nutrition. Consists of consciously choosing to consume foods that provide the most health benefits for one’s body and mind and align with the guidelines provided by the Food Guide Pyramid.

Spiritual growth. Encompasses self-awareness and choosing to develop and connect more meaningfully with one’s own limitless potential through the search for purpose and the achievement of life goals.

Interpersonal relations. Consists of meaningful communication with the intent of sharing ideas and emotions that will result in the creation of stronger relationships with others.

Stress management. Actively pursuing and implementing resources and techniques to efficiently manage or decrease worries (Walker & Hill-Polerecky, 1996).
The Self-Compassion Scale: The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003a) consists of 26-items that are used to measure participant’s level of self-compassion. Through the examination of cognitions, emotions and behaviors a total self-compassion score is calculated (Neff, 2016). This total self-compassion score on the SCS is derived from the following 6 subscales: mindfulness, common humanity, self-kindness, over-identification, self-judgment and isolation (Neff, 2003a). Mean scores of 2.5 or higher equate to greater levels of individual self-compassion. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = (almost always) to 5 = (almost never). The Self-Compassion Scale has shown good internal consistency (α =0.92) where the individual sub-scale constructs ranged from 0.75 to 0.81 in college students (Neff, 2003a). The Self Compassion Scale has also demonstrated good internal consistency in other populations, including adults in general populations (Costa, Marôco, Pinto-Gouveia, Ferreira, & Castilho, 2015) where the Cronbach’s alpha was reported at .91.

Semi-structured Interview

Through the use of open-ended questions, the semi-structured interview was designed to encourage dialogue and allowed for participants to respond openly without any limits on their responses. Patton (1990) noted the importance of open questions in qualitative research, as it provides the freedom for participants to respond in their own words. These questions were generated based on the review of the literature that examined the wellness behaviors of counselors and served to gather as much detail as possible regarding the participant perspectives and personal experiences in the area of wellness and self-compassion. The interview questions were the following:

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. What influenced your decision to become a school counselor?
2. How would you describe your typical workday?

3. How do you integrate/incorporate positive lifestyle behaviors into your daily life?

4. To what extent do you think you integrate self-compassion into your life personally and professionally?

5. What has been your experience in trying to help others learn to make wellness a priority?

6. What formal education/training have you received about self-care and the practice of self-compassion?

7. What recommendations do you have for other school counselors in regards to wellness and the practice of self-compassion?

8. What other thoughts would you like to share regarding wellness, self-compassion, self-care or positive lifestyle behaviors that we did not cover?

There were 13 participants who completed the surveys (screening tool). Out of the 13 surveys, 11 were found to meet to inclusion criteria of 2.5 or higher mean score on both surveys.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

The 11 eligible school counselor participants were then emailed and invited to participate in the semi-structured interview portion. A follow-up email invitation was sent to the 11 eligible participants one week later and as a result of these contacts, seven semi-structured interviews were scheduled and conducted during the four weeks the call for participants was open.

**Interview Pilot Testing**

Cognitive interviewing is a procedure that is used to assess response error, where the focus is primarily on the interview questions, as opposed to the procedures in the questionnaire’s administration (Willis, 1999). Five counselors were interviewed using the cognitive interviewing
verbal probing technique in order to provide feedback and reduce survey error. Willis (1999) described verbal probing as a process where the interviewer asks the original question, with subsequent questions designed to probe for more detailed information relevant to the original question. The verbal probing methods used in this cognitive interviewing procedure included: the paraphrasing probe, the comprehension/interpretation probe and a general probe asking counselors to answer the level of difficulty (easy, medium, hard) of the question. An example of a cognitive interview probe is as follows: Can you repeat the question in your words? (paraphrasing probe). Results of the cognitive interviewing process found that two of the participants made a comment regarding the wording of question number two. Both suggested adding the word incorporate to follow integrate in order to aid in the understanding of the question. The new interview question reads as follows: To what extent do you think you integrate/incorporate positive lifestyle behaviors into your daily life?

**Role of the Researcher**

My role as a researcher is to critically reflect on my own position as I navigate through the inquiry process (Lichtman, 2013). I acknowledge that I am influencing the inquiry process because I am the mechanism that will then provide interpretation based on my own understanding of the participants’ responses (Lichtman, 2013). Pillow (2003) highlighted how the consequence of acknowledging one’s role in research and being self-reflective will augment one’s ability to have sounder research explanations throughout the study. Similarly, Peshkin (1988) discussed the importance for researchers to identify their subjectivities so that they can better understand the lens through which their interpretation of the participants’ experiences has been filtered. The researcher will then be more fully transparent to the readers how their past has intersected with the research being investigated (Peshkin, 1988). Notes/journals are not limited to
passively writing down what had occurred in an interview. Rather, it is a process that invokes some sense-making (framing) that describes the content before, during and after an interview/interaction has occurred (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Therefore, my journal served as a primary source to document my thoughts and observations of all interactions with participants from the first contact to completion. Additionally, the journal allowed for transparency, as well as supported my ability to order to organize, clarify and provide alternative perspectives of data generated.

**Data Analysis**

All seven of the participant’s semi-structured interviews were audio recorded. To ensure confidentiality each participant was given a pseudonym. I chose to transcribe verbatim each recorded interview myself. This process, which encompassed listening to the audio recording several times in order to accurately capture dialogue, provided me with an opportunity to become deeply immersed and familiar with my data. Additionally, this procedure served as an initial coding technique where I would begin to document words or phrases that seemed relevant to wellness. Once I completed the transcribing and initial coding, I used a color-coding system to delineate the Descriptive Codes from the In Vivo codes. Saldana (2009) asserts Descriptive Coding can be used to capture the essence of the data. Thus, the Descriptive Codes for my analysis served as a way for me to sort and summarize each participant’s transcript by topic. Saldana (2009) notes, In Vivo codes can be used to capture the verbatim output of participants’ dialogue. Thus, the In Vivo codes in my analysis served to highlight direct quotes from each participant in order to capture participant’s authentic experience and true voice. Saldana (2009) discussed how coding provides the foundation for the organization of data that shares similar characteristics into categorical areas. Thus, categories were then created based on reviewing the
coded transcripts, resulting in 28 categories. Table 1 will present the list of categories and sub-categories found.

Table 1

*Categories and Sub-Categories from Coded Transcripts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self (boundaries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling Wellness</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fun/joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking-out Wellness</td>
<td>Others-students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having Perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing Struggling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Talk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Lack of self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Encourage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The categories were organized to highlight important common elements, as well as to delete redundant topics. The next step involved grouping the categories under the three research questions that guided this study. This process resulted in the creation of five final themes that will be discussed in Chapter four.
Ethical Considerations

Informed consent and confidentiality are areas addressed with participants as ethical considerations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The participants who responded to the recruitment advertisement were provided a link that included the informed consent document. Upon reviewing informed consent information and continuing onto the next page, the participants indicated his or her willingness to participate in the study. On the next page, participants were provided with the key terms and definitions that related to this study. The following page asked the participant’s to provide their contact information (email address). This email address was only used if the participant was selected to participate in the follow-up semi-structured interview portion. Only those selected for the follow-up interview were emailed to set-up a time that was convenient for them. Participant information was coded with no relationship to personal identifiers. Each participant’s information was kept private and confidential. Only coded data was used for analysis. No real names or personal identifiers were mentioned in any communication or report regarding the study and its outcome. Additionally, all information remained confidential and participants had the right to review transcripts, as well as, withdraw from this study at any time. Information was also included in the informed consent that addressed minimizing any risks and addressed any benefits for participants in this study.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided the following four criteria important to a research study in determining worth and trustworthiness: (1) credibility, (2) confirmability, (3) dependability, (4) transferability. Credibility in this study was addressed by allowing the participants’ to review the transcribed transcripts in order to verify the authenticity of the interpretation recorded, also known as member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Confirmability was addressed through the use of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), where multiple data sources were generated in order to demonstrate complementary aspects of wellness behaviors in counselors. For example, in addition to the semi-structured interviews, two instruments were used as a screening tool in order to provide a quantitative assessment of documented wellness levels in the school counselors’ participating in this study. Additionally, I employed an external auditor to review my process of data analysis and; thus, minimize researcher bias in this study. Two meetings, one week apart were scheduled with the external auditor to review the coding process and obtain feedback. Dependability was addressed through the creation of an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that included the use of reflective journals and analytic memos (Saldana, 2009). My journals were dated and included comments on what I observed as well as my personal thoughts regarding the interviews (Saldana, 2009). My analytic memos were dated and titled and included my personal reflections to any aspect related to the conceptualization and/or execution of this study (Saldana, 2009). Transferability was addressed through the generation of thick descriptive data in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick descriptions provided a greater understanding of the larger context so that decisions could be made regarding the appropriateness of whether findings may be applied to other similar settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the methods of this study by presenting the questions that guide this research along with a description of the design, instruments, participant selection process, and data analysis procedures. The criteria for establishing trustworthiness were also presented.
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to explore the self-compassion and wellness behaviors of practicing school counselors. This chapter begins with detailing the process used to analyze the data that was generated from the semi-structured interviews conducted. The findings aim to answer the following questions:

1. How do practicing school counselors achieve and maintain wellness?
2. What factors contribute to school counselor wellness?
3. To what extent is the concept of self-compassion related to school counselors achieving wellness?

In this chapter, I also provide the demographic data for each of the seven school counselors who participated in this study as well as the mean scores from each of the two instruments the participants completed.

Data Analysis

As detailed in the methods section, the process of data collection included the use of two instruments (HPLP-II and SCS) as a screening tool, a semi-structured interview and my reflective journal in order to capture my thoughts during this process. Included in this chapter, I also provide the demographic information for each participant interviewed along with the mean scores from the two screening tool instruments employed.

I used Lichtman’s (2013) thematic data analysis process in this study to categorize aspects of the interviews that were described by the participants. This six-step process entailed moving from the raw data that was generated in the interviews to first identify codes and
categories (Lichtman, 2013). Steps one and two of this six-step process consisted of the initial coding of the transcripts as well as the revisiting of the initial coding. My initial coding began during the original transcribing of the participants interviews. When revisiting the initial coding, I employed a color-coding system in order to delineate the Descriptive Codes (capturing the essence of the data through words or brief phrases) and the In Vivo codes (capturing the verbatim output of participants’ dialogue) (Saldana, 2009). This process served as a way for me to sort and summarize the data, as well as, to capture participant’s authentic experience and true voice (Saldana, 2009). Step three consisted of developing an initial list of categories, as this provided the foundation for the organization of data that shared similar characteristics into categorical areas. Once this occurred, steps four and five entailed modifying and revisiting categories in order to reduce redundancies (Lichtman, 2013). Thus, categories were then created based on reviewing the coded transcripts and resulted in 28 categories. These procedures then lead to step six, the generation of five themes/concepts (Lichtman, 2013). The themes that emerged in this research were: Advocacy; prioritization of wellness; modeling wellness; self-compassion and resilience. The theme of advocacy discussed areas where the school counselor promoted wellness for self, others or their profession/program. The theme of prioritization of wellness encompassed categories where the counselors scheduled time for wellness such as, spirituality, fun, family and hobbies. Modeling wellness related to the actions and behaviors the school counselors enacted both personally and professionally that supported their alignment with the promotion of wellness. Self-compassion related to the three main constructs of mindfulness, common humanity and self-kindness that operationalized this practice as well as discussed the role of perspective. The theme of resilience discussed protective factors that emerged among counselors such as their strong self-efficacy, sense of control and the role of supportive
colleagues. I also used categorical aggregation in order to discover patterns and also assist with comparison across participants as described in the cross-case analysis in this study (Stake, 1995).

The Seven Participants

The participants in this study all met the following criteria:

1. Participants were current practicing school counselors.

2. Participants were screened using the HPLP-II and the SCS instruments. Only participants with mean scores of 2.5 and higher on the HPLP-II and the SCS will be chosen to participate in the semi-structured interview portion. Mean scores of 2.5 or higher indicate average to high levels of total wellness and self-compassion.

3. Participant had 10 or more years as a practicing school counselor.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Time in Field</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>HPLP-II</th>
<th>SCS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>4.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulane</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All seven participants identified as Non-Hispanic White females. More information regarding this homogenous sample will be addressed in chapter five. Their ages ranged from 36
to 55 years old. The mean age was 47. Time in field ranged from 10 to 32 years. The mean number of years of experience was 20 years. The score on the HPLP-II ranged from 2.79 to 3.75 with a mean score of 3.12. The score on the SCS ranged from 4.07 to 4.77 with a mean score of 4.45.

I will present each school counselor’s experience as an individual case, while highlighting the common themes that emerged among all participants. In order to provide a detailed and authentic picture of each school counselor, I have chosen to incorporate their own words as much as possible, where I used quotation marks for shorter phrases and block formatting to capture longer participant accounts.

**Eve.** Eve is married and has two children. Eve has been a school counselor for 10 years. She currently worked in an elementary school setting, serving students from kindergarten to fifth grade. Eve’s first career was as a social worker and she described her experience positively, she stated, “I really liked helping people and supporting their mental health.” However, the time-demands of the profession were something that Eve noted she found difficult. She said, “As a social worker, I worked 12 months a year and was on-call several weeks a month. It just wasn’t the lifestyle for me.” Eve then came to counseling after she had worked for five years as a social worker.

Eve responded quickly to my first email requesting to schedule an interview. We were able to conduct the interview through Face Time. I found Eve to be a kind, engaging and passionate counselor. I realized very quickly in the interview with Eve that one area in which she would deliver rich data was in regards to promoting the profession of school counseling. Eve provided detailed descriptions in regards to how she advocated for the counseling profession and
Advocacy. Advocacy in school counseling has been described as going above and beyond what is routinely expected in order to make a difference (Field & Baker, 2004). When discussing her typical day, Eve described her need to go above and beyond, in order to justify the need for school counselors to be employed in her district. She explained,

When I go home, I check my email and try to get back with the teachers really quickly. I think a lot of that stems from the fact that when I started here, we didn’t have elementary counselors. We weren’t funded by the school district and so I spent a lot of time doing things to justify the program. I wanted to demonstrate that we were effective in supporting students and that we were worth funding.

In the county in which Eve moved to, there were very few school counselor positions. The few that existed were itinerant, where the school counselor would work at multiple schools throughout the district each week. As a result of this, Eve began efforts to promote the need for more school counselor positions and the positive impact school counselors can have on student success. She stated,

Before I came to this district there were only two elementary counselors. Both counselors did their own thing, completely independent of each other. When I came in, I encouraged the others to work together so that we could build a comprehensive program that would one day be funded by our school district. One counselor hopped on board right away, the other one was reluctant because she had been running her own program for many years. And, so for the first few years we started meeting at our homes on our own time after school. We would all talk about ways we were supporting our students and ways we could support one another. It was really great. We were taking care of each other.

Eve’s advocacy efforts were successful. She described this as follows:

This past year, the district finally funded our positions and now we have eight counselors and they pay us to collaborate. Now that the District is paying for our positions, we are meeting every month. I bring up these things about going to conferences and trainings to take care of our selves. It’s not just me that I focus on, but everyone I work with.
However, Eve noted the effort needed in continuing to promote the need for school counselors, persists in her district. She stated,

Many counselors are brand new in our school district. We are also trying to show the district that we’re a united front and we’re all doing the same thing. I don’t want the program to be all fragmented, and everyone doing their own thing because then we are not likely to get buy-in from the district to (continue to) support the program.

Eve’s passion for making a difference and her courage to provide a voice for school counselors and the importance of their role are important elements that emerged throughout this interview.

**Prioritization of Wellness.** The act of prioritizing is something that supports goal attainment and requires a bit more intention from an individual. For example, exercise is important to Eve and she has found a way to integrate this into her life. She described this process,

I’m a runner. I feel that it makes a huge difference for me. That’s why our family chose to live where it’s warm. I need the sun to feel good. And, I need to run. For example, I haven’t had time to run the last couple of weeks and it was 60 degrees today so I just had to run! It’s such a huge stress reliever. Also, I have such a high number of students at my school. There are over 600 kids in my school and I’m only there four days a week. Our site, in particular, has a lot of high need students. I can never get everything done. I have to turn kids away all the time. I just don’t have time. So, I make it a priority to run. I even put a mark on my calendar to indicate when I run. Otherwise, a week might go by and I got caught up and didn’t get my run in! You just have to make it priority and build it into your day.

I noted in my reflective journal how I also worked in schools where there was a high student to counselor ratio and often felt similarly while working as a school counselor. I found exercise and specifically running to be a tremendous stress reliever. I also found that logging the days that I ran, as well as the days that I planned to run, helped me to reach my goal of integrating both (physical and mental) wellness into my life.

In addition to prioritizing exercise, Eve also explained how she has chosen to prioritize other areas of her life and how this has allowed her to have that work/life balance. She stated,
I also make it a priority to get enough sleep. My husband and I also spend a lot of time with our (kids) on the weekends. Yesterday we spent the day skiing! It’s great! It’s only a couple of hours away, so we can get up there for the day and come back and it’s still 60 degrees. So, it’s nice. We also do a lot of little getaways. Over Christmas break we took the kids to a (football game).

Eve has also chosen to seek out information on wellness demonstrating the importance she placed on her own self-care and that of the teachers and students. She stated,

I encouraged them (counselors) to participate in (a mindfulness) training as a group. I learned about mindfulness from someone else in the school district. I found a 12-week course, and so I shared it with them… The training is self-care for the counselors and that benefits the teachers and students as well.

The importance of prioritizing her own wellness was evident in the intentionality Eve placed on scheduling and seeking out opportunities for wellness and self-care that supported her desire for work/life balance.

Modeling Wellness. Throughout the interview Eve discussed how she modeled self-care for herself and others. When asked what recommendations she has for other school counselors in regards to wellness she stated that, “it’s really important (for school counselors) to take care of yourself, to do hobbies, extra curricular activities and not just be a workaholic and take everything home.”

What stood out in this interview was how Eve also, practiced what she encouraged for others. Throughout the interview, Eve discussed the importance of exercise, specifically running as an important stress reliever for her. Eve noted the importance of getting a good night’s sleep, as well as how she often plans and makes time for “family getaways.” Additionally, Eve described how she modeled the practice of mindful breathing to her students and how this has also benefited her. She said,

This semester I’ve been running a small group focused on mindfulness two times a week. I’m finding that it really benefits me as well because we meet first thing in the morning. We are practicing mindful breathing and it’s a good way to start the day off.
Modeling wellness was woven throughout all aspects of Eve’s personal and profession life; thus, demonstrating her belief in the importance of self-care through her own actions.

**Self-Compassion.** Self-compassion encompasses the act of recognizing one’s own struggle or pain, remembering that we all experience struggle or pain sometimes and then choosing to show love and kindness to yourself (Neff, 2011).

The importance of “having perspective” was a way in which Eve demonstrated her self-compassion by looking at the bigger human picture in situations. Neff (2011) has also described this as, “a way to allow you to widen your outlook so that you can fully appreciate and acknowledge all aspects of life, the bad as well as the good” (p. 256).

The following are examples of how the “good and the bad” were woven into Eve’s school life, through the integration of the constructs of mindfulness, common humanity and self-kindness {Shown in brackets}. She described this as follows,

For example, when you’ve been working with a kid for a long time and you’ve provided all kinds of supports, set-up strategies for the teachers, and it just doesn’t seem to be working it’s easy to be down on yourself {mindfulness}. I always try to see the bigger picture, look at all the supports I’ve put into place throughout the entire school. I also try to reflect on what went well this week or month. Yeah, I think that’s important to reflect on the bigger picture because it’s easy to get caught up in a lot of these day-to-day events {common humanity}. I think I’ve also trained myself to look at the big picture because I’ve been advocating for school counselors to our school district for so many years.

The importance of having perspective was further highlighted by Eve when providing recommendations for other school counselors on how to integrate wellness and self-compassion into their lives. She said,

You can never check all the boxes because as soon as you do, something else comes up {mindfulness}. You just have to know that you’re making a difference and you may not see it right away. It could be another 10 years. You may never even see it, but just by nature of our job, our positions. What we do makes a big impact {self-kindness}.
This type of self-compassion was critical, especially due to Eve’s high student to counselor ratio, where it was often difficult to get everything that was planned, completely accomplished. Thus, feelings of stress may manifest. She stated,

My typical workday varies from month to month. On a month that I am going in the classroom for lessons, I’m in the classroom approximately 4-5 hours a day. In between classroom lessons, I’m checking in with students, talking to parents or teachers on ways to support a kid in the classroom. And then there’s the occasional after school meeting where you’re serving on a particular committee. I end my day by entering notes into the note counselor program and it takes anywhere from 30-60 minutes. I’m always feeling rushed at the end of the day so I can get home.

Interestingly, although Eve demonstrated numerous examples of practicing self-compassion throughout our conversation, when I asked her the question that addressed the extent she thinks she integrated self-compassion into her life she said,

I don’t think I’m hard on myself, I have a lot of stress just because I am an over achiever, I always want to get things done, but I’m not hard on myself. Some of those questions on the survey seemed self-deprecating. I don’t think I’m ever self-deprecating. I do the best that I can {self-kindness}.

Eve demonstrated aspects of self-compassion in this answer and throughout our conversation. However, the term self-compassion was not a way that Eve seemed to describe this practice (as noted in my research journal). This is also congruent with Neff’s (2011) description of the resistance that exists in Western culture to recognize the practice of self-compassion.

**Resilience.** In trying to understand why it is that some school counselors have been able to persist and thrive in the profession, where others have not, resilience is a theme that has also emerged. Resilience can be viewed as a process that combines attitudes, actions and interpersonal supports, in order to develop a way for individuals to persevere in the face of adversity, trauma and significant sources of stress (Fernandez, 2016). The capacity to develop resiliency has benefits for counselors working in highly demanding educational school
environments, as building the skill of resilience is tied to wellness and may help counselors persist in the profession.

Eve’s described the continuous effort and hard work that was required of her in order to advocate to the district to fund school counselor positions. She discussed the importance of this campaign stating, “I wanted to work with kids through the education system.” On the same token, Eve desired a position that would provide her with more life balance. She said,

I wanted a career that would support me having children and being able to be with them when they weren’t in school. This led me to a career in school counseling. I went back to graduate school and now I have my summers off and more time with my family. It’s just great to have the whole summer to just recharge my batteries. I have the three whole months to relax and take care of myself, and my family. When I was a social worker, I just didn’t have enough down time. Now my work schedule is really much more conducive to being able to practice self-care. School counseling has been a good fit for me.

The professional schedule of a school counselor provided Eve the sense of control she needed in order to create the work/life balance she desired. This sense of control was a factor that supported her wellness and led to her ability to persist. As noted in my researcher journal, Eve’s courage to continuously campaign for the hiring of school counselors in her district, speaks to her need in finding professional balance with life/work and also her resiliency, as she emerged stronger as a result of her unending dedication to the profession.

When I asked Eve what formal education she had received on self-care and the practice of self-compassion she discussed a crisis/trauma workshop she had attended the previous school year that also addressed self-care.

Last year I attended a two-day workshop, a total of 8 hours, on crisis/trauma care. A big part of the training was caring for your self. We talked about having a co-regulator, someone you could confide in as well as having compassion for yourself, being able to let things go. The District wanted us to bring the training back to our school sites. They set up like some modules, but I haven’t been teaching it at my site yet because I feel like if we are going to put it out there and teach crisis/trauma we may potentially open up some
wounds and make people aware of things and I don’t think we have resources in place to deal with at this time. So, I haven’t brought this training to our school yet.

This workshop on crisis/trauma was supplemented with information on self-care, although the training’s primary focus was not school counselor self-care and/or the practice of self-compassion. Thus, Eve’s ability to integrate wellness into her life personally and professionally also stemmed from her strong self-efficacy and belief in the importance of seeking out information on wellness. Self-efficacy relates to an individual’s belief in their own ability, impacting their initiation and performance outcomes (Bandura, 1977). Eve demonstrated this desire to seek out self-directed learning opportunities when she discussed the discussed a mindfulness training she initiated for the school counselors in her district. She described this,

The program is through the “mindfulschool.org”. And, so each week they ask you questions about how you have incorporated it. They put you in these groups. So, (the school counselors in my district) got put in a group together along with a couple of hundred people, but we can all read what we are doing each week, and we can kind of share how the week’s going and stuff. It’s kind of nice how we can look and see how other people are doing. So when we go to the next monthly meeting we can kind of check-in. But the monthly meetings are just a nice way for us to check in to ask how are we handling and dealing with our stress.

Eve’s self-efficacy also emerged as related to her belief in her preparedness to serve as a school counselor. Eve discussed how her counselor training and background were areas that related to her wellness and capacity to persist. For example, when faced with a challenge Eve was able to draw on her belief that her education, background and own self-awareness can help her navigate through these situations. She said,

(My) graduate program was really excellent, so I think I have a lot of tools as a school counselor. I know that I’m doing the best that I can, and that’s good enough.

Therefore, Eve’s own commitment to self-directed learning combined with her self-efficacy may have contributed to her ability to integrate wellness for herself and her school community and consequently supported her ability to sustain wellness and persist in the profession.
Considering instruments. Eve’s HPLP-II mean score was a 3.12. A score of 2.5 signified average wellness as defined by the psychometric data of the HPLP-II (Walker & Hill-Polerecky, 1996). The higher the mean score on the HPLP-II indicated greater alignment with an overall healthy lifestyle. Eve’s HPLP-II mean score was the third highest of all seven participants. Eve’s SCS mean score was 4.84 and was the highest of all participants in the study. Eve’s high mean SCS score supports the assertion that she does practice self-compassion as highlighted throughout the interview, even though the term itself may not be as widely used.

Nina. Nina is married and has been a school counselor for 25 years. She had previously worked as a high school counselor and this year was returning to the middle school setting. It has been 15 years since Nina has worked with this population. Currently, Nina was the counselor for the eighth grade students. Her school served approximately 1,400 students and she was one of three counselors in her school.

Nina was the first school counselor I interviewed. As noted in my reflective journal, I was very nervous to conduct this interview and was hopeful that it would go well. Also, it was the first time I used Face Time to interview, so the technology component was also worrisome. However, all of my anxiety was unfounded, Nina and I had a very successful conversation. Currently, Nina was working in a middle school and came to the field of counseling through her work in the schools. She explained,

While I was first working in the school system. My job was working with a Bachelors degree in a long-term sub position and was informed that I was required within the first five years to earn a Masters degree. And then I kind of fell into the idea of counseling, just because I was looking for financial assistance and there was a scholarship for counseling.

I found Nina to be a confident, caring school counselor and very forthcoming throughout our conversation.
Advocacy. Nina demonstrated the value she placed on self-care by promoting to students the importance of wellness. She described this below.

My experience this year has been working with middle school students. Most recently with the girls and some of their choices. Behaving more appropriately and respectful of themselves. I try to teach my students that everyone is special and they owe it to themselves to take care of their bodies because you only have one.

This theme also translated to her colleagues, “I do have some co-workers that I talk with about our wellness challenge and getting more involved actively and physically.” Nina’s positive attitude, genuineness and honesty that were displayed in our conversation seemed to align with her style of advocacy at her school and her commitment to promoting wellness.

Prioritization of Wellness. Similar to Eve, prioritizing wellness seemed to be accomplished by Nina through the repetition and documentation of the desired wellness behavior. For example, when asked about the positive lifestyle behaviors that are apart of Nina’s daily life she stated,

(Each day) I have a bottle of water on my desk and I start out with my cup of tea. So I go from my 32oz. cup of tea to my bottle of water and I try to make sure that I am hydrating.

Nina demonstrated the importance she placed on wellness by habitually enacting behaviors such as purposefully bringing a bottle of water everyday and strategically placing it on her desk so that she was visually cued to drink it throughout her day. Nina also discussed the importance of creating a way to document her activity through the use of a pedometer. She stated,

In addition to that, second semester my school has a Walking Wellness Challenge. I have my pedometer to measure and record steps on a weekly basis.

Although Nina may not be able to walk as much every day, tracking her steps seemed to keep her accountable. The importance of this activity emerged when she was not able to walk, as she made a point of explaining the reason. She described this below.
Today was a sedentary day because it was Monday, I did have a lot of students that needed to speak with me, in addition to emails and phone calls.

Nina’s conscientiousness in tracking and documenting her walking, speaks to the importance she placed on this activity and also her enjoyment of this exercise. When offering recommendations to other school counselors Nina said,

I would say finding something that resonates for them as far as an activity they would like to do on a regular basis. So, if they are more about wanting to unplug and be more of a quiet kind of thing or solitary versus if they would like to be around a group of people with a similar interest of wellness, whether it’s yoga, tai chi, or a Zumba class.

Nina prioritized her nutrition and exercise and was able to integrate these behaviors into her school day because they were important to her.

**Modeling Wellness.** Nina’s modeling of those positive lifestyle behaviors (exercise, nutrition) she promoted for others, further demonstrated her own authenticity of character and genuineness. She said,

I think just physically in my appearance with the fact that (colleagues) can see I walk at a quicker pace. I’m upbeat and I always have my bottle of water. Others look at those things and have summed me up as the kind of person that is more conscientious of that. Also when there are unhealthy food choices like cookies and pastries available at meetings, coworkers have noticed that I don’t choose to eat those items.

Nina discussed how the modeling of these wellness behaviors has now impacted co-workers at her school. She said, “they can tell that I tend to be more conscientious and so they have sought me out for guidance and my thoughts about a healthy lifestyle.” These types of interactions demonstrated how Nina, in a short period of time, seemed to have developed a good rapport and respect among her colleagues through her actions and interactions.

**Self-Compassion.** Nina’s transition to a new school this year has added to her need to integrate self-compassion as described below,

It has been fifteen years since I’ve been a middle school level counselor and a lot has changed {mindfulness}. I have needed to regularly practice patience and self-
compassion. I have learned that I not only pride myself in being compassionate towards others, but I allow myself to be compassionate toward myself {common humanity}.

Nina’s was mindful that this transition can come with challenges and that patience was needed on her part. When asked how this practice may look in the school setting, Nina said,

When I catch myself getting worked up, I do more breathing. So the breathing is what I do to calm myself down and I can’t do it when people are around, so I just might take a quick walk away, or go to the bathroom and then I just get my breathing under control.

This behavior aligns with what Neff (2011) calls, a self-compassion break. The purpose of a self-compassion break is to validate to yourself that you are upset while simultaneously offering yourself a moment alone where you can provide comfort to your upset state (Neff, 2011).

Nina further described how she integrated positive self-talk during this (self-compassion) break in order to support her practice of self-compassion. She said, “then (I would) kind of do my self-talk of calm down you are going to get through this, this is all new and it is part of the process.”

Nina’s choice to go on a walk, or to a bathroom and soothe herself through the practice of deep breathing and self-kindness was an act of self-compassion.

Nina also wanted to make known the importance of being active and eating well has on the practice of self-care and self-compassion. She said,

I really think exercise and proper nutrition are key components and that falls hand in hand with the self-care and self-compassion. If you feel better about yourself, you are going to be more kind to yourself {self-kindness} and not so judgmental, or critical of yourself.

**Resilience.** As Nina was deciding if school counseling was going to be the direction she would take for her career path, she began to reflect on the experiences she had with her own counselors throughout her schooling. She described this,

I reflected on how I never had a counselor that was really helpful. Actually, I graduated from high school a year early without any assistance, or support from my own counselor and I thought this could be really cool for me. That was back in the (80’s).
Nina’s past negative experiences with her own school counselors were powerful factors that helped to shape her future career path. Overcoming adversity and rewriting this story in a positive way for other students, speaks to Nina’s self-efficacy and her belief that being a school counselor was more than just a job, but a way to affect others in a meaningful way. Additionally, it helped to explain her drive to persist in the profession, as her desire to make a positive difference in the lives of kids is evident through her words and actions. Nina captured her resilience with this key phrase for other school counselors, “Be positive, patient and persistent.”

Nina’s self-efficacy also emerged when she discussed how she had self-taught herself information on self-care and wellness over the span of her career. She said,

I’m self-taught with different websites. I have either sought it out on my own, or subscribed to them where I get regular information. Mind body green is one where I get a lot of information. Another thing is that I have always been interested in wellness. So, having that wellness piece indirectly ties in with that. (Earlier in my career), I took a class at a (wellness institute), and became certified as a nutrition consultant.

Nina’s own life-long commitment to self-directed learning had supported her ability to continue to practice and integrate wellness behaviors despite the lack of training from her school or district in this area.

**Considering instruments.** Nina’s HPLP-II mean score was a 3.33. Nina’s mean score was the second highest of all seven HPLP-II scores. Nina’s SCS mean score was a 4.77 and was the second highest, right behind that of Eve. Nina’s high scores on both instruments, combined with her 25 years in the field of school counseling demonstrated her ability to not only survive, but also, thrive in the profession.

**Tonya.** Similar to Nina, Tonya is married and has also been a school counselor for 25 years. Currently, Tonya worked in a secondary school setting. Tonya also has served as an on-site supervisor for school counseling students during their internship. After arranging a date that
would work for both of us via email, Tonya and I connected for the interview by phone. Tonya
displayed a warm and sincere tone and as noted in my researcher journal, I found that I resonated
with many things she was saying in regards to balancing the needs of her students and that of the
job itself. Her journey into counseling stemmed from being in the classroom. She said,

When I decided to go into education and I was actually in the classroom, I liked it, but
not as much as I enjoyed the time I spent with the students, one-on-one with the kids. So,
I kind of felt then that I missed it just a tad, where education was it, but not the full
picture, so that’s when I went into counseling.

I enjoyed our conversation and I also found that I was feeling more comfortable in this process
as I was enjoying connecting with fellow counselors and hearing their perspectives on wellness.
Noting in my reflective researcher journal that this was something I wish I had done more of
while I was working as a school counselor.

Advocacy. In our conversation, the theme of advocacy emerged where Tonya discussed
the times where she emphasized clear boundaries between work and school. She stated,

If someone calls me related to work, or you know my principal lives near me and may
stop by and ask me to check on a kid and I’m like why couldn’t you have told me that
tomorrow. So, there are times where I cut it off.

However, Tonya goes on to say that creating those work/home boundaries regarding her emails
has been more challenging. She explained,

I am kind of compulsive about making sure that things get done and I don’t always feel
like people can do it as good as I can. I feel like I am the only one that can answer the
emails properly. So, I have my emails on my cell phone. In the summer though, I am very
good about not looking at my school email but I don’t really shut that down during the
day and I wish that I did.

Similar to Eve, creating those clear boundaries regarding emails was difficult because Tonya also
wanted to represent her counseling program and her department as dependable and in a positive
light. Tonya described this as follows,
As I have gotten older and, so to speak, established because I am more known in my district because I have been here for so long that you need to have a voice and to speak out. There are some schools and some places where they don’t necessarily have a great view of what counselors are supposed to be, or of what their jobs are and what their day to day tasks should be and you have to speak out and not only be an advocate for your kids but also for yourself on some occasions and it is okay to do that and it is healthy to do that because sometimes people will try to take advantage of you and that can be so stressful as well.

Tonya suggested how her experience positively impacted her confidence in her role as a counselor and this supported her ability to have a voice and speak out. Tonya also discussed how this impacts new counselors and related her experiences working with school counseling interns. She stated,

You know for the new counselors who are just coming in and it is so cute when I have students doing their internship because they are so excited and then they kind of start to see what they are doing in their classes and what they are learning is not always 100% what they will do in the schools. And schools are definitely different from one location to another and one state to another, I hate to see them get discouraged because you know a few of my interns have been like, I don’t think I have made the right decision. And I have one person who moved to a different state and decided to go back and get their degree in communications. I just feel bad about stuff like that. You know they did this for a reason. And I feel like they have a good soul and I can see something wonderful about how they can reach certain kids. I hate to see people not feel good about the job overall because it definitely has changed dramatically over the last 10 years and it is a little bit hard to stay motivated sometimes and I get that.

Tonya described how wide-ranging a typical school counselor’s workday could be depending on the time of year. She said,

(Each day) can vary, truthfully, and you know that, depending on the time of the year my complete workday, starting in a week, will be testing. I will be testing from 8:30 in the morning to 4:00pm in the afternoon. Which is really unfortunate. But there are days where I am fortunate enough to go into the classroom and do classroom guidance and talk about character education, and talk about high school registration and getting ready for college and stuff that I love to do. So, it really varies, I would not say my typical day is always the same. There is usually a meeting, or conference almost every morning of every week and there is always hallway duty and lunch duty. But being able to have a set schedule, I can’t tell you the last time I was able to have everything etched in stone and follow it to a tee.
Prioritization of Wellness. During our interview, Tonya addressed some of the demands that are associated with not having a set schedule. She stated,

You know, I think overall, as a counselor, you know that you are there for the kids and when a student comes in and they are crying, or upset, or something is going on, you have to drop what you are doing and talk to them. Then on the other end, you have pressure from the district to have certain pieces of paperwork that have to be completed by a deadline. You know I love to spend time with the kids, but I also feel like sometimes the district, or the people who are not necessarily in the building with us, don’t understand what our roles should really be.

In order to address these pressures, Tonya discussed the ways she has prioritized wellness into her life. She said,

For me to keep my stress level and just my frame of mind in a good place, there are some weekends I set aside to just be like my down weekends, where I don’t bring home paperwork, I don’t do anything on the computer and I find a book that I want to read. But everyday, almost everyday, I go and I have to workout because that is my stress relief. My husband thinks I’m crazy. He says, how bad that can that job be, you get to help kids and it should be really great. And, I’m like you have no idea. Come with me one day.

I appreciated Tonya’s candid perspective during this conversation (as noted in my researcher journal) as well as how she emphasized the importance of making time for self-care. Similar to Eve and Nina, prioritizing exercise and activities not related to work emerged as important areas for her own wellness. However, Tonya also pointed out how she intentionally chooses not to invite co-workers along with her when working out. She said,

You know, I have to be honest with you I don’t really invite people that I work with to do (activities) with me like that. So, if I’m doing a bike ride or going kayaking, I might ask someone, but I like to workout by myself. I don’t really want to go someplace and then start talking about kids, or talking about the day. That’s kind of my time, so I don’t necessarily try to bring my colleagues into my daily routine (outside of school).

By integrating these clear boundaries between work and non-work activities, Tonya further demonstrated how she placed her own wellness as a priority. However, even though she worked out alone, Tonya did state that her co-workers were aware of the importance she placed on wellness and exercise, she said,
Oh yeah, they make fun of me all the time. Because every once in a while I post something on Facebook how I went to the 5:30 in the morning class because I feel I wasn’t able to go after school and they are like why are you going in the morning, you’re not even stressed out yet. You know it doesn’t matter, it helps my frame of mind. It gets me in a good place before I even start my day.

Tonya also described a time where she did not prioritize her wellness. She said,

There was a point where I wasn’t working out and doing things and I didn’t feel good and it impacted my ability to do my job because I was taking sick time and just really not super happy. There was a stretch for probably like two years where I was like, I don’t think I want to be a counselor anymore. Then I started to change some of my eating and started exercising and I started feeling better and I lost a lot of weight, well not a lot of weight, I was never really heavy. I just got more toned. So now regardless for how bad my day is, I know that when I go to the gym, that is my time to relieve my stress and do what I have need to do.

When offering recommendations for other counselors in regards to integrating and prioritizing their own wellness, Tonya said,

I think that, well I don’t want to speak for others, but I just feel like other counselors that I have known, they get to a point where they are unsure. You know that start to feel like, Oh do I want to retire early? Especially when there is so much testing involved with school counseling. So many of my friends said, you know that’s it, I’m out. I didn’t go to school and get my degree so I could sit behind a computer with kids and test them all day, that’s it I’m done. So, I feel like once you start to see things not necessarily crumbling down around you, but going in the wrong direction, you have to make a decision that yes you are going to stick with it, this is what you want to do and try to make those positive changes, or if it’s best for you and your family and your students, then maybe you do need to take a break. There are definitely ways that you can keep yourself healthy you just have to have that shutdown time. I mean that’s definitely the biggest thing being able to separate yourself when you leave that building and taking care of yourself physically and emotionally and spending time with your family and just doing healthier things.

The importance Tonya placed in prioritizing her own wellness was evident throughout our conversation as evident through her words and actions.

**Modeling Wellness.** In addition to prioritizing her own wellness and self-care, Tonya also discussed how she makes a point to become involved at school with the students. She explained,
I always involve myself in the student-faculty games and activities. You know I would say I am not as fast as I used to be, but the kids are always kind of surprised and say things like, “Oh wow, (Name) you can throw a football” and I say “heck yeah I can throw a football” And they say “you got a spiral” and I say “yes, I got a spiral.” It helps them to see you on a whole other level, not just the person sitting behind the desk. It’s kind of more of a human kind of connection at that point, which I love. I love to be able to do that with the kids.

Tonya’s reasons for choosing to interact with her students and model this active behavior stems from her concerns for the sedentary lifestyle of so many children of this generation.

She said,

I worry more about the kids, because they don’t seem to be as active as when I was a child. They are very much stationary with their cell phones and their Play Stations and all of those things and they just don’t get out there and play. There are just so many obese children now, I think more than I have ever seen in my life at this point and it is a little scary to me that they are that severely obese in (this) grade. Some kids are like 160lbs in (this) grade and that is so not healthy. It concerns me because that impacts their education as well because kids make fun of them and that gets into a whole other bigger scenario.

Although Tonya makes a point to model wellness behaviors, she also communicated that she will follow-up with a family if she noticed a student was making a habit of not choosing healthy options at lunch.

**Self-Compassion.** One aspect of self-compassion is related to finding something positive about your present circumstance. Seeing a situation from a different point of view relates to having perspective and looking at the bigger picture. Similar to Eve, Tonya demonstrated this ability when she described how she chooses to notice all aspects (the good and the bad) of her day and then focus on the positive. She said,

You know there are some days when somebody talks to me and they are going to be like, oh man she really hates her job, or she doesn’t like what she is doing and there are those days {mindfulness}. But overall, I’d say 95% of the time, I come home and I can think about something that happened and it makes me smile. Like I can’t believe he finally got a C and he was so excited, it was great, he ran into my office and gave me a big hug. You know, those are the days that I live for. Not the days that have nothing to do with things related to guidance. Yeah, you just have to kind of have to be happy with the little small accomplishments {self-kindness}. 
Neff (2011) explained this as the appreciation for what is going well in one’s life circumstance, where one consciously chooses to focus on the positive. This relates to gratitude and being grateful for what you do have, which also ties into resilience. Interestingly, when I asked Tonya to what extent she thinks she integrated self-compassion in her life, similar to Eve, she had difficulty bringing attention to this practice.

Well, that’s a good one because I don’t always feel that I cut myself a break. I sometimes feel like I’m really difficult on myself, or hard on myself because when I’m trying meet deadlines, or do something and when someone asks me to help them do something, when I really know that I have to get my job done first, I always stop what I am doing to kind of help other people and then it stresses me out because I am trying to get my things done quickly. So, I wouldn’t say that I am very good at that all of the time, but I probably need to take care of myself in certain situations at school better.

Although it was challenging at times for Tonya to turn that kindness inward due to wanting to be there for her colleagues, she did agree that she was aware of her feelings (mindfulness) and that she does want to show care to herself (self-kindness), even though it was difficult at times.

**Resilience.** Tonya’s resilience emerged when she discussed whether she had received any formal education in self-care and/or the practice of self-compassion. Aside from the classes that were offered at her gym on nutrition, or a program offered through her health insurance coverage that awarded a discount if she used a Fit bit, Tonya had not had any formal self-care training. She said,

Well, I will tell you that at the facility (gym) that I have gone to they have seminars once a month on proper eating and they just had something on the Paleo nutrition. I didn’t go, but I have been to some that they have had there. You know, (seminars such as) working out over 50, knowing you are not in your 20’s anymore. You are going for the long haul, not the short gain. So, I have attended a few of those, but I don’t think I have had any formal training. But you know, now that you say that I am a little annoyed that my school district doesn’t provide more training in stuff like that.

This statement demonstrated Tonya’s strong self-efficacy regarding wellness. Even though Tonya lacked any district provided support in counselor training on self-care, she was able to
continue in the profession through her own commitment to self-directed learning, persistence and drive.

Similar to Nina, Tonya’s past experience with her high school counselor, who did not show a great deal of interest in helping to guide and support her, impacted the choices she made for her future. She said,

Well, number one was, I didn’t have a great school counselor. So, I feel like if I had had someone, and I’m not necessarily saying they had to be someone like me, but someone who truly took an interest in me when I was in school, then I feel like the choices I made as far as a career, might have been a little bit different because I’m a science person and I always felt that I wanted to do something related to research. But, my counselor wasn’t really supportive of that at the time. That was though back in the 80’s, where men were going into science and math. Where it’s not like now, where we are pushing females to do STEM. Women can do anything. So, that’s definitely part of it.

Tonya’s self-efficacy also impacted her desire to provide guidance and information for other students and she believed in the importance of her role in helping others make informed career decision regarding their future paths.

Considering Instruments. Tonya’s HPLP-II mean score was a 3.75. Tonya’s mean score was the highest of all seven HPLP-II scores. Tonya’s SCS mean score was a 4.51 and was the third highest. Tonya’s high scores on both instruments, combined with her 25 years in the field of school counseling are a testament to her ability to not only persist, but also, thrive in the profession.

Sara. Sara has been a school counselor now for 32 years. Of all the participants interviewed for this study, Sara has the most experience working as a school counselor. Sara currently worked in a secondary school setting and her school served approximately 1,600 students. Sara is one of four counselors in the school. This is Sara’s last year as a school counselor and she is retiring at the end of the school year.
Sara was one of the first school counselors that I contacted to participate in the semi-structured interview portion of my study. However, I did not hear back from her right away and I thought that maybe we were not going to be able to connect. So, I was very happy when she contacted me and let me know that she had time that day to talk by phone. As I noted in my researcher journal, I appreciated her follow-up as this also confirmed her desire to share her perspective regarding wellness. Throughout our conversation, I found Sara to be a confident and caring counselor who provided an authentic picture of her experiences in the school system.

Before becoming a school counselor, Sara worked as a teacher and was going to school to get her degree as a Licensed Mental Health Counselor. She said,

Well, when I was in my Masters for counseling, I have the clinical counseling. That’s what I went into, I didn’t go into school counseling. I didn’t do an internship, even though I was a teacher, I was going to get out of education and have my own practice and stuff. And I did that for a while, but I did also stay in teaching though, it just was not feasible to do that monetarily and with the insurance and stuff to charge people.

Sara then began to work as a counselor in the schools. Sara described how she integrated wellness while working in the school setting.

**Advocacy.** During our interview, Sara shared her experiences in trying to help her co-workers make wellness a priority. She said,

It’s really tough with educators to do that. I work a lot with teachers. I have a lot of teachers that come and see me and they might stop in once a month and others stop by like clock-work on their planning period. And when they do, I can tell it’s been a bad day. I find myself a lot, encouraging other staff members to take care of themselves because education isn’t an easy field and people don’t (understand).

When asked how she encouraged others, Sara said,

I suggest walking. I suggest meditation. I often suggest books that I have read that I am big-believers in. I have also suggested support groups, sometimes going to the medical doctor and therapists/counseling, all that kind of stuff. I suggest those things a lot.
The importance Sara placed on helping her colleagues make wellness a priority was evident throughout our conversation. Sara also discussed her desire, upon retiring, to reach out to school counselors everywhere and advocate for the need of self-care. She said,

You know, I’m getting ready to retire and if I could go around and do anything, I would love to work with counselors and make them aware of that (need for self-care).

Sara further went on to describe the urgency of this situation. She explained,

Our counselors are burning out like our teachers because they are under so much pressure to collect data and (reach) this graduation percentage rate. And you know what, (school counselors) are not taking care of themselves and in a short amount of time, you are going to have everyone burnt-out. We are not going to be effective with kids anymore.

Sara’s desire to serve as an advocate for school counselors was unmistakable throughout our conversation. She said,

Everything is trauma informed care and I think it’s important but what about the trauma that the counselors face that aren’t taking care of how their trauma affects their life and the giving of their talents to students. We are looking at it from the student’s perspective all the time. But, if you’ve got (counselors) that are affected by trauma and not taking care of it, how are you going to help kids who are trying to learn who have been traumatized.

It was evident that Sara’s 32 years experience as a school counselor working with students, teachers and other counselors had provided her with a span and depth of knowledge in regards to the importance of promoting wellness and well-being in school settings.

Prioritization of Wellness. I was interested to inquire about Sara’s own wellness practices, as she was my participant with the most time spent in the field of school counseling. Similar to the other school counselor who I had interviewed, Sara reported that exercise was an integral aspect of her well-being. She said, “I exercise every night.” Sara also added that every morning she take a few minutes for herself. She stated,

You mean for me personally, I read a devotional every morning. I have a little bit of quiet time in the morning for a prayer/devotional.
Interestingly, Sara was the first school counselor to bring up spirituality as part of her prioritization of wellness. Sara described the necessity of taking time each morning and exercising each evening because a typical day as a school counselor can take a toll, in part due to the high number of students in her school. She described this as follows,

We have about 1,600 students… I think I have my day planned, but then the plan never goes accordingly. We are actually reactive more than proactive, sadly to say. We are usually putting out fires with kids emotionally, socially and academically. Responding to their requests. Right now I have 67 students that have requested to see me.

Similar to other school counselors who I had interviewed, the high student to counselor ratio seemed to come up as a factor in contributing to stress in the school setting.

**Modeling Wellness.** As highlighted earlier in the conversation, Sara had suggested activities for her co-workers to incorporate in regards to wellness and self-care. What I also noted was how Sara also practiced and integrated what she recommended for others. For example, when I asked Sara about what she did in school to help her own wellness. She discussed how she would take walks around and this was how she incorporated her meditation. She said, “Yes, when I walk, that is my meditation time.” That was her preference rather than just sitting still. Sara’s modeling of the wellness behaviors she promoted for others provided further evidence in her own belief in the importance of wellness and self-care. This theme was especially evident when Sara discussed how school counselors’ actions and behaviors impacted and affected students as well as the teachers in the school. She explained,

Not only are we affecting the students, but we are also affecting the teachers. Any counselor at any school, ask them how many teachers they see. Teachers are broken souls. They are like doormats, especially now in this education system. So, you are trying to empower them (the teachers), and administrators are on their own wave-length. They are data-driven robots and they have taken the human part out of their job. We are the only human thing left in the public school system today.
The statement, we are the only human thing left in the public school system (As noted in my researcher journal) greatly resonated with me. This short but powerful statement conveyed what I also saw during my 13 years in the school system where there was a stronger focus on data and test scores. I appreciated Sara’s candid and unguarded perspective during our conversation.

**Self-Compassion.** Sara wove in aspects of the practice of self-compassion throughout our conversation. Similar to Eve, the way in which Sara described the act of self-compassion involved the idea of having perspective. She said,

> There are some days that it is very easy to concentrate on the negative things that you have experienced as a counselor during the workday. There are many reasons that we could take “emotional feelings” home with us… And sometimes, you just do that {mindfulness} and there are other times, where you just need to shake it off. But it is important to make sure that we take care of ourselves… You just have to keep everything into perspective {common humanity}.

When asked if there was anything that she may say or do in order to practice having perspective, Sara said,

> Well, you have got to remember, I have been doing this for over 32 years, so it’s a lot easier for me to say, “I did what I could do” {self-kindness}. Because I know when I leave everyday, I have done all that I can do for a certain situation or a student. I know I have done all I can do, but when you are new at this, it is very hard. You second-guess your self, a lot and it is very hard to recognize all that.

Sara was able to capture the necessity of practicing self-kindness, not only in the beginning stages of one’s career, but also throughout. Sara also attributed her ability to persist in the profession by being able to know and recognize her own limits. She said,

> I just think that I’m pretty good at multi-tasking well and not everyone does that well. I even have some counselor friends who have to do one thing at a time and not every counselor can multi-task well. I think it’s just knowing when you have gotten to your limit, when you’re full {mindfulness}. On the day when you say, you know what I’m full. I can talk to people but I can’t fix anything else today until I can fix myself.

When asked how that may look or sound, Sara said, “It’s a reminder to me that I need to treat every person with kindness and I would also do a lot of self-talk.” Sara further discussed this
when offering recommendation to other counselors in regards to wellness and self-compassion, she said,

Just first of all, number one is to take care of your self, because I believe trauma in our life affects the way we can help others. And, I believe trauma in our life can be anything from having an appliance break at your house in the morning to a death or divorce or something like that. So, just recognizing that we are subject to it ourselves and that we need wellness {mindfulness} and unless we are really well, we are not going to be effective in helping other people be well. Recognizing the need first and giving yourself permission to do it {mindfulness}.

When I asked Sara to what extent she integrated self-compassion into her life she said,

I think probably a lot. Us counselor types, well at least me, I can’t speak for everyone. At least for me, I over analyze everything. Anything anyone says in my life, whether it’s at home or at school. You are always looking for something a little deeper. Sometimes, I need to take things for just how people say them and just leave it, but I over think it a lot.

Sara provided a recent example of when she needed to practice self-compassion. She said,

You know, yesterday I witnessed a situation with an administrator and a colleague of mine. The administrator was so mean to the colleague that I felt uncomfortable. You know I had to do some self-compassion.

Sara’s articulated the importance the practice of self-compassion has been for her in her role as a school counselor as also evident in the many examples where this practice emerged throughout this interview.

**Resilience.** Sara’s reason for making the final decision to become a school counselor was influenced greatly by her own experience with her high school counselor. She said,

I liked the kind of person that they were. How they were accepting and showed unconditional positive regard. Their fairness to all of the students and their kindness was a big factor.

Having a counselor whom she held in such a high regard had a profound impact on Sara’s life, and this contributed to her ability to believe that being a school counselor was a calling for her. Her strong self-efficacy supported her through the ups and downs of a 32-yearlong career span. She described her love of the profession below,
I am going to retire at the end of this year and I have been doing this a long time and I’m not done, I’m just done with this part of it. You know what I am saying. I’ve never loved a job so much in my life and that’s the worst part about retiring is leaving the counseling job itself.

Another area that highlighted Sara’s resilience is when she discussed why she chose to participate in this research. She said,

I do think there needs to be more of this (focus on wellness) and that’s why your study intrigued me because I think of all the years I went to counselor workshops, activities and crap meetings throughout the district, never once have we had a day where we once focused on this… A lot of people don’t respect the school counselor position or the enormity that we have to put up with and deal with. It is an unbelievably hard job and we are the master juggler. We are juggling the administration, the staff, the students and the parents.

Sara’s lack of school district led professional development in the area of counselor wellness and self-care was something that she recognized as a barrier. However, through her own resourcefulness in seeking out information on wellness, as well as her own self-efficacy regarding the importance of wellness, Sara found she was able to overcome this obstacle. She explained,

Well, I don’t think I have had any specific training (in self-care)…but I call it the Dr. Phil age. All the Dr. Oz’s and Dr. Phil’s, since they have been on TV, so that been a decade or two. I think there is much more awareness for everybody, but for those of us who are counselor/therapists or anything like that, we have tended to latch on to those people and we learn from them too.

Sara also attributed supportive and trustworthy colleagues as a factor that positively impacted her ability to maintain and sustain her own wellness throughout her educational career. She said,

We do a lot of counseling with each other here at our school. I mean we happen to be friends, but I have been at some schools where they are not friends with the other counselors, you wouldn’t tell them what size shoe you wore. I just think you know if you click with person or not. I think the biggest factor is trust. I think that is one of the biggest things for a counselor, you have got to maintain trust with others and especially with each other. And that confidentiality rule, just because you are both counselor s doesn’t mean you can break it.
Sara displayed a capacity to overcome challenges throughout her career and through the support of trustworthy colleagues and her own self-directed learning has been able to persist and thrive in the profession.

**Considering instruments.** Sara’s HPLP-II mean score was a 3.04. Sara’s mean score was the fourth highest of all seven HPLP-II scores. Sara’s SCS mean score was a 4.52 and was the third highest among the seven participants.

**Fatima:** Fatima is married with two children. Before becoming a school counselor Fatima worked in adult education in admissions. Currently Fatima worked in an elementary school setting, serving students in kindergarten through fifth grade. She has been an elementary school counselor for 10 years. Her school serves approximately 800 students.

Fatima was the last participant who I interviewed. I found Fatima to be a sincere, articulate and very easy to talk to counselor. As noted in my reflective journal, our conversation flowed naturally and she provided detailed descriptions, especially of the running club that she had started at her school. During the interview, I noted how the theme of advocacy emerged as an area that was well represented in our conversation.

**Advocacy.** One example of how Fatima went above and beyond and advocated for her counseling program as well as the students and staff was through an afterschool girls running club that she had initiated at her school. Fatima described how this club began.

I think when I started it, it actually was another counselor, it was one of the counselor’s on the (other side of town) who had talked about doing a, “girls on the run” club a few years ago at one of our meetings.

Although the club was originally created as an outlet to help students have fun and get stronger, it also seemed to positively impact the students and staff members as it related to Fatima’s counseling program. For example, Fatima has been able to promote wellness at her school by
tying activities such as running and exercise, to skills such as goal setting, teamwork and collaboration for the students as well as the staff. She explained,

Well, I think of wellness more so in the mental health area, but obviously with doing the running group, I try to encourage some of the girls and my co-workers to come out and be active and have fun. I always say, we are doing this just to have fun and to get stronger. So, I do encourage people and I think we have seen people (achieve goals) and especially during the run group when the girls don’t think they can make it to a point, and when they do, they feel really good about it. So, I know that I have been able to help with some of that goal setting.

Fatima’s desire to advocate and encourage others in regards to wellness was evident throughout our conversation. Fatima also reported the importance she placed on prioritizing her own self-care.

Prioritization of Wellness. Similar to the other school counselors in this study, Fatima demonstrated various ways in which she incorporated wellness into her life. One area that emerged was Fatima’s high priority on exercise and nutrition, although she also described the struggles to keep this on track. She said,

Well, I think probably the struggle that is always there, is trying to eat more healthily. To not fall victim to the old, I don’t have time and you know do what’s easy. I can’t say I’m always winning that battle but it’s something I am always aware of and striving towards. And the exercise piece as well. I find that when I get kind of off track with it, then everything starts to feel kind of blah. When I get back on track, and sometimes it’s hard to fit it in, but then I’m glad that I did.

She further described how she has found a way to schedule the exercise piece into her life and the impact his has had. She said,

The running is something that I definitely enjoy, it’s sort of my time, but I forgot that I did that afterschool today too. So, every week when I have the girls running group, going out with the group of students and some of my friends and co-workers that have also kind of jumped on board and have come along to do it. It’s fun and it’s something that is scheduled. Something to look forward to.

Fatima also placed a high priority on having a having work/life balance and when asked how she managed this balance she said,
I think that I manage it because yes there are nights that I have to do work, but from the time that I leave school to when the kids go to bed. That’s our time (family time) that’s chatting, that’s cooking, that eating, it’s the whole nine yards. Just making sure that we have that family time. But also, not over scheduling myself even for social events. I find that I do better if that every Saturday and Sunday are not booked up with some kind of commitment. The weekends are busy. I just need to make sure that I have some kind of family day, where we don’t have anything scheduled… And also to remember to make sure that you have fun and joy and that you make sure that you make time for those things because that is important.

The importance of creating boundaries between work time and family time emerged as a way that Fatima was able to prioritize her own need for self-care.

**Modeling Wellness.** One way Fatima would model wellness was by making sure she would take a lunch everyday. Just as Fatima encouraged others to take care of themselves, she also valued the importance of modeling what she promoted. She said, “For lunch, I try to be good about taking a little bit of the lunchtime for myself.”

Modeling positive wellness behaviors also extended into other areas. For example, Fatima’s own passion for running had influenced her counseling program at her school. While Fatima was training for a half-marathon she began to think how she could model this behavior for her students at school. She said,

I had been getting into running personally at that time and I thought, wow, that would be really cool to do (for my students at school). But, it just wasn’t the right time for me with the little ones. A couple of years ago though, I was training for a half marathon with a teacher friend of mine who works with me and I said, I would like to do this (girls running club), would you be interested. Because I didn’t think I could do it all on my own and so she agreed and we got the approval from the principal. So, this is now the third year where we have been doing (the running club).

Fatima’s efforts in establishing this club combined with her own active participation had created an opportunity for her colleagues to also participate. Consequently, her colleagues served as mentors while also supporting the modeling of positive wellness behaviors for students. She said,

Yes, it’s very cool that we have different people that want to come out. We invite everyone, we say, Thursday’s is run group day and we would love, and the girls would
love to have some of their teachers and staff members come out. So we have usually three (staff members) that walk. So, they are not runners, they will walk and when we go out to the neighborhoods they form the back barrier of the group. This year one of our P.E. coaches has started to come out and join us and of course the girls love to see her. Also, one of our 4th grade teachers had come out and some of the girls have had her as a teacher and they love that she is out there and our literacy coach has come out too. So it’s just kind of nice to have familiar faces from around campus where people have said that, sure I will come out and get some exercise and be a mentor.

Fatima’s ability to incorporate and model those positive lifestyle behaviors that she promoted for others emerged as key to her ability to maintain and sustain her own wellness.

**Self-Compassion.** The practice of self-compassion is parallel to wanting wellness and serenity for oneself (Neff, 2011). This practice is critical for counselors whose jobs are often unpredictable and demanding. When describing her typical day, Fatima also navigates the morning routine with her young children before the school day even begins. She said,

So, every morning I call it like the craziest time of the day. The morning rush, get up, shower, get dressed, getting the (kids) ready, getting breakfast for them, their lunches together; I get my protein shake…I have the shakology. I use the pre-made bag, it’s chocolate flavor, throw a little frozen banana, ice, water, good stuff and it’s ready to go…So then I stop and drop my (younger child) at her (school) and then onto (my school), and I usually get there between 8:15 am and 8:30am.

Fatima discussed how each school day was different, She said,

Then, the normal morning of meetings, planning, preparing for the whole day. Then probably, you know, every day brings something different. Like today, I had 3 guidance classroom lessons to do. I had a leadership team group meeting at the end of the day, then lunch duty, in between. I had several individuals and conflict resolution groups and the next thing you know the day was over.

Fatima noted that after her lunch duty was a time where she purposefully would take time for herself. She said,

Some days when I feel I’ve had too much to do, I will sit and eat in my office. Sometimes it’s very purposeful because it gives me quiet time (self-compassion break)...I honestly do find that after I do my lunchroom duty in the cafeteria. I some times do feel I have to go out of there because it feels so noisy. And it kind of gives me that, “Oh my gosh”. So, after that I go to my office, keep the light off and decompress for about 5 minutes.
When asked to describe what this experience is like for her, she said, “It’s just the quiet, and just the darkness. You know, leave the light off, come in and just sit down.” Fatima described this break allowed her to prepare mentally for the second half of the afternoon saying, “believe it or not, it’s kind of relaxing.” Interestingly, after Fatima described her process of taking time for herself each day she said, “I don’t think I’ve really ever thought that I did that until I just started to say that. I really do take those couple of minutes.” This statement demonstrated the need Fatima placed on her daily (self-compassion) break, even though it was not something that she realized she needed.

In contrast, Fatima had no problem describing and recognizing the compassion she provided to her teachers and colleagues she said,

I guess I think of myself as someone who tries to be very positive and push people towards thinking positively and focusing on the good things rather than living in that self-pity and just trying to be a support for everyone and for the teachers. You know sometimes everyone gets stressed, while I can’t solve their problems of their work load, I can listen and I can give them the positive support and kind words to notice all the great things that they are doing and helping to get them through that.

The practice of self-compassion also emerged in our conversation when Fatima provided recommendations for other school counselors. Through the constructs of mindfulness, common humanity and self-kindness, Fatima demonstrated the importance of cultivating self-compassion She said,

Well, I guess the recommendation is that you have to have work-life balance, you have to find what works for you and you have to be okay with not always being able to get it all done everyday {mindfulness}. I think this is something we just talked about at our level meeting and I think people get really stressed because they want to be everything to everyone. You know we all do, that’s why we are in this field, but sometimes you just have to be okay to recognize that you are only human {common humanity} and you can’t possibly get everything done everyday because that is just not a realistic thought.
When asked for an example of what Fatima would say to herself when she was struggling or facing some sort of limitation, she responded with “I got this or I can get through this” {self-kindness}. Neff (2011) calls the silent repetition of a memorized phrase, a self-compassion mantra. Although this mantra is unique, as each individual may have their own phrase that resonates for them, its unifying purpose is to provide comfort for oneself in times of difficulty. Fatima chose to integrate her self-compassion mantra in order to provide comfort and kindness towards herself in times of suffering.

Similar to other counselors in this study, Fatima demonstrated examples of the practice of self-compassion throughout our conversation. When asked to what extent she has integrated this practice, Fatima said, “I think that I do” and described the importance of recognizing her strengths and weaknesses. She said,

I have always tried to be very self-reflective. Knowing my strengths and knowing my weaknesses and knowing what things that are weaknesses that I am okay with being weaknesses. As well as what things that I want to work on and try harder with.

Interestingly, similar to some of the other counselors in this study, Fatima did not use the term self-compassion to describe the compassionate behavior she demonstrated towards herself, although the behavior was described throughout our conversation.

**Resilience.** Resilience emerged as a key factor in Fatima’s ability to persist in the profession. The lack of professional development on wellness for school counselors was one area that she discussed. She said,

Well, that’s really hard to think of, when I think about all the different meetings and different things, how much time is really spent on that (self-care training). Do we talk about the importance of it, yes. But, I don’t know if a large focus is placed on that, or if true training time is really given to it.

Fatima’s extent of formal self-care training stemmed from her participation on the district crisis intervention team, but not all counselors receive this information. Only those few counselors
designated to participate on the team receive this additional information on the importance of wellness. She said,

The thing that does come to my mind is that I am part of the district crisis intervention team, and I think that within that team with the nature of the work that we do, when we are called out to a crisis and have spent an entire day or more and have helped people who are going through all of those stages of grief, we do always try and remind each other to take care of ourselves. So, I know that on our team we are on a text thread and it’s always before we leave the building that day wherever we are, we go around and say one thing we are going to do that evening to take care of ourselves.

Fatima also recalled that at the yearly meetings wellness is also addressed. She said,

At some points, usually probably once a year at our meetings, we will do a supportive circle where someone kind of facilitates and goes around and everyone answers a question and give us a chance to decompress.

Being connected to the district crisis team seemed to offer Fatima an extra layer of support in regards to information on self-care, but she even noted that this type of information is not something that all school counselors are receiving, even though it is an important topic. She said,

I think this is a great topic, because like I said, because I was stumped when I was thinking about if we have really been trained on how to properly care for ourselves.

Fatima’s strong self-efficacy in her ability to integrate wellness despite the minimal district training and/or focus on self-care, speaks to her resilience.

Additionally, Fatima discussed the positive impact supportive colleagues and the forming of close friendships at work have had on her own wellness and also attributes this to her ability to overcome adversity and thrive in the profession. She said,

I guess it’s about having supportive colleagues too in our role because I think that is something that comes up as counselors especially elementary counselors is that we can feel isolated with no one else that you work with who does your job. You almost don’t have that person to commiserate with as a teacher would. For me, I think having formed some close friendships with other counselors and sometimes it doesn’t have to be someone who is a counselor, but someone who can see things from your perspective. So, I have a very good friend at work who is a (colleague) and who is my work buddy, but also my teammate to where she goes in and supports the teachers. She knows also has to sit in meetings and she has to attend them and we can commiserate with each other when
we have a chance to see each other. And she is a positive person too, so when I say commiserate, it’s not in that way in which, oh my gosh, we have to leave or let’s talk ourselves down. It’s more like we need to get together and have coffee.

Fatima’s self-efficacy related to her preparation and background in this field also supported her resilience. Fatima’s background in psychology as well as her training in the area of school counseling combined with her desire to work in the school system provided Fatima with the belief that this profession was the right fit for her. She said,

Ok. Well, I was a psychology major as an undergrad. Then I was working in adult education in admissions, and knew that I wanted to go back to school to get my Master’s and was realizing how much I liked counseling, talking through things helping people with problem solving. So, at first I actually thought I was going back to school for mental health counseling. That was just the program that I had initially signed up for, but school counseling was also an option, and as I started to take my first couple of classes I realized that was the direction I wanted to go it would blend my education, background and doing the counseling but working in the school system. It was like a light bulb moment, oh, that’s what I wanted to do.

Fatima also described how her self-awareness regarding the importance of her own work ethic was another factor. She said,

I think that I am hard on myself in the sense that I have always been a hard worker and I never want to let anyone else down, but I also don’t want to let myself down, because I do think I do have more of that internal drive, of just wanting to do a good job. It doesn’t matter if anyone is watching. My husband and I were just talking about this, how some people they don’t care that they show up at work late and because if they get away with it then they are just like, alright. But, I could never do that because I would know. You know just having a good work ethic I really important to me.

Fatima’s, belief (self-efficacy) in her ability to make a difference as a school counselor combined with her dedication and work ethic impacted her perseverance in the face of situations that could be difficult, at times, and contributed to her resilience.

**Considering Instruments.** Fatima’s HPLP-II mean score was a 2.79. Fatima’s mean score was the lowest of all seven HPLP-II scores. Fatima’s SCS mean score was a 4.35 and scored sixth out of the seven participants in this study. Although Fatima’s scores fell on the
lower end of the seven participants, her scores are considered average (HPLP-II) to above
average (SCS). Combined with her 10 years experience as well as the detailed and descriptive
information she provided in the interview, Fatima’s experience is testament to her ability to not
only persist, but also, thrive in the profession.

**Fiona.** Fiona is married and has children. Before becoming a school counselor, Fiona was
a teacher. She worked her first year as a teacher working with children who were emotionally
handicapped. The following three years Fiona taught children with learning disabilities. Then,
while still working as a teacher, a counselor at her school recommended that she consider
becoming a school counselor, as this might be a good fit for her. She said,

The counselor at the school (I worked at) was trying to get an AP (Assistant Principal)
job and she said, “(Name) I think you would really like it.” So I thought about it and I
actually went to (University) and I took one class at a time until I was finished with my
Masters. I actually paid for it by getting a loan every semester with the credit union for
the class I was taking. I would get the money and then the credit union would take the
payment out of my paycheck every two weeks so I never had a student loan. She did not
get an AP job so I had to go out and interview for a counseling position. My first
counseling job was at an elementary {A School} that I was at for 12 years.

Fiona has since been a school counselor for 28 years. Fiona currently worked at a middle school
and has been the counselor at that school since it opened.

Fiona was one of the last participants I had interviewed for this study. I was able to
connect with her afterschool by phone and was eager to conduct this interview as Fiona had one
of the highest number of years experience as a school counselor in the study and I hoped this
would yield rich and descriptive data (as noted in my researcher journal). As anticipated our
conversation was successful. I found Fiona to be an engaging and friendly counselor who
provided great details regarding her perspective on wellness. One area that emerged right away
during the interview is how she advocated for herself and the other counselors at her school.
Advocacy. Similar to the other counselors in this study, Fiona recognized that each day was different where her schedule was influenced by different factors such as the time of year (testing/registration) and/or unplanned student, or parent concerns. She said,

There is no typical workday at (School Name) and let me tell you why. You know, we have so many meetings and our meetings start at 7:40-7:45 in the morning. I could have a leadership meeting, faculty meeting, or an MTSS meeting. I could also have a parent-teacher conference with the team. So that starts my morning and I could also have a new student so there could be a new registration waiting for me by 8:00 or 8:15, then I have to make their schedule then after that I also do individual counseling. Right now we are doing course cards for our 8th graders going to high school, so they all have questions and then their parents have questions. I have an open door policy, so many of our parents don’t think to call and make an appointment and they just show up and expect to be seen. So, I always tell my parents, I have an open door policy and if my door is open you are more than welcome to come in. So there are plenty of times when parents do come in. We also have an hour of lunch duty because of our sheer numbers. Then afterwards we eat lunch. …. I also do mediations between kids. I also might have a Baker Act that I have to do a suicide assessment on. I may have to do a threat assessment. I may play good cop / bad cop with my assistant principal with students that she wants to have a talk with the two of us in there. Then usually I try to do my phone calls before I go home then I leave work and try not to bring anything home. I mean as a counselor sometimes I do, but I don’t bother taking my stuff home because I know I’m just going to drag it back and not even look at it.

The one constant that Fiona mentioned when she discussed her typical day was lunch with her colleagues. She said,

We eat in the closet. It’s a storage closet in the office and usually all of the counselor’s eat there together. We do not usually, and this is for our well being, talk shop unless it’s something that might take a minute or two, otherwise we discuss family, friends, and what we are doing over the weekend.

When I asked Fiona how this practice of not “talking shop” began at lunch she told me she had initiated it years before when the school first opened. She said,

Because I have been there since the school opened and you know I did it teasingly with the assistant principals when they would come in, and (I would say) “we don’t talk shop in here”, using humor and they are fine with it and they know we want to have a peaceful lunch.
By creating boundaries where lunchtime was protected as a time for building social connections with colleagues and not for addressing school related tasks, Fiona has demonstrated the importance she placed on wellness. Additionally, her ability to voice this request (being kind and using humor) to her assistant principals allowed her to advocate for herself and for the other counselors in regards to promoting their own need for self-care. She described this as follows,

"We have actually said we do not talk shop in here, because the assistant principals will come and try to talk shop and we say no, “come see us after lunch, or we will come see you.” “We are not talking business at this time.”

Fiona’s ability to use kindness and humor as a way to connect with her administration and advocate for the “peaceful lunch” she and her colleagues required was a testament to the importance she placed of self-care for counselors.

Fiona’s efforts in advocating for her students’ well-being also emerged during our conversation. Fiona discussed the importance she placed on promoting the idea of having balance to her students. She explained,

"For the kids, I have taught them they need to balance life. Issues in the past have been where a kid, who breaks up with their boyfriend, and what happens is they feel like they don’t have any friends anymore because they didn’t balance between the boyfriend, friends and family. Then they lose their friends because they hung out with the boyfriend too much. So, I constantly talk to especially to (#) graders that you have to balance your life, you have to realize that you have to make time for everybody. I teach my girls that your girlfriends can be there for life, you will date many boys between now and the time you get married. So you really need to understand and you have got to look at these things because if you don’t have your girlfriends anymore, you are going to feel isolated and alone. So, make time for those girlfriends and they can be there for you through everything.

When I asked Fiona how she promoted this idea of "having balance" to her students she said,

"When (the students) come with anxiety and we are seeing more kids with anxiety, sometimes they call it panic attacks and they are not panic attacks it’s anxiety. I teach them when you are feeling anxiety then come and see me. This is your safe place. If I’m not here then you just can stay, or go across the hall and (Name) can help you and give you a pass back to class. A lot of times they will do it (Come to my office) and I will say, you know what they don’t even need it, they just need to know there is a place for them if..."
that would happen. So, we do that. Then I teach them breathing exercises and how to go
to their safe place and do the tension exercises to release the tension in their body. I do
that with a lot of kids.

Fiona’s direct and honest approach she had during our conversation is congruent with her style
of advocacy for her students and staff as it related to promoting wellness.

**Prioritization of Wellness.** Fiona discussed her experience encouraging teachers to de-
stress by suggesting relaxation activities outside of the school setting. She said,

For the teachers, I think it depends on what they are telling me. You know I will preach
you’ve got to make some time for your self. Hey maybe you need to go and get a
pedicure, or a massage, or something that you are doing for yourself.

Fiona then provided a very candid response regarding how difficult it can be to make oneself a
priority. She said,

I can feel the tension in my shoulders and there are many times when I am like, “oh my
god, why am I so tense.” But, it’s the stress. It’s there…And I know that and I preach that
(to get a pedicure or a massage), but I don’t always do it for myself. So, I wait for my
kids to give it to me for Christmas and then I go and do it.

Consequently, how Fiona was able to successfully prioritize wellness in her life was by
scheduling pre-set activities that were apart of her daily schedule. She said,

When I get home I always meet my neighbors at 5:00pm to walk our dogs. We walk a
mile and a half and that allows me to de-stress. We really don’t talk about work unless
there is something really major or something unusual that happened. We talk about
family, we talk about politics, we talk about whatever is on the news and just exercise.
Fiona also discussed the importance of having an exercise schedule that is built into your daily
routine. She said,

I also exercise in the morning when I get on my recumbent bike. I try to do it for 20 or 30
minutes and it gives me energy and then I take my shower, get dressed and go to work. I
think the exercise does help all the way around because I know I don’t feel as stressed if I
exercise. When I get on the bike in the morning, I feel like I’m a little more awake and I
have a little more energy to start tackling the day.

The importance Fiona placed on wellness was evident as she modeled the very behaviors that she
promoted for her students, staff, and administration.
Modeling Wellness. During our conversation, Fiona described how the administration at her school does not place a high priority on taking the time to eat lunch. She said,

They talk shop and they eat at their desks. And I have told them, that that is not healthy for you, you need to de-stress, you need to give yourself a break and not work through your lunchtime, but they just continue to do it. We invite them, but they don’t usually come. Every once in a while, maybe once a year I might see my AP eat lunch, but for the most part it never happens.

However, Fiona noted not only does she encourage others to take time for themselves, but she (along with the other counselors) also modeled it, She said,

We get a duty-free lunch and we make sure we take it…We have kind of set that tone and (administration) will come in and say, ‘I know we don’t talk business in here but when you come out’… It’s funny, and they do respect us and it really works out well.

Fiona also discussed how she would herself use the strategies and techniques that she taught to her students in order to manage her stress. Deep breathing, being mindful of the present moment, and massage are all areas that Fiona modeled for her students. She provided an example of how she would explain this to her students,

The ones that have a hard time going to sleep, I teach them to breathe in and breathe out and takes a lot of practice but if you keep doing it and you say it in your head, other thoughts can’t come into your head, that are keeping you awake. I teach them too if there is something important they are worried about go write it down and lay it in your bathroom (floor). Then their mind does not have to think about it all night…I was taught many years ago how do some massaging on your back and to get rid of knots in your shoulder blades. I can get rid of some people’s migraines you know things like that. So, a lot of time even my kids, I tell them if you are feeling stressed, take your right hand and go over your left shoulder and I want you to squeeze on it and I want you to push around with your hands and you can do it on the back of your neck, behind your ears. You know, I teach them that type of things and I also do it for the teachers where they will say can you please work on me. And they come and sit and say, you need to start charging. They say, how do you feel that knot and I say I guess I have done it for so long. My husband had a lot of ailment so I have just done it and the teacher that I help and they get the release that makes me happy. So you know, teaching them some ways to reduce their stress.
The numerous examples of how Fiona modeled and incorporated the behaviors/skills she promoted for her students and staff in order to cope with stress was evident throughout our conversation and demonstrated the value she placed on wellness.

**Self-Compassion.** When I asked Fiona to describe the extent that she thinks she integrated self-compassion into her life, before she responded she asked for me to define self-compassion. This is congruent with the idea that the term self-compassion is not a prevalent term. On the same token she was able to comprehensively articulate the practice of self-compassion. She said,

> It depends on what it is. For the most part, I realize that. You know how some people look at a glass as half full or half empty. So it’s your attitude about life and what’s going on {mindfulness} and hey everybody makes mistakes {common humanity}, so you don’t condemn yourself when you make the mistake. You have to realize that we’re all human. Just like those parents when they scream at their kids when they make a mistake, instead of saying hey you made a mistake and you are going to learn from it {self-kindness}. I don’t’ come down hard on myself normally. And I think that’s my personality. I’m more of a type B, I’m a laid back personality and I think that makes a difference too.

I noted (in my reflective journal), Fiona incorporated the three interrelated constructs of mindfulness, common humanity and self-kindness that operationalize this practice of self-compassion. Thus, reaffirming that this is not an unknown practice, just a less commonly used term.

**Resilience.** Fiona’s resilience emerged as she discussed her recommendations for other counselors in regards to wellness and the practice of self-compassion. She said, “I would tell them (school counselors) to take care of themselves first of all.” However, when I asked Fiona what formal education/trainings she has received in order to support the importance of counselor self-care she said,

> Well, it has been a long time since I have been to a conference but, I’m trying to remember. I apologize, I may have to think about it and add to this one…Because really I’m not so sure even in our counseling meetings three times a year…Right, I couldn’t tell
you the last time I had that (training on self-care), maybe probably through my {Health Insurance}. I know about a year and a half ago I did the weight loss or the exercise and I think they probably promoted it. You know what I am saying. You have got to take care of yourself. But, as far as professionally and doing it through any kind of training. No.

The lack of professional development in the area of self-care only highlighted Fiona’s own drive and commitment to self-directed learning. This was evident through her ability to sustain a focus on wellness demonstrating her strong self-efficacy throughout her 28-year career span.

Another key factor that Fiona attributed to her resilience was the importance of colleagues. She stated,

They (school counselors) need to find somebody, either to have a mentor, or have another counselor friend or have your teammates. In middle school, I have had it.

Fiona described in more detail the importance supportive colleagues have had on her own ability to persist in the profession. She said,

It makes you feel like you’re family. So, it really does make a difference because if somebody comes in and says, ‘Hey, how did your dad do?’ or “Hey, how did it go with?” you know that people care. I get all kinds of situations where people come and talk to me, but you know it’s that connection. My mother in law has passed away, but she had dementia, well come to find out there are two other teachers who are going through the same thing, or have had the same thing and so just talking about it, they give you ideas, and you give them ideas. Hey this is how I dealt with it, this is how you dealt with it, oh, I need to try that. So, it really does make a difference. And even with kids, what I have found as I have gotten older, it is like when I connect with my counselors and the secretary at lunch, I have found that and it’s been really nice that what has happened is that some people are a little more open than others and people will talk about things like, believe it or not, their sex life or something medical and then what happens is you find out, hey you are not alone, or you’ve gone through the same issue. I can tell you that I had a counselor, and she is no longer in the state. She actually left. She actually left the profession. She was in for probably five years. What she couldn’t stand, which is what the rest of us can’t stand is the paperwork and all the political crap/stuff we have to do from legislation all the way down. She was engaged twice before she married her husband now and she said “(Name), I am so glad you guys talk about all these different things because I’m younger and I wouldn’t think to talk. That’s really not normally what most people talk about, so I’m finding out what’s normal. And I think that comes with age and with people who are older, but I realize that talking about things and not being embarrassed about something, you end up helping somebody. So, it really does make a difference.
Fiona described how she has been able to find this support in her middle school. However, if she would have worked at an elementary school that could have been more challenging because unlike middle schools were you typically have three or four counselors, elementary schools usually just have one, so you can feel more isolated. She said,

In elementary school, it’s harder because you are by yourself and you feel like you don’t have anybody. So unless you’re friends with the AP, or unless you are friends with some other teachers that will help you to de-stress and talk about your day and vent then you really don’t have anybody and you are pretty much on your own. So that makes it more difficult.

This aligns with what Fatima had also discussed regarding the isolation that could happen with counselors in elementary school settings.

**Considering instruments.** Fiona’s HPLP-II mean score was a 2.80. Fiona’s mean score was the six highest of all seven HPLP-II scores. Fiona’s SCS mean score was a 4.10 and was the sixth highest among the seven participants. Although Fiona’s scores fell on the lower end of the seven participants, her scores are considered average (HPLP-II) to above average (SCS).

Combined with her 28 years experience as well as the detailed and descriptive information she provided in the interview, Fiona provided a thoughtful and comprehensive perspective on wellness as she had experienced it in the school system.

**Tulane.** Tulane is married with two young children who also attended her school. Tulane currently worked in an elementary school setting and has been a school counselor for 12 years. Tulane’s elementary school served 500 students and employed 50 staff members. Tulane has two school counseling interns assigned to her school and served as their on-site supervisor.

Tulane and I had gone back and forth with different dates and times before we were finally able to connect through Face Time. I found Tulane to be a passionate advocate for the
school counseling profession and an engaging conversational partner (As noted in my reflective journal).

**Advocacy.** Tulane provided a detailed description of her typical workday (Appendix J) and provided a clear picture of how she worked with impacted students at her school. Additionally, Tulane discussed how she also advocated for others. When working with her school counseling interns, Tulane discussed how she would encourage them to self-advocate for themselves if they needed help when working with students. She said,

> For (my school counseling interns), I always say, hey, I’m always here, especially like if they are running a small group. I say, hey you just let me know. It can be a little signal or hey what do I do now. I always want them to say, hey, so that I can jump in and I will know what to do. Now, when they are working with individual kids, I might not do that as much because I kind of want them to process through that, but if they are in a classroom lesson or small group I might jump in and say, I’m noticing right now that you look overwhelmed or you look stuck, how can I help you? Or do you want me to jump in now to model what you could say? And you can go back and do it later.

Another area where the theme of advocacy emerged was related to school counselors and counseling programs. Tulane was the co-chair of a grant initiative to acquire money for school counseling programs in her district. She described this process,

> Right now, in (State), we have a company called (Company Name). They are a pharmaceutical company, anyway. They have provided grant money for schools in (State) to apply for counseling grants. So, a lot of public schools applied and I think all of them got it up to I think $50,000. So, I co-chaired it for my district and we got it a few weeks ago, so now we are meeting to discuss what we are going to do with all of that money and to write a more updated grant...You had to write is as a district, so we are K-12, so we wrote one for K-12. Our focus is social/emotional because that’s the areas where we lack more mental health concerns. We are noticing our graduation rates are pretty good, our test scores are pretty good, so it’s really just focusing on that mental health side.

Tulane’s commitment in helping school counselors and school counseling programs promote mental health and wellness was evident through her actions and dedication surrounding this grant. Tulane described how this was impacting her school schedule. She said, “So, that’s
throwing a little wrench in the schedule because now I spend at least an hour and a half a week at meetings (related to this grant).”

Tulane’s advocacy efforts in regards to wellness, was also reflected in how she promoted her school counseling program. She described this,

This week is National School Counseling Week, I’ve given each of my staff members personalized cards and I make them little things and give them gifts from time to time. To me, I don’t expect anything back, but it’s just for them, so then they know how important they are for me, my role in the school and for the kids at the school. So, I think that just in general, encouraging other people to be mentally and emotionally healthy and ready to start the day.

Tulane’s ability to encourage others also related to her own dedication to prioritizing wellness into her life.

**Prioritization of Wellness.** Tulane provided several examples of how she had been able to prioritize wellness. Tulane described how she was able to schedule time to exercise with some of her colleagues right after school. She said,

Well, there is a group of us that workout every week after school, so that’s helpful. A group of us might get together and just kind of decompress and exercise. Our principal actually use to lead an exercise class at our school, now due to other stuff and her scheduling she can’t do that anymore. So, a lot of us stay after school 2-3 days a week and we do that. That’s a pretty constant way that we are able to maintain that positive lifestyle.

Additionally, Tulane discussed how she had prioritized and integrated prayer into her life.

Tulane described how an existing group at her school has helped to support this priority. Tulane said,

The prayer group… It was there when I joined the school. I think that people come and go but I think a lot of it, I can initiate because my job is more flexible than that of a teacher. So, I’ll know when the teacher is on prep, so I might just go down and give them a hug and say, hey let’s talk, even if we don’t pray. You know, I am very comfortable going in and talking to any of the teachers. Most of the time, it is about there stuff, but they are always willing to listen to me too.
Prayer and exercise were not the only areas that Tulane had chosen to prioritize into her life. She said,

I really enjoy doing crafts and I’m pretty creative, so even spending time doing that by myself or with my (child) and getting away and doing that. So, yes it is important to have this part of your life, but there are so many other things, whether it’s God, that for me or being a Christian, or it it’s crafts, if it’s reading, you know just finding a passion beyond just counseling… I mean in general, I think that everyone needs to have a passion from their professional life.

Tulane’s ability to engage in making time for those positive lifestyle behaviors that helped to provide balance and passion in her life emerged throughout our conversation.

**Modeling Wellness.** Modeling those wellness behaviors she promoted for others was important for Tulane as she described how this occurred with her family. She said,

We (my husband and I) both workout and exercise, so I think that is being a good model for our children and they are both very active and involved in different things.

Being able to demonstrate those wellness behaviors that she promoted for others was important to Tulane.

**Self-Compassion.** The importance of the practice of self-compassion emerged when Tulane provided recommendations for other school counselors in regards to wellness. She said,

I think it is important for counselors to be aware of their own stress levels {mindfulness}. You know kind of what we teach the kids, what is that that you say, I just need to say no, or I just need to stop and shut my door for a minute, because there is so much of that emotional part of just taking on from everybody and other people in the building don’t know that, unless we tell them that and most of the time, we don’t. We don’t want to complain, but with a caseload of 500 kids, plus 50 staff members and it’s kind of like okay keep everything together. So, I think it’s just recognizing what is that limit for you. When do you need to know that it is time for you to just take a break, because I think that is just huge.

Tulane described how she encouraged and taught her school counseling interns to be aware of their own stress. The constructs that operationalized the practice of self-compassion are shown in brackets. She said,
You know I have had a lot of interns and I have two right now, and that is one thing that I tell them or always want to point out to them. I will say, I can tell you are a little overwhelmed, let’s stop and try to instill that {mindfulness}. That you know, it’s okay, we can’t have our magic wand and we can’t fix everything even though we may always want to {common humanity}. Kids are all going to do things even though we may have taught them. Hardly, anyone in our buildings know what we do everyday {self-kindness}. And I think that’s probably the big thing that I would want counselors in training to just consider. You know, kind of almost do like an emotional thermometer throughout the day and say okay, where are you now and if you are finding that you are too high, that’s when you say hey, I have to put something aside and do something about this.

Interestingly, although Tulane noted the importance of this practice for other school counselors, when I asked Tulane the specific question related to the extent she integrated self-compassion into her life, Tulane answered,

That’s a good question, I don’t know. Probably not a lot of conscious self-compassion. Sometimes, you know, I just give myself a time-out and know that I need to get back to it. So, probably not a lot to be honest. I’ll probably do it more so for other people, but not as much to myself as I should.

Tulane provided an example of how a time-out would look for her in school. She said,

If it (time-out) is at school, I might just sit in my chair. Sometimes, I will even take a walk around the school {self-compassion break}. Sometimes I think just walking around or going and sitting with a kid at lunch.

At home, Tulane also recognized the importance of taking that time-out when needed. She said,

“(My husband and I) also recognize that, hey we are sometimes super busy, and we just need to take a break.”

The important role of prayer for Tulane while at school also emerged in our conversation. She said,

I’m a Christian, so (I pray) everyday during the school day, of course not out loud, but we have a prayer group that I will be a part of. And a lot of my good friends there, we talk a lot and a lot of them are Christians as well, so we will get together and talk and/or go into a room and pray together, or you know whatever we need to do.
Tulane noted that this prayer group at school served to help her and her colleagues when they were struggling with something in their lives. She described the role of prayer and the prayer group in her school. She said,

Normally, during the school day, it would not be a group, more like one teacher. You know, if she is struggling with something even in her classroom, or from her personal life, we might get together, or I will do the same thing. If I go up to them and I’m like, I just need a minute, so then I will go to them. I feel very comfortable doing that.

Although Tulane said she did not feel she practiced self-compassion “as much as she should,” her integration of daily prayer helped ease her in times of struggle and this aligns with the core purpose of the practice of self-compassion (As noted in my researcher journal).

**Resilience.** The theme of resilience emerged when Tulane discussed her path to becoming a school counselor. Tulane described her early life experience. She said,

I think ever since I have been a young child, I always helped with vacation Bible study and I helped in the nursery. I’ve always just enjoyed kids and I went to a small Catholic school growing up and then went to a pretty small high school and a pretty small college. It’s now become a university. So, I have always wanted to work with kids, I initially wanted to become a teacher and so when I was a freshman in college, I went and I subbed for my own first grade teacher.

While Tulane was subbing for her first grade teacher’s class she began thinking about becoming a school counselor. She said,

I went back and subbed for her and while I was subbing a little boy said that he was going to fail a test, so in 1st grade, he said, well I’m going to fail it anyway, I don’t care. At that moment, I thought I don’t want to be a teacher, I want to be able to work with that boy one-on-one in order to be able to really understand him, what’s his motivation, more of the why. So, I went back to college, and it was my spring break at the time, and I changed my major to psychology because I knew I just wanted to work more with people that way. But, I always wanted to work with kids, as far as children and adolescence, so I took a lot of those types of classes in college. Then when I went to go for graduate school, I applied for school psychology, did that for about a year, and realized I just didn’t want to do the testing. I loved the testing and the numbers and the data collection, but I also wanted to work more with the kids. Then I changed my major to school counseling and I went to {A University} for two years and it was definitely my passion.
Tulane knew from an early age that she would work with kids. The idea of counseling being a calling for her spoke to her self-efficacy in that her education and background provided her with the belief that this was the job where she would make a difference in the lives of kids. Therefore, when stress and obstacles were encountered, her self-efficacy was a factor in her resilience.

Tulane’s focus on wellness emerged throughout our conversation. However, when I asked Tulane about what formal training or education she has received in regards to self-care and the practice of self-compassion she said,

I mean self-care, really nothing. No formal training. Self-compassion, I think it is just all the classes we have in graduate school. I was just re-trained for our crisis team and I think all of that training, although not self-compassion, but maybe compassion to others. But to answer your question, probably none. I never had any (training) related to self-care and self-compassion except for the classes in graduate school that really made you look at your own life, or even in my psychology degree and that understanding considering Maslow and all of the theorists that go with it, so other than that, nothing.

Similar to many of the other counselors in this study, Tulane’s own desire and commitment to engage in opportunities to learn about and model wellness was how she had overcome this lack of district professional development in the area of counselor wellness.

**Considering instruments.** Tulane’s HPLP-II mean score was a 3.02. Tulane’s mean score was the fifth highest of all seven HPLP-II scores. Tulane’s SCS mean score was a 4.07 and was the sixth lowest among the seven participants.

**Cross Case Analysis**

In this chapter I chose to describe each of the seven individual school counselor’s experience as an individual case, while also integrating the five common themes that emerged across the studies. As I analyzed the transcripts and moved from categories to themes, it became evident that some participants across studies provided similar experiences related to wellness. Although, differences were noted in relation to years of experience, current school level, past
employment experiences, similarities across did emerge. Therefore, I chose to employ a cross-case analysis in order to organize my data, as well as to answer my three research questions. The themes of advocacy, prioritization of wellness and modeling of wellness address research question one. The theme of resilience addressed research question two. The theme of self-compassion addressed research question three. Additionally, a summary, matching theme by participant is displayed in Table 3.
Table 3

**Summary of Theme by Participant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme 1 Advocacy</th>
<th>Theme 2 Prioritization of Wellness</th>
<th>Theme 3 Modeling Wellness</th>
<th>Theme 4 Self-Compassion</th>
<th>Theme 5 Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Profession/Program Others</td>
<td>Schedule Self-Care</td>
<td>Exercise Stress Management</td>
<td>Having Perspective</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy (Wellness) Self-Efficacy (Prepared) Professional Schedule (Outlier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Schedule Self-Care</td>
<td>Exercise Nutrition</td>
<td>Take a Break Self-Compassion</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy (Wellness) Self-Efficacy (Calling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Schedule Self-Care</td>
<td>Exercise Nutrition</td>
<td>Having Perspective</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy (Wellness) Self-Efficacy (Calling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Schedule Self-Care</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Having Perspective Self-Compassion</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy (Wellness) Self-Efficacy (Calling) Supportive Colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Schedule Self-Care</td>
<td>Exercise Lunch Break</td>
<td>Take a Break</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy (Wellness) Self-Efficacy (Prepared) Supportive Colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Schedule Self-Care</td>
<td>Exercise Stress Management Lunch Break</td>
<td>Having Perspective</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy (Wellness) Supportive Colleagues Timing (Outlier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulane</td>
<td>Profession/Program</td>
<td>Schedule Self-Care</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Take a Break</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy (Wellness) Self-Efficacy (Calling)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 1: How do practicing school counselors achieve and maintain wellness?

**Figure 2: Advocacy**

Advocacy. Within the theme of advocacy both Eve and Tulane discussed the importance of promoting the role of school counselors in their profession/program. Both Eve and Tulane demonstrated a genuine belief and desire to focus on wellness and the impact school counselors can make. Eve emphasized how her ability to promote wellness for others was accomplished through a combined effort, she said “I think of that on three different fronts” working with the kids, teachers in her school, as well as the counselors in the district. Similarly, Tulane’s efforts in promoting wellness included, not only those in her school environment (students and teachers), but also counselors at the district level. As evident when Tulane discussed her role in a grant she wrote that represented all school counselors in her district, she said, “I co-chaired (the counseling grant) for my district.”

Tonya also discussed how her level of advocacy correlated with her years of experience in her role as a school counselor in her district. Consequently, she attributed her time in the field had impacted her level of advocacy.

Efforts related to communicating the importance of wellness for students and colleagues, were also addressed by counselors in this study. Nina provided a recent example where she
helped some of the female students and the importance of making healthy choices regarding their bodies. Both Nina and Fatima both promoted physical activity such as walking and running to the staff and/or students. Similarly, Sara also discussed how she had encouraged her staff in regards to wellness by suggesting physical activity (walking), as well as meditation, books, support groups and therapy.

Self-advocacy in this study emerged in the discussion when the participants discussed the importance of creating boundaries at school as well as to support their own work/life balance. Tonya and Fiona both described how this was accomplished for them. Tonya demonstrated this by verbalizing to others when a boundary had been crossed. For example, she said to her colleague who stopped by her house after school to discuss a student, “Couldn’t you have told me that tomorrow at school.” Similarly Fiona described this by communicating with humor and kindness to her administration, that she would not be “talking shop” during her daily lunchtime.

Participants also reported having some difficulty in creating boundaries. Both Eve and Tonya discussed how they both struggled around responding to work related emails while they were at home. Both discussed how this habit emerged as a need to positively represent their counseling programs to others and both felt this was an area they needed to improve.

The need to advocate regarding the importance of wellness also emerged as a result of the increased levels of stress witnessed. For example, Both Sara and Eve brought attention to the burnout they are seeing in their schools and the need to encourage wellness among the staff. Eve described this as follows,

I also provide strategies for the teachers. I’ve worked with several of the teachers that are completely burnout, and that’s really hard because those are the ones that are really internalizing everything the kid does…There are a few teachers where I’ve gone into their classroom and done mindfulness activities that benefits both them and the students.
Sara, echoed this sentiment and also addressed the high stress that school counselors are similarly experiencing, stating, “Our counselors are burning-out like our teachers because they are under so much pressure.”

**Figure 3: Prioritization of Wellness**

Prioritization of Wellness. In order to prioritize wellness, Eve placed a mark on her calendar when she would run as this kept her accountable. Nina kept a bottle of water on her desk each day and wrote down the daily number of steps she took. Tonya scheduled weekends where she would just relax and read a book and not use her computer. Sara scheduled time to exercise each morning before school and also allowed time to read her devotional/prayer. Fatima exercised after school each week with her running club and also scheduled a “family day” each weekend where she has no other commitments. Fiona exercised each morning for 20-30 minutes on her recumbent bike and also had a scheduled time (5:00pm) each evening to walk the dogs with her neighbors. Tulane scheduled time afterschool to exercise with her colleagues two to three days a week. Tulane also prioritized her wellness through participation in a weekly school prayer group. All the school counselors in this study made a conscious choice to prioritize their wellness by creating a scheduled time each day and/or week for self-care.
Figure 4: Modeling Wellness

Modeling Wellness. Exercise was an area that was discussed across all participants. For example, both Eve and Fatima discussed the importance of running. Eve said, “I need to run…It’s such a huge stress reliever” and Fatima said, “Running is something I definitely enjoy, it’s sort of my time.” Nina, Sara and Fiona all discussed how they integrated walking as their form of exercise. Nina participated in the Walking Wellness Challenge at her school and used a pedometer each week to monitor her walking. Sara preferred to do her walking in the evenings and this also served as her time for meditation. She discussed how some of her colleagues exercised in the morning but that does not work for her. She said,

I wish I could (walk) in the mornings, but I’m just not a morning person. You know, those people that wake up at 4:45am and do all that’s stuff before they get to work. I want to be like them when I grow up. I just can’t do it. It can be 11pm (though) and I won’t think anything of walking around my neighborhood and they are in bed asleep for 2 hours already.

Fiona also walked in the evenings with her dog. She said, “We walk a mile and a half and that allows me to de-stress.” Tonya chose to participate in the games and activities at her school to model the importance of exercise and Tulane also noted she exercised outside of school. The important element that emerged among the exercise habits for all seven counselors was that they had found an exercise that worked in their lifestyle and that they enjoyed.

Modeling stress management techniques also emerged as an area that two of the school counselors discussed. Eve incorporated mindfulness techniques such as, mindful breathing while
at school. Deep breathing, mindfulness and massage were all areas the Fiona modeled for her students while at school.

Taking time each day to eat lunch was something both Fatima and Fiona noted as important for their well-being and both modeled this behavior. Fatima described the importance of carving out that little bit of time each day in order to eat lunch. Fiona made sure that each day she made time for lunch and also connected with her colleagues on a personal level.

Both Nina and Tonya discussed how they modeled wellness behaviors related to nutrition through their words and actions while at school. Nina demonstrated this through her consistently healthy food choices and water intake. Tonya described how she modeled this when she would monitor the students’ lunch and call home if they seemed to be developing unhealthy eating habits.

**Research Question 2: What factors contribute to school counselors’ wellness?**

*Figure 5: Resilience*
**Resilience.** School counselors working in a school setting will inevitably face challenges that are an innate part of working in this role. However, these challenges are further compounded when counselors are continuously faced with obstacles, that over time, cause chronic stress to manifest such as: high student to counselor ratios (as Eve and Sara reported), emotionally taxing concerns that leave counselors feeling depleted such as, abuse, suicide and threat assessments (as Tonya, Sara and Fiona reported), feelings of being overwhelmed with keeping up with the legislation requirements and paperwork that are specific to each school level (as Nina and Fiona reported) and feelings of isolation as a counselor (as Tulane, Fatima and Fiona reported). The seven participants in this study all described challenges and adversity they encountered while working as school counselors and also described factors that have aided them in order to navigate through these experiences. Similar to Cohen’s (1991) view of wellness, these seven school counselors’ ability to bounce back from adversity supported their capacity to sustain wellness. For example, the seven participants reported having no formal training specifically related to counselor self-care and/or the practice of self-compassion; however, all stressed the importance for school counselors to take care of themselves. Some of the school counselors even expressed some frustration regarding this lack of self-care focus. For example, Tonya said, “I’m a little annoyed that my school district doesn’t provide more training in (self-care).” Fatima said, “Have we really been taught to properly care for ourselves.” Sara said,

> I do think there needs to be more focus on this…because I think of all the years I went to counselor workshops, activities and crap meetings, never once have we had a day where we once focused on this.

In order to address this deficit, all of the participants demonstrated a strong self-efficacy related to the development of positive lifestyle behaviors and chose to pursue learning opportunities (self-directed learning) that supported their desire to integrate wellness. For example, Eve
discovered a course on mindfulness that impacted herself, as well the counselors in her district, and students in her school. Nina, sought out information on wellness from online websites. Tonya participated in wellness seminars at her gym. Sara, sought wellness information from different sources such as, online/television and books. Fatima initiated and implemented a running program for her student and staff at her school. Fiona chose to participate in the exercise/weight loss program her health insurance offered. Tulane supported her wellness through her strong alignment with her religion/spirituality. Therefore, self-directed learning was an important factor that facilitated the school counselors in this study’s growth in the area of wellness and self-care and possibly helped to buffer the effects from the lack of lack of formal training provided to the counselors in this area.

The view that becoming a school counselor was a calling emerged as a factor for Nina, Tonya, Sara and Tulane. For example, when I asked Nina and Tonya what influenced their decision to become a school counselor, they discussed how unhelpful their own high school counselor had been and used those interactions as the catalyst to create a different and positive experience for other students. Sara said, she had a wonderful high school counselor whose positive characteristics of kindness, fairness, and unconditional positive regard made a lasting impact on her and was a “big factor” in why she chose this profession. Tulane said she knew she always wanted to work with kids and that school counseling was her passion.

Self-efficacy related to counselor preparation was another area that emerged for Eve and Fatima. Both Eve and Fatima discussed how their educational background, school counseling training, desire to work with kids combined with own self-awareness all contributed to their belief in their ability to succeed as a school counselor.
The importance in the role of supportive colleagues also arose as a significant part of Sara, Fatima and Fiona’s resilience. Sara highlighted the importance of being able to trust her colleagues and the importance of confidentiality. Fatima discussed the importance of having at least one close colleague who has a positive attitude and can see things from your perspective. Fiona emphasized the importance of open communication and connection as colleagues served as a type of extended family. The importance of having supportive colleagues arose as a way to interact interpersonally with others and supports school counselors’ wellness, especially due to the fact that three school counselors (Tulane, Fatima and Fiona) brought up the feelings of isolation that can emerge within the school setting in this role.

**Outliers Related to Resilience.** The need for work/life balance emerged as important to Eve as well as finding a job that supported this balance. School counseling was the profession Eve chose as the right fit, as it supported her desire to help people, while also allowing her to have quality time for herself and family. Thus, the school counselor professional schedule provided Eve with the sense of control she needed over her environment in order to create that work/life balance she required and this impacted her wellness as well as her ability to persist.

Although another counselor had initially encouraged Fiona to pursue counseling, Fiona’s resilience was also tied to the good timing of events that occurred during her career span and Fiona emphasized the role of good timing in our conversation. For example, she discussed how she was able to secure a loan to pursue her Masters Degree in School Counseling and was able to take one class each semester while also continuing to teach. Once she graduated, she found a position at an elementary school that she worked at for 12 years. Then after 12 years of driving one hour each way to work to her elementary school as a counselor, she was able to move to a
closer school in her county due to the “good timing” of new legislation from the governor that
allowed her to transfer to a different county without suffering too much of an financial impact.

She said,

My first counseling job was at an elementary (A School) that I was at for 12 years and
then I moved from (City) to (City), I drove an hour one way for another year, then I
transferred to {A county}. I would have lost like $10,000 moving from (County) to
(County). I was at a baby shower and the secretary at (School) was the aunt of the girl
that was having the baby and we were talking because, my neighbor, her sister was a
counselor in {Another State} and she made double the amount of money that I did here in
(State) and overheard us talking and asked, “do you want to interview?” and I said
actually, yes, but I think I would lose too much money and she said let me call you back
and let you know. So that’s how I found out I would have lost all that money. Then she
said (Name), would you like to come in to interview and practice since you said you
haven’t gone anywhere in 12 years. Do you want to come in and just interview, give it a
chance, I said sure because I needed the practice. I was expecting to go back to (Another
county). On that Wednesday the governor signed into law that you could take all of your
years with you. It use to be seven years and now you can take all of your years with you.
So I went ahead and I interviewed, I got the job and I only ended up losing around
$2,000. For the wear and tear on my car and spending all the time driving to (City), it
made it worth it.

Therefore, both the sense of control over and timing of opportunities were factors that impacted
Eve and Fiona’s resilience, although these factors were not mentioned by any of the other
counselors in this study.

**Research Question 3: To what extent is the concept of self-compassion related to school
counselors achieving wellness?**

![Figure 6: Self-Compassion](image)
Self-Compassion. Eve, Tonya, Sara and Fiona all discussed the importance of having perspective when dealing with extreme stress, or a difficult situation. Having perspective was a way that these school counselors described the practice of self-compassion. The counselors discussed the need to have perspective when they were describing a time in which they needed to lessen the feelings of pain associated with a situation that was difficult for them. For example, Eve described how perspective would help her when she was not seeing progress when working with a student and was beginning to feel down. Tonya emphasized perspective in that she wanted to make sure she noticed all parts of her work with students, not just the times when something was not going well. Fiona related self-compassion to her outlook and attitude about life and how this perspective allowed her to practice self-kindness. Sara integrated the concept of having perspective when she discussed self-compassion. She described that keeping everything in perspective for her related to knowing that when she leaves everyday, she has done all she can and she needs to be ok with that.

Nina used the term self-compassion to describe how she was able to comfort herself in her new role as a middle school counselor and described the importance she placed on taking a break (self-compassions break) when she would feel stress. Similarly, Fatima also described the critical role taking a break had for her as it related to self-compassion, as she would take this time each day to decompress after her stressful lunch duty.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the transcribed coded data under the five themes of advocacy, prioritization of wellness, modeling wellness, self-compassion and resilience. A cross-case analysis was also presented to organize the data and answer my three research questions. In
Chapter five, the themes will be discussed more thoroughly as they relate to the three research questions and the literature.
Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter discusses the results of the qualitative interview study that explored the self-compassion and wellness behaviors of practicing school counselors. The chapter will begin with the purpose of the study and overview of the methods. Summary and findings from the three research questions in this study will be discussed, as well as implications for school counselors, school administrators, school counseling supervisors and counselor education preparation programs. This chapter will also address the limitations of this study as well as areas to consider for future research.

Conceptualized within the Theory of Work Adjustment’s framework, the purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of individual school counselors who can prioritize and integrate wellness principles and behaviors into their professional practice and have also persisted in the profession for over 10 years.

This qualitative study was intended to explore and provide a better understanding of individual school counselors’ perspectives regarding their wellness and self-compassion behaviors. The data originated from the seven semi-structured interview transcripts and my researcher reflective journal. These two instruments were used as a screening tool for participant inclusion in this study. All semi-structured interviews were conducted by either Face Time, or by phone and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. I used an audio recorder to record each interview. I transcribed each interview myself and sent the transcribed data to the participant as a member-checking strategy in order to ensure accuracy of information and allow for clarification.
I conducted an initial coding of the data and then I analyzed the data for terms/phrases related to wellness that resulted in the creation of 28 categories and 5 final themes.

There are three major exploratory questions that guide this research:

RQ: 1 How do practicing school counselors achieve and maintain wellness?
RQ: 2 What factors contribute to school counselor wellness?
RQ: 3 To what extent is the concept of self-compassion related to school counselors achieving wellness?

Key Findings

As a result of conducting this study, one key finding that emerged is that school counselors do integrate self-compassion and positive wellness behaviors. The following is a more detailed summary that speaks to each research question.

RQ 1: How do practicing school counselors achieve and maintain wellness?

The purpose of this question was to explore what behaviors arose from this group of school counselors and examine how these behaviors impacted their wellness. Three themes addressed this research question: advocacy, prioritization of wellness and modeling wellness. As participants described their experiences the importance of having a voice emerged. Advocating for self, other and/or program/profession, allowed these counselors to exhibit a sense of agency within their environment and this helped to promote a positive and cooperative atmosphere that supported their wellness.

One of the most compelling themes was the prioritization of wellness. This theme demonstrated the importance of making self-care a priority, as all seven unanimously discussed the need to schedule time for self-care each day and/or week. For these busy counselors, the act of scheduling self-care served as a way to ensure that positive lifestyle behaviors were
incorporated into their lives. Additionally, the act of scheduling self-care impacted to what extent those wellness behaviors were modeled by the school counselors in this study. As a result, all seven counselors in this study modeled those positive lifestyle behaviors they promoted for others.

**RQ 2: What factors contribute to school counselors’ wellness**

This was a strength-based study focusing on positive lifestyle behaviors and wellness practices. However, as the interviews progressed, the participants also described the escalating feelings of stress they would feel while working in their school settings. Therefore, a major area that emerged in this study was the resilience these seven school counselors demonstrated, despite the challenges they encountered. One key area that supported their ability to demonstrate resilience stemmed from how they thought, felt and believed about the importance of wellness. Therefore their self-efficacy impacted their view of wellness.

Additionally, the belief in the effectiveness of their counselor training programs and educational background seemed to influence how these school counselors would react in the face of difficult situations at school. One counselor even noted that she felt her counseling program was excellent and that her education prepared her to handle any situation.

Participants also discussed the view of counseling as a calling. The past experiences (positive and negative) of the school counselors supported their desire to make a difference in the lives of students. Having a job that had built in breaks for rest and vacation provided one counselor with a sense of control over her environment. Thus, this professional schedule contributed to her wellness and ability to persist. Additionally, the good timing related to pursuing a career in counseling, was also noted as a factor by one of the counselors.
RQ 3: To what extent is the concept of self-compassion related to school counselors achieving wellness?

The purpose of this question was to gain an understanding as to what extent the concept of self-compassion was related to counselor wellness. The theme of self-compassion was key in describing these findings. All seven school counselors in this study described how they would incorporate self-compassionate behavior in order to soothe themselves in times of difficulty or stress. However, the term self-compassion was only reported by two participants to describe this behavior. Having perspective or taking a break were the ways in which the majority of the participants chose to describe how they would integrate self-compassion. The act of being self-compassionate emerged through the constructs of mindfulness, common humanity and self-kindness.

Reflections on the Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework for this study was built on the belief that when there is an alignment between tasks (promoting wellness in others) and abilities (promoting wellness in self), school counselors can prioritize their own wellness and remain in the profession. I found this framework to be very useful in guiding my research and helped to confirm many of my assumptions regarding counselor wellness. For example, I believed school counselors who demonstrated and valued wellness, as evident through the high scores on the screening tools, would be able to integrate positive wellness behaviors when stressors arose. The results from my study are consistent with this belief. In addition, I believed the practice of self-compassionate behavior would prominently emerge as a key way these counselors integrated wellness and this assumption was also confirmed. In addition, I found that the positive psychology constructs of
optimism and gratitude seemed to be woven into the narratives when describing how these counselors integrated self-compassionate behavior. However, advocacy was an area that I did not address in my conceptual framework, but emerged as an area that related to counselor wellness in this study. For example, the counselors’ ability to use their voices to make a positive impact and affect change contributed to maintaining their own level of well-being. The sense of agency that emerged as a result of these school counselors’ advocacy efforts seemed to empower them and this contributed to their overall wellness in this study. This new information will now impact the way in which I view counselor wellness and this is also an area I would like to explore in future research on school counselor wellness.

**Relationship Between Literature and Research Questions**

The study results exploring the self-compassion and wellness behaviors of practicing school counselors were consistent in many ways with previous research. A brief review of the literature on counselor wellness will be discussed, as it relates to the research questions, and to the school counselors in this study.

**Research Question 1**: The first research question explored how school counselors achieved and maintained wellness. Three themes (advocacy, prioritization of wellness, modeling wellness) emerged from the data. The first theme of advocacy will be discussed.

**Advocacy.** Advocacy was not an area that I initially connected to counselor wellness; however, this emerged as a prominent section of discussion among school counselors in this study. In order to better understand how advocacy impacted counselor wellness, I explored the research in this area. The American School Counseling Association’s National Model (2012) described the role of advocacy as a general way school counselors help to promote systemic change within the school environment. Similarly, this was also described by the counselors in my
study and emerged in the form of self-advocacy, advocacy for others and advocacy for the program/profession. Participant findings suggest that advocating in some form is a critical process in creating and maintaining wellness, as this sense of agency that was cultivated within each school counselor had an impact on their wellness.

Similar to previous literature (Evans & Payne, 2007), school counselors in this study discussed the importance of self-advocacy as it related to the establishment of personal boundaries while at school, and outside of school. Through the creation and maintenance of boundaries, school counselors were able to create the work/life balance they desired.

It is important to reiterate that all the school counselors in this study had 10 or more years experience, with four out of the seven having 25 or more years in the field. Interestingly, years of experience may impact counselors’ level of professional identity and make a difference in school counselor’s level of advocacy. Research conducted by Brott and Myers (1999) found that school counselors understanding of their professional identity had developed as they progressed from their training programs to their professional careers. Thus, as school counselors cultivate their professional identity, this may then impact the level of advocacy in which counselors feel comfortable exerting. For example, as Tonya reported in our conversation, new counselors may struggle with understanding their role, as the experience obtained while in counselor-in-training programs may differ from the dynamic and varied reality that exists in the real-world school settings. As counselors gain experience and are better able to understand their roles, they may feel more confident in advocating.

Research in the area of advocacy and counseling has identified characteristics such as a non-judgmental attitude, persistence, capacity to communicate effectively, as well as a desire to enact change, as qualities that supported counselor/advocates ability to serve in this role (Earle,
1990). Similarly, many of these same personal qualities emerged as ways the school counselors in this study demonstrated advocacy within their school setting.

**Prioritization of Wellness.** All seven school counselors reported the importance of scheduling self-care activities into their lives. Similarly, Venart et al. (2007) described the need for counselors to integrate steady and deliberate plans when trying to prioritize wellness. They state, “Changing the way counselors work so they prioritize their own wellness requires a daily, deliberate and consistent focus and necessitates a shift away from crisis management to proactive planning” (pg.63). Therefore, the act of scheduling wellness and self-care activities into their daily and weekly schedules proved to be an essential component that supported wellness among the counselor in this study. The consistency of this behavior among all counselors supports this behavior as a key foundational element in the process of successfully prioritizing wellness.

**Modeling Wellness.** The ACA’s Task Force on Counselor Wellness and Impairment (2002) highlights the importance for counselors to model what they advocate for others. The seven school counselors in this study all modeled wellness behaviors. Research has also found that counselors who demonstrate those positive wellness behaviors they promote for others serve as a role model, encouraging wellness, while also affirming the importance of their own wellness (Miller, 2001; Venart et al., 2007).

I was encouraged by the findings in this study. All seven counselors valued wellness, as evident by their average to above average mean scores on their wellness screening instruments. Additionally, all chose to model wellness and implement this behavior into their lives. Exercise was a common theme across participant narratives and served as an integral way these counselors modeled and supported their well-being. Similarly, research conducted by Stender (2013) supported this finding and discussed the importance for counselors to make time for
exercise/physical activity in order to support their own self-care.

Taking the time to eat lunch daily was reported in the findings as a component of counselor wellness. Interestingly, one of the counselors pointed out how none of the administrators at her school would take the time to have a lunch break. Working throughout the day without intentionally taking time to sit down and eat was perceived as an unhealthy habit. School counselors in this study believed taking a lunch break each day provided an opportunity to disconnect for a few minutes from work, while also nourishing the body and mind. Therefore, in order to support this belief, counselors modeled these behaviors while at school. Thus, counselors who conscientiously choose to prioritize this behavior and build this into their workdays are setting an example for others regarding the importance of attending to their own well-being. It is important to note that taking time each day for lunch as a school counselor can often be very difficult due to the unpredictable timing of factors related to student needs. However, modeling this behavior demonstrates to others that you incorporate those same behaviors that you promote for others and this alignment supports your own authenticity as a counselor. In my personal experience as a school counselor, I also witnessed how often administrators, and even other counselors, would work through lunch. Similarly, I felt this behavior did not align with my own view of wellness. Therefore, I took a lunch break each day and would sit outside at a picnic table, eat my lunch, and read a book. This small but impactful act of taking a lunch each day was something that was important for my own well-being and I hope I served as a model for others regarding the importance of wellness.

**Research Question 2:** The second research question explored what factors contribute to school counselor wellness. The theme of resilience emerged from the data and will be discussed.

The school counselors in this study all described challenges they encountered, as well as
feelings of stress that would manifest, as a result of their work in the school setting. One counselor captured this by saying, “I can feel the tension in my shoulders and there are many time when I am like, oh my God, why am I so tense, but it’s the stress. It’s there.” This ever-present stress is something that school counselors are experiencing more and is especially compounded by the high student to counselor ratio. Therefore, school counselors require information on how others counselors have been able to address this challenge and emerge stronger as a result.

Protective factors are an important component of resilience (Doney, 2013). The success of the seven school counselors in this study’s ability integrate wellness and persist in the profession stems from their ability to integrate protective factors such as self-efficacy, support networks and sense of control, in order to deal with and overcome school stressors and challenges. Similarly, in a study by Evans and Payne (2007) the researchers examined the barriers and practices of school counselor wellness and highlighted the importance for school counselors to display a resilient mindset regarding self-care. A key component that emerged in regards to building resiliency for the school counselors in the present study was through the integration of self-directed learning opportunities. For example, the school counselors in this study did not discuss receiving any formal training, or professional development that targeted school counselor wellness and addressed self-care. In the face of this lack of specialized training, these counselors all demonstrated an internal desire for the pursuit of increasing their own knowledge in the area of wellness. In fact, one school counselor brought the information she learned regarding the practice of mindfulness back to her school site and integrated this with her students and fellow counselors. Each of these counselors demonstrated resiliency, as they were able to persevere in the profession despite the lack of focus on counselor wellness from their
respective districts. Although some of the counselors were frustrated by the lack of support and training in this area, it was their strong belief in the importance of wellness that proved to be a deciding factor in their ability to successfully integrate wellness.

In my 13 years working as a school counselor, I also did not recall having any formal district training, or workshop that related to my own self-care as a counselor. Similar to the counselors in this study, I experienced feelings of chronic stress as a result of not attending to and prioritizing my own self-care. As a result, I also chose to seek out classes and information on contemplative practices from outside sources in order to address and support my own emotional well-being. I knew that my wellness was a priority as I was the instrument that provided guidance to my students. During our interview, Sara made an interesting point when discussing the need to make wellness a priority that resonated with me and that I connected this to the lack of focus on school counselors’ wellness. When talking about trauma informed care for students, Sara brought up the importance of considering how the counselor is also affected by trauma and how she felt this was not being addressed. Sara said, “We are looking at it from the student’s perspective all the time.” Sara was trying to emphasize that in order to help the student, you must also consider the counselor. I agree with Sara and believe that school counselor’s wellness is a priority, as our level of wellness impacts our interactions with our students and colleagues.

I anticipated that some school counselors in this study would be able to make wellness a priority because they possessed certain innate characteristics, such as a strong self-efficacy that would foster the development and sustainability (self-directed learning) of how these counselors would think, behave and feel about wellness. However, self-efficacy also related to how these counselors viewed this profession as a calling, as well as how prepared (background, training and experience) they believed they were to serve in their role as a school counselor.
Therefore, the role of self-efficacy emerged as a key area for school counselors in the present study as they all demonstrated the importance this factor had on their resilience. Previous research (Woods, 2009) had also linked school counselors’ belief in their abilities (self-efficacy) regarding their professional roles to well-being. Similarly, findings in this study also connected self-efficacy related to background/training regarding preparation for their professional role to counselor wellness. Additionally, research conducted by Woods (2009) also found a significant positive relationship between years of experience and self-efficacy. Similarly, counselors in this study all had 10 or more years experience and self-efficacy emerged in their narratives in relation to factors related to counselor wellness and resilience in the profession.

The view of school counseling as a calling emerged within four counselors’ narratives and demonstrated the importance they placed on making a difference. These school counselors were able to attribute meaning and passion to their roles and this helped to support their resilience. Previous literature conducted by Bryant and Constantine (2006) examined the life satisfaction scores of women school counselors and found perceived meaningful work by counselors was an area that impacted wellness. I would like to explore this area further. I see the value in remembering why one chose to become a school counselor as this question emerged as a result of the study conducted by Evans and Payne (2007), where all the school counselors interviewed discussed leaving the profession of counseling before retirement age. Consequently, I wanted to better understand what influenced individuals to enter the field of counseling and how that may relate to their own wellness and ability to persist. As seen in this study, the majority of the school counselors connected to their chosen profession to an internal drive, or past experience that profoundly shaped the course of their future career paths and may have also supported their ability to persist in the profession. Therefore, although I anticipated self-efficacy
would be an area that supported counselor wellness, I was very interested in the multi-faceted way in which self-efficacy emerged in this study and how it related to resilience and wellness.

Evans and Payne (2007) found positive benefits of connecting on a social/emotional level with at least one or more colleagues at one’s school site and this was supported in the findings in this study. The importance of support networks for these school counselors proved to be an integral component in their well-being while at school. Research in the area of resilience in the workplace has shown the importance of connecting with your co-workers to help deal with work pressure and to serve as a positive support network. Interestingly, Tulane said, “I’m an island” and I resonated with this statement. I have had the fortunate experience of working at all three levels (elementary, middle and high). Similarly, I often felt isolated in my role and it was important for me to establish those connections with other supportive colleagues at my school. I also attributed those positive connections as an integral component of my overall well-being within my school environment.

Resilience in these seven school counselors encompassed cultivating their own resources to aid in stressful situations. Therefore, developing an internal desire for seeking out information related to wellness, having an understanding of what influenced one’s decision to become a counselor, the importance of one’s belief in their preparedness as a school counselor, as well as recognizing the role of supportive colleague(s), all played a part in fostering resilience among these seven school counselors in this study.

**Research Question 3**: The third research question explored the extent to which the concept of self-compassion was related to school counselors achieving wellness. The theme of self-compassion emerged from the data and will be discussed.
The practice of self-compassion has been found to ease the way one relates to their own pain; thus, reducing stress and positively impacting one’s emotional well-being (Neff, 2003a; 2011). The idea of having perspective and taking a break emerged as ways the school counselors in this study described the practice of self-compassion. Patsiopoulos and Buchannan (2011) conducted research with licensed mental health counselors and also discussed the role one’s perspective has on the practice of self-compassion. For example, one of the licensed mental health counselors reported, “Self-compassion is almost like an attitude, or a perspective that you shift within yourself” (p. 305). This description aligns with how a majority of the school counselors in my study also described self-compassionate behavior.

Research shows individuals’ who demonstrate high levels of perspective when examining a situation, also exhibit greater levels of self-compassion (Neff, Rude & Kirkpatrick, 2007). Lawson (2007) also discussed the importance having perspective and self-awareness has on counselors’ wellness and ability to persist in the profession.

What I learned from this exploration of self-compassion among these seven school counselors was that they all wove in some aspects of this practice as way to provide comfort to themselves in times of difficulty. Although the majority of school counselors in this study implemented self-compassionate behaviors, the term self-compassion was not as widely used to describe this behavior. However, the three interrelated constructs that supported self-compassion were described and discussed among the counselors across studies. Therefore, I chose to highlight the constructs of mindfulness, common humanity and self-kindness within the conversations, shown in brackets, to demonstrate the prevalence of this practice among counselors. For example, across the seven studies all the school counselors described, or discussed the constructs of mindfulness, common humanity and self-kindness as it related to the
practice of self-compassionate behavior with the exception of Tonya. Tonya was the only school counselor who only included mindfulness and self-kindness when she discussed how she would choose to focus on what was going well in times of stress at school. What this information suggests is that the practice of behavior consistent with self-compassion is prevalent; however, there seems to be lesser awareness in the terminology and constructs associated with operationalizing this skill.

This integration of self-compassionate behavior seemed to help the counselors in this study mitigate feelings of stress and uncertainty that would arise as a result of working in their roles as school counselors. For example, the school counselors in my study reported working at high need schools and related this to the high number of social/emotional student concerns, including trauma, they encountered within their population. Lawson and Myers (2011) reported in their study on counselor wellness that those counselors who worked with a larger percentage of trauma cases were more at-risk for burnout. Thus, having the skills necessary to self-soothe was an essential component to these school counselors’ well-being.

Interestingly, one of the counselors discussed that she did not think she consciously integrated self-compassion. I believe this type of thinking results from the lack of training in this area. In my experience as a school counselor, there was never any training on this practice and I was left to seek out opportunities to address my own wellness. I believe that the more information and awareness that is provided to school counselors in the area of self-compassion, the more school counselors will intentionally choose to integrate this practice to address their own wellness.
Implications and Recommendations

School Counselors

The importance of advocating for oneself and others within the school environment, as well as creating boundaries between school and home, emerged as key areas as it provided a sense of agency among the counselors in this study. These efforts proved to be an integral element in achieving and sustaining wellness and helped to support a positive sense of self in these counselors. It is suggested that school counselors continue to find ways to advocate in their professional environments in order to empower their own sense of self, as well as to support the integration of work/life balance.

The importance of prioritizing wellness emerged as a significant contributor related to achieving and maintaining wellness in these seven counselors. Therefore, the act of scheduling self-care should be considered as a way to ensure that those positive lifestyle behaviors that school counselors promote for others are also incorporated into their own lives.

Modeling wellness behaviors such as taking time to eat lunch, incorporating healthy foods, and using stress management techniques are all ways that the counselors in this study chose to model wellness. More specifically, exercise, was a common experience among the seven school counselors in this study and this alignment demonstrated the value they placed on this behavior. Exercise seemed to be an integral lifestyle component and may have served as a buffer against stress, as well as a way to model wellness. It is important to note that these school counselors modeled wellness inside, as well as, outside of the school settings. Six of the seven school counselors discussed how they integrated mindfulness and stress management techniques while in school as well as outside of school. Additionally, the school counselors discussed how they also participated in games and activities with students and staff such as, running club and
walking challenge. The school counselors in this study demonstrated the importance of modeling wellness in both their personal and professional lives and this served to support and reinforce this behavior for others. Thus the idea of, “practicing what you preach” emerged as a central element to how these school counselors viewed wellness. I suggest school counselors find wellness practices and behaviors that resonate with them and make a point to integrate these into both their professional and personal lives. Wellness behaviors such as running, walking and practicing mindfulness are all activities that could be considered, as these were some of the behaviors described by the counselors in this study.

The majority of school counselors in this study felt school counseling was a calling for them; they reported this was the reason why they chose this profession. The detailed and thoughtful responses allowed me to appreciate the importance of remembering the reasons behind why school counselors chose this profession. In this study, the value of remembering what influenced one’s decision to become a school counselor helped to buffer some of the innate stressors that arose in these counselors’ school settings. Therefore, school counselors’ may benefit from taking the time to write down and/or reflect on what influenced them to become school counselors and this may prove to be helpful in building resiliency.

**Administrators and Counseling Supervisors**

School counselors are continuously exposed to the emotions and suffering of their students. Additionally, school counselors are also faced with challenges that are an innate part of their unique role in the school setting. Therefore, it is important that counselors possess ways to provide comfort to themselves in times of stress, or struggle, that can also be integrated in a time efficient and effective manner. For example, Fiona discussed how infrequently she was able to integrate activities that helped her to relax such as getting a pedicure or a massage in order to
address her stress. It is difficult for school counselors to rely on only external resources in order to address their emotional suffering. In order to address this need, school counselors require more information on how to integrate internal resources such as the practice of self-compassion in order to provide comfort and nourishment in one’s moment of need. Therefore, administrators and school counseling supervisors should consider providing more awareness and training regarding the term self-compassion along with the constructs that support this practice as this may offer school counselors an effective strategy to address their emotional well-being while in the school setting.

School counselors who already demonstrate aspects of self-compassionate behavior may also benefit from more awareness and training in this area of self-compassion, as they will be able to connect their current self-soothing behaviors to the more systematic integration of this skill. Thus, strengthening this behavior by providing more conscious awareness of the elements associated with being able to nourish oneself in times of suffering. Therefore, in order to create more awareness regarding self-compassion school administrators and counseling supervisors should consider providing training for school counselors in this area in order to promote wellness and possibly mitigate compassion fatigue and burnout. Consequently, training in this area may also impact retention in the profession as counselors will be proactively prepared with self-care and wellness practices that can be integrated into their lives and may buffer against effects of chronic stress.

How school counselor think, feel and behave regarding wellness arose as an important finding in this study. For example, the seven school counselors in this study demonstrated such a strong belief in the importance of wellness that they all chose to seek self-directed learning opportunities. Thus, school districts may also consider providing counselors’ with trainings and
workshops specifically related to counselor wellness and self-care. A yearly wellness retreat that focuses on school counselor self-care is an example of how a district may choose to prioritize to school counselors the importance of wellness. The retreat would provide school counselors with opportunities to learn about research in the area of self-care such as the practice of self-compassion and other contemplative practices. In addition, it may also facilitate opportunities to connect with and support other counselors in the area of wellness and gives school counselors permission, so to speak, to go back to their school sites and prioritize wellness and integrate what they have learned.

**Counselor Education Programs**

The practice of self-compassion should be considered while school counselors are in their graduate counselor training programs. One way for this to occur is to have school counselors in training complete a wellness project that integrates components of self-compassion during their practicum and internship. The purpose of this project is to provide awareness and supervised training regarding the integration and prioritization of self-compassion. In addition, by beginning this project in their training programs, counselors in training are provided with the time and practice necessary to make these practices part of their self-care routine. Consequently, they will carry these wellness behaviors into their professional roles as school counselors.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study may have been the recruiting process. Although the process provided a reliable means for screening appropriate participants, the two-step process may have discouraged otherwise eligible participants. Therefore, this may not be a reliable strategy for recruiting participants and network sampling should be considered. Another limitation of this study was the lack of familiarity with the term self-compassion among the participants. Even
though a definition was provided during the initial survey as well as reviewed prior to conducting the semi-structured interview, there continued to be some need to define this term among the participants.

Bryant and Constantine (2006) discussed how women outnumber men in the school counseling profession. Similarly, the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center conducted a national survey to explore the perspectives of school counselors in the profession and found that of the 5,308 school counselors surveyed 77% were women and 75% identified as White (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011). These findings align with my current sample of school counselors who also all identified as White and were all women. However, a proportion of school counselors who are men and come from diverse racial and ethnic groups also make-up school counselors within the profession. Therefore, another limitation is the absence of male and culturally diverse school counselors in this study.

**Future research**

School counselors require strategies that can be used to provide emotional nourishment and, in turn, support their well-being. The school counselors in this study all described the practice of self-compassionate behavior. Therefore in order to explore this area of self-compassion further, future research should be considered that would examine the impact a wellness and self-compassion protocol has on school counselors’ level of wellness. This protocol can be implemented in times of stress or struggle within the school setting and could examine the impact of the integration of this skill on school counselor emotional well-being.

I would also be very interested in exploring the role of advocacy as it relates to supporting school counselors’ sense of agency within the school setting and how that impacts counselor wellness.
All seven participants in this study identified as female. Therefore, it would be important for future research to include a more heterogeneous sample. Additionally, all participants identified as White. Therefore, it would also be useful to explore how wellness practices may differ among school counselors who are more culturally diverse. Spirituality is another area to be addressed in future research as it relates to counselor wellness. It would also be helpful to explore the role of spirituality among individuals from different ethnicities and backgrounds.
American Counseling Association (2014). *ACA code of ethics*. Alexandria, VA.

American Counseling Association (2002). *Task force on counselor wellness and impairment*. Alexandria, VA.


doi:10.1037/a0024482


Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Hello,

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at the University of South Florida. I am looking for participants who are interested in counselor wellness/self-care, are current practicing school counselors and have 10 or more years experience as a school counselor to participate in a research study.

For those interested in participating in this study, it will consist of the completion of an online survey that should take approximately 10 minutes. For some participants, there may be an additional follow-up component that will consist of a 20 -30 minute semi-structured interview that will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for the participant and will be conducted via Skype or Face Time. This study has been approved by the IRB. Participants are free to withdraw at any time. Please use the following link to the informed consent as well as the survey questions:

(If this link does not work, please copy it into your browser)

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/J3VTMJ8

Should there be any questions, I welcome the opportunity to hear from you. Feel free to contact either myself: Anjanette Todd (anjanettet@mail.usf.edu) or my dissertation chair, Dr. Cindy Topdemir (ctopdemi@usf.edu) with any questions or further information.

Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated!

Anjanette Todd
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida

IRB# Pro00028879
Appendix B: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study # Pro00028879
Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study. We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called: An Exploration of Self-Compassion and Wellness Behaviors Among Practicing School Counselors. The person who is in charge of this research study is Anjanette Todd. This person is called the Principal Investigator.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
You are being asked to participate because you are a current practicing school counselor with 10 or more years in the field. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of individual school counselors, who can prioritize and integrate wellness principles and behaviors into their professional practice.

STUDY PROCEDURES
If you take part in this study, you will be asked to complete the Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile II (HPLP-II) and the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) surveys, through the website Survey Monkey. Both surveys will be presented within the same link to facilitate connection and should take approximately 10 minutes.

You will be asked to include your email address as some participants whose mean scores on both instruments are at or above a 2.5 may be contacted to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview. This follow-up semi-structured interview will further explore self-compassion and wellness behaviors and should take approximately 20-30 minutes. This interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you and will be conducted via Skype/Face Time.

ALTERNATIVES/VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION/WITHDRAWAL
You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer; you are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

BENEFITS and RISKS
Although there is no direct benefit to individuals in participation in this study, the findings may provide opportunities to increase our understanding between healthy lifestyle behaviors and wellness and facilitate recommendations for self-compassion and wellness.
Appendix B: Definition of Terms (Continued)

This research is considered to be minimal risk. The questions included in this survey are commonly asked in similar surveys developed for public use and for research.

COMPENSATION
We will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY
We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. However, every effort will be made to keep your answers confidential.

Survey Monkey does not sell survey responses to third parties without the survey creator's permission and we do not use any contact details collected in our customers’ surveys to contact survey respondents.

However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: Principal Investigator: Anjanette Todd, Faculty Advisor: Dr. Cindy Topdemir, and The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB).

- It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu. If you have questions regarding the research, please contact the Principal Investigator at anjanettet@mail.usf.edu

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are. You can print a copy of this consent form for your records.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by proceeding with this survey that I am agreeing to take part in research and I am 18 years of age or older.

Survey link to access survey is below:
(If this link does not work, please copy it into your browser)
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/J3VTMJ8
Appendix C: Definition of Terms

**Definition of Terms**

**Health-promoting Lifestyle**: A health-promoting lifestyle is a positive approach to day-to-day life, and is an active process towards enhancing wellness and fulfilling one’s full potential (Walker, Sechrist & Pender, 1987).

**Self-care**: Self-care is a broad term, which relates to how an individual’s promotes well-being in themselves and encompasses areas such as physical, psychological, spiritual, professional and personal support systems (Richards, Campenni & Burke, 2010).

**Self-compassion**: A healthy, caring and kind attitude that is directed toward oneself in times of suffering (Neff & Dahm, 2014). Self-compassion consists of three constructs (mindfulness, common humanity and self-kindness (Neff, 2003).

**Wellness**: A lifestyle with the aim of integrating body, mind and spirit in order to move towards optimal health and well-being (Myers et al., 2000).
December 23, 2016

Anjanette Todd
L-CACHE - Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career & Higher Education
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00028879
Title: An Exploration of Self-Compassion and Wellness Behaviors Among Practicing School Counselors

Study Approval Period: 12/23/2016 to 12/23/2017

Dear Ms. Todd:

On 12/23/2016, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Protocol Version #1

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Online Consent Version 1 (granted a waiver)

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s). Waivers are not stamped.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:
(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your study qualifies for a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.117(c) which states that an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either: (1) That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject’s wishes will govern; or (2) That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context. (Online consent).

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D.

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
Appendix E: Interview Guide

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. What influenced your decision to become a school counselor?
2. How would you describe your typical workday?
3. How do you integrate/incorporate positive lifestyle behaviors into your daily life?
4. To what extent do you think you integrate self-compassion into your life personally and professionally?
5. What has been your experience in trying to help others learn to make wellness a priority?
6. What formal education/training have you received about self-care and the practice of self-compassion?
7. What recommendations do you have for other school counselors in regards to wellness and the practice of self-compassion?
8. What other thoughts would you like to share regarding wellness, self-compassion, self-care or positive lifestyle behaviors that we did not cover?
Appendix F: HPLP-II Permission Letter

Dear Colleague:

Thank you for your interest in the Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile II. The original Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile became available in 1987 and has been used extensively since that time. Based on our own experience and feedback from multiple users, it was revised to more accurately reflect current literature and practice and to achieve balance among the subscales. The Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile II continues to measure health-promoting behavior, conceptualized as a multidimensional pattern of self-initiated actions and perceptions that serve to maintain or enhance the level of wellness, self-actualization and fulfillment of the individual. The 52-item summatated behavior rating scale employs a 4-point response format to measure the frequency of self-reported health-promoting behaviors in the domains of health responsibility, physical activity, nutrition, spiritual growth, interpersonal relations and stress management. It is appropriate for use in research within the framework of the Health Promotion Model (Pender, 1987), as well as for a variety of other purposes.

The development and psychometric evaluation of the English and Spanish language versions of the original instrument have been reported in:


Copyright of all versions of the instrument is held by Susan Noble Walker, EdD, RN, FAAN, Karen R. Sechrist, PhD, RN, FAAN and Nola J. Pender, PhD, RN, FAAN. The original Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile is no longer available. You have permission to download and use the HPLP II for non-commercial data collection purposes such as research or evaluation projects provided that content is not altered in any way and the copyright/permission statement at the end is retained. The instrument may be reproduced in the appendix of a thesis, dissertation or research grant proposal. Reproduction for any other purpose, including the publication of study results, is prohibited.

A copy of the instrument (English and Spanish versions), scoring instructions, an abstract of the psychometric findings, and a list of publications reporting research using all versions of the instrument are available for download.

Sincerely,

Susan Noble Walker, EdD, RN, FAAN
Professor Emeritus
Appendix G: HPLP-II Survey

**LIFESTYLE PROFILE II**

**DIRECTIONS:** This questionnaire contains statements about your *present* way of life or personal habits. Please respond to each item as accurately as possible, and try not to skip any item. Indicate the frequency with which you engage in each behavior by circling:

- **N** for never,
- **S** for sometimes,
- **O** for often,
- **R** for routinely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NEVER</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>OFTEN</th>
<th>ROUTINUALLY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Discuss my problems and concerns with people close to me.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Report any unusual signs or symptoms to a physician or other health professional.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>4. Follow a planned exercise program.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
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<td>5. Get enough sleep.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>6. Feel I am growing and changing in positive ways.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
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<td>7. Praise other people easily for their achievements.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Limit use of sugars and food containing sugar (sweets).</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Read or watch TV programs about improving health.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Exercise vigorously for 20 or more minutes at least three times a week (such as brisk walking, bicycling, aerobic dancing, using a stair climber).</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Take some time for relaxation each day.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Believe that my life has purpose.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Maintain meaningful and fulfilling relationships with others.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Eat 6-11 servings of bread, cereal, rice and pasta each day.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Question health professionals in order to understand their instructions.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Take part in light to moderate physical activity (such as sustained walking 30-40 minutes 5 or more times a week).</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Accept those things in my life which I can not change.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Look forward to the future.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Spend time with close friends.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Eat 2-4 servings of fruit each day.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Take part in leisure-time (recreational) physical activities (such as swimming, dancing, bicycling).</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Concentrate on pleasant thoughts at bedtime.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Feel content and at peace with myself.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Find it easy to show concern, love and warmth to others.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
26. Eat 3-5 servings of vegetables each day.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
27. Discuss my health concerns with health professionals.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
28. Do stretching exercises at least 3 times per week.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
29. Use specific methods to control my stress.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
30. Work toward long-term goals in my life.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
31. Touch and am touched by people I care about.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
32. Eat 2-3 servings of milk, yogurt or cheese each day.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
33. Inspect my body at least monthly for physical changes/danger signs.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
34. Get exercise during usual daily activities (such as walking during lunch, using stairs instead of elevators, parking car away from destination and walking).  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
35. Balance time between work and play.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
36. Find each day interesting and challenging.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
37. Find ways to meet my needs for intimacy.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
38. Eat only 2-3 servings from the meat, poultry, fish, dried beans, eggs, and nuts group each day.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
39. Ask for information from health professionals about how to take good care of myself.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
40. Check my pulse rate when exercising.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
41. Practice relaxation or meditation for 15-20 minutes daily.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
42. Am aware of what is important to me in life.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
43. Get support from a network of caring people.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
44. Read labels to identify nutrients, fats, and sodium content in packaged food.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
45. Attend educational programs on personal health care.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
46. Reach my target heart rate when exercising.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
47. Pace myself to prevent tiredness.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
48. Feel connected with some force greater than myself.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
49. Settle conflicts with others through discussion and compromise.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
50. Eat breakfast.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
51. Seek guidance or counseling when necessary.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
52. Expose myself to new experiences and challenges.  
   NEVER  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ROUTINELY
   N      S       O       R
Appendix H: SCS Permission Letter

To Whom it May Concern:

Please feel free to use the Self-Compassion Scale in your research. Masters and dissertation students also have my permission to use and publish the Self-Compassion Scale in their theses. The appropriate reference is listed below.

Best,

Kristin Neff, Ph. D.
Associate Professor
Educational Psychology Dept.
University of Texas at Austin

e-mail: kneff@austin.utexas.edu

Reference:

Coding Key:
Self-Kindness Items: 5, 12, 19, 23, 26
Self-Judgment Items: 1, 8, 11, 16, 21
Common Humanity Items: 3, 7, 10, 15
Isolation Items: 4, 13, 18, 25
Mindfulness Items: 9, 14, 17, 22
Over-identified Items: 2, 6, 20, 24

Subscale scores are computed by calculating the mean of subscale item responses. To compute a total self-compassion score, reverse score the negative subscale items before calculating subscale means - self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification (i.e., 1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1) - then compute a grand mean of all six subscale means. Researchers can choose to analyze their data either by using individual sub-scale scores or by using a total score.

(This method of calculating the total score is slightly different than that used in the article referenced above, in which each subscale was added together. However, I find it is easier to interpret the total score if a mean is used.)
Appendix I: SCS Survey

**HOW I TYPICALLY ACT TOWARDS MYSELF IN DIFFICULT TIMES**

Please read each statement carefully before answering. To the left of each item, indicate how often you behave in the stated manner, using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Almost always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. I’m disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.  
2. When I’m feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that’s wrong.  
3. When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through.  
4. When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world.  
5. I try to be loving towards myself when I’m feeling emotional pain.  
6. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.  
7. When I’m down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.  
8. When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself.  
9. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.  
10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.  
11. I’m intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don’t like.  
12. When I’m going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.  
13. When I’m feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.  
14. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.  
15. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.  
16. When I see aspects of myself that I don’t like, I get down on myself.  
17. When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective.
Appendix I: SCS Survey (Continued)

_____ 18. When I’m really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier
time of it.

_____ 19. I’m kind to myself when I’m experiencing suffering.

_____ 20. When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings.

_____ 21. I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering.

_____ 22. When I'm feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.

_____ 23. I'm tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies.

_____ 24. When something painful happens I tend to blow the incident out of proportion.

_____ 25. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.

_____ 26. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't
like.
Appendix J: Typical Day Tulane

So, I guess a typical day, we get to school about 30 minutes before the kids come and on some mornings, we have a staff meeting or just collaborating with teachers. You know, a lot of times I will go and check-in with a teacher for something or get my lesson plan printed off and copies. My own children go to my school, so they go to school with me, so sometimes it’s even managing them. So, it’s not all always work related. And then, once the kids come, I have breakfast duty, so I help one of the custodians with breakfast duty, so I’m able to see some kids, and this is the first year I have done that and it’s pretty nice. I kind of like that 10 or 15 minutes, just to check-in especially for some of the kids who might be more in need of that warmth, early in the morning. Then after that I have a group of kindergartners. I do a daily check-in with them where we just do some social skills. They can earn tokens for following directions, even during our little time together, so I use the Second Step Curriculum, I use a social skills app. So I use a lot of different social programs. We do that, and then I transition them to a group of second and first graders, and we do some of the same things. I do the Zones of Regulation curriculum with first grade, so the second graders would have had it last year and so it’s nice and we can do more of an emotional check-in of how their day is and what zone they are in, what their goal is, respectful choices. So, definitely more of that behavioral piece, but also that emotional piece with the little bit older kids. Then, I do a group of 3rd graders, so similar, we do a daily goal, but we also use several apps that are related to social stuff, like Social Quest, just a lot of those quick check-in games. Then, I do a group of 4th graders, where we actually use a social card game that we do inappropriate versus appropriateness within the social environment, that kind of thing. So, all those groups together take about 30
minutes, so basically the first 30 minutes of my day as long as there is not a parent who comes in and of course if there is not a crisis, then I will of course do that. So, a typical day would be all of that. Then, I have a couple of small groups that I meet with, particularly in a 3rd grade class. There is one boy who I meet with, who is on a behavior plan for kind of more self-control. So, I pull him and three of the other boys at 9:30am. So, this is like from 8:30am to 9:00am and then from 9:00am to 9:30am, it’s kind of like, ok whatever I need to do. So, sometimes it is meeting with an individual student or sometimes it’s continuing to plan or email or whatever. Then, will have a small group and that goes from about 9:30am to about 9:50am 10:00am, where I use Second Step curriculum with them along with a just variety of other things. I have used a {unable to discern} cookbook and a variety of things. So, then I will meet with them and then at about 10:00am, two days a week, I have a reading group where it really isn’t specific to counseling, but for those higher kids where I have spoken to teachers and said, hey, I’d be happy to pull those kids out so you can have a smaller class size, but then also I read books that we can tie into the social/emotional side. And, it happens that my own children are in my groups, so it’s kinds of nice how that all works out…You know, we are able to read a book and discuss it and we might act out, or just talk about different things, the character traits so on and so forth. Then from 10:30 am to 11:00am, I have kindergarten lunch duty everyday and from about 11:00am to 1:00pm that’s when 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade each lunch. I typically have a lunch group every period. So, from 11:00am to 11:30am, then from 11:30am to 12:00pm, and so on and so forth. I will have first grade groups mainly related to social skills again. I use the, Incredible Flexible You curriculum with kindergarten and then first grade. Then second grade, just depending on
girls/boys, it has a lot do with friendships, self-esteem, personal control, you know, that kind of stuff. Third grade, again, kind of the same thing. If it’s girls, then I might use some relational/aggression stuff and on occasion I might use the, Weird book series and Weird and Tough {unable to discern}, so those kinds of things. And, right now, I have a boys group, so I just found online a curriculum that has to do with social skills, so just practicing a lot of those skills. So, for fourth grade, same kinds of things. I’ll do like you know, study skills, pretty typical counselor groups. So, then about 11:00am to 1:00pm occasionally I’ll have other things, but that is like a hit and miss generally in like a typical day. Then from 1:00pm to 3:00pm and that’s when school ends, I’m doing my classroom lessons. So, I have 20 classrooms, so a lot of times from 1:00pm to 3:00pm, that’s four classes, I can try to get in, in a day. I don’t have that every day, but like one week a month, I will do that. So, like today, I had one from 12:30pm to 1:00pm, 1:00pm to 1:30pm, 1:30 to 2:00pm. You know, that kind of thing. And then that’s the day.