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Professional School Counselors and Motivational Interviewing with Student Clients

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Walden University

College of Counselor Education & Supervision

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Robert Pincus

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

Professional School Counselors and Motivational Interviewing with Student Clients

by

Robert Pincus

MS, Capella University, 2010

BS, University of Phoenix, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

Mental health counselors who counsel adolescents suffering from substance abuse and obesity issues have successfully used motivational interviewing with their clients; however there is little data that has explored motivational interviewing when it has been used to address academic concerns in schools. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of school counselors who have used motivational interviewing to improve student academic performance. This heuristic phenomenological qualitative study examined the perceptions and experiences of professional school counselors who had used motivational interviewing in their schools. Criterion sampling was used to recruit 9 middle and high schools counselors from across the United States. Interview data was analyzed using NVivo software and provisional coding, which revealed four specific themes: defining motivational interviewing in schools, explaining specific techniques, combining motivational interviewing with other theories, and training opportunities for school counselors. The themes that emerged from this study strengthen existing research and provide current and future school counselors with insight into the potential that motivational interviewing could bring to their school counseling programs.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother Judie Pincus, who worked hard to provide a stable home environment for her children after our father died, while still emphasizing the importance of education. Your selflessness in raising a family alone in New York City has been my motivation to become a counselor and assist others in need. Your constant advocacy for your children has been a great example for me as I advocated for students in the high schools in which I have worked.

I am grateful for the many friends and colleagues who have encouraged me on this journey. Pastor Alex Davis, your constant encouragement and friendship was so important throughout this process. Chris Haywood, your funny stories and encouragement was truly important to keep me focused on the task at hand no matter what the obstacle. Colleagues, Dr. Kim Pendleton, Dennis Spires, and Rafe Semmes, I am grateful for your support throughout this long journey. Many thanks to my church friends who were always positive about my finishing this chapter of my life; especially Ross Setters, Matthew McDow, and Becca Crosby. Brian Kritzer, thanks for your friendship and encouragement over the years. Thanks to all friends and family who helped me reach this goal.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge that without Jesus Christ as my Lord and savior I could not have finished this dissertation. The power of my faith in Jesus motivated me to finish this project that He blessed me to complete to better assist others in His name and image to spread the Gospel.

I am thankful that Dr. Ted Remley took a chance on me and agreed to become my dissertation chair. Dr. Remley is not only an outstanding chair, but also someone who cares about his students in the present and future, and guides them to the finish line. I cannot thank Dr. Remley enough for the time he has spent assisting me in completing this dissertation. Dr. Corinne Bridges, my methodologist, was also outstanding in her assistance during this process. Dr. Walter Frazier has been a constant source of encouragement and has mentored me through the Walden process.

I am also thankful to the many school counselor friends I have worked with over the years who have shown me the importance of motivating students towards success. Special thanks to Marwan Sanford and Connie Barnes for showing me what a school counselor should look like in our schools. I am forever grateful to all those at other organizations and to everyone else I did not mention, but who contributed in some fashion to the successful completion of this dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Dr. William Miller designed motivational interviewing in the 1980s while working with clients suffering from substance abuse (Miller, 2009). Counselors use motivational interviewing techniques with clients to solicit change talk that empowers the clients to control their own lives (Miller, 2009). Motivational interviewing has been used with adolescents struggling with smoking (Colby et al., 2012) and alcohol abuse (D'Amico, Houck, Hunter, Miles, Osilla, & Ewin, 2015). Researchers have shown that mental health counselors use motivational interviewing with adolescents to combat behavioral issues, which indicates the technique could assist school counselors working with student clients in middle and high schools (Sibley et al., 2016).

The United States Department of Education reported an overall U.S. graduation rate of 79% in the 2010-11 school year (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). However, the national graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students were only 67% and 71%, respectively (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). De Sousa and Gebremedhin (2004) noted that West Virginia has the highest high school dropout rate and one of the worst economies in the United States. In West Virginia, the majority of the available workforce was working at poorly paying, unskilled jobs with low standards of living. Petty (2014) noted the keys to assisting potential first-generation high school students toward graduation were first making sure that basic needs from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) were met. In addition, Petty (2014) proposed that students' need for achievement (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1976), including social belonging, self-esteem, and self-

actualization, must be met to improve the graduation rate for high school students.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs holds that all humans crave physiological safety and security, belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

McClelland's need for achievement focuses on a person's need to strive and excel at something (McClelland et al., 1976). Additionally, Ryan and Deci (2000) suggested that fulfilling students' needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy improves their motivational drive towards being successful in high school. These researchers have noted the importance of finding counseling techniques that use self-determination theory to assist students in fulfilling their basic needs and needs for achievement in setting future goals.

State grading for individual schools and districts links graduation rates to funding, and may be used as justification for takeover of failing schools (Carnoy, Elmore, & Siskin, 2003). High school administrators' expectations for professional school counselors include motivating at-risk students to graduate with their cohort within 4 years to improve their schools' state grades by increasing graduation rates (Blount, 2012). There are many interventions available for use with at-risk students, but there have been no studies of the perceptions of professional school counselors on the effectiveness of motivational interviewing with this population. Frey, Sims, and Alvarez (2013) suggested that motivational interviewing is flexible enough for working with individuals from various populations as a *response to intervention* (RTI) method. In the literature review, I found no studies on the perceptions of professional school counselors regarding the effectiveness of motivational interviewing in schools, which could have the potential to

affect RTI methods with students. In this chapter I discuss the background and problem, purpose of the study, research question, theoretical framework, and nature of the study. Additionally, I provide key definitions and outline the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of this study.

Background of the Study

Studies have demonstrated how addiction counselors have used motivational interviewing techniques to motivate their clients toward sobriety (Gouzoulis-Mayfrank et al., 2015). Mun, Atkins, and Walters (2015) suggested that motivational interviewing could assist in reducing alcohol abuse with adolescents. Barnett et al. (2012) noted that a teen-based substance abuse program using motivational interviewing was effective with high school students in a school setting.

Despite the positive potential of using motivational interviewing with students, few professional school counselors use these techniques that are new to the profession (Strait et al., 2012). Kittles and Atkinson (2009) noted the effectiveness of motivational interviewing for interventions with students. Terry, Smith, Strait, and McQuillin (2013) replicated a previous study by Strait et al. (2012) on motivational interviewing and demonstrated that motivational interviewing interventions increased math and English grades of middle school students. At a high school in Northwest Louisiana, motivational counseling groups based on motivational interviewing assisted in significantly reducing (by 68%) two-of-three at-risk factors for students affected by truancy, discipline, and failing grades (Pincus, 2016). Juhnke et al. (2013) showed that motivational interviewing techniques were successful with school bullies and promoted positive behavior.

The literature on motivational interviewing in schools is limited. However, the articles I reviewed supported the implementation of motivational interviewing in schools (Channon et al., 2013; Juhnke et al., 2013; Strait et al., 2012). Researchers have described motivational interviewing as a directive Rogerian person-centered counseling theory for counselors working with students (Channon et al., 2013; Juhnke et al., 2013; Strait et al., 2012). Motivational interviewing comprises four tenets (Juhnke et al., 2013; Strait et al., 2012). The first of these four tenets is *expressing empathy* using person-centered theory (Juhnke et al., 2013). Rogers's theory is taught to all graduate counseling students, which makes motivational interviewing concepts easily understandable to counselors (Juhnke et al., 2013). *Rolling with resistance* is the second tenet of motivational interviewing, which involves counselors accepting the clients' viewpoints without reservation (Juhnke et al., 2013). The third tenet is to *develop discrepancies* in the clients' statements (Juhnke et al., 2013). For example, a student might state he or she is lonely yet continues to bully other students. The counselor could use this statement to allow the client to examine his or her goals. The last tenet of motivational interviewing is supporting *self-efficacy* in which clients develop identified goals for attainment versus the counselor or school administrator forcing students to accept goals they do not support (Juhnke et al., 2013).

Juhnke et al. (2013) further noted the six change stages that are a part of motivational interviewing: precontemplation, contemplation, determination, action, maintenance, and relapse. In precontemplation, clients do not see a reason to change their behavior, but the counselor could suggest that clients examine issues with the behavior that might not be positive (Juhnke et al., 2013). In contemplation, students and counselors

collaborate to understand the negatives of the conduct. For example, bullying behaviors lead to suspensions and lack of friendships (Juhnke et al., 2013). In the action stage, counselors elicit solutions from clients to decrease or eliminate negative behaviors (Juhnke et al., 2013). Counselors should refrain from providing solutions so that clients come up with the solutions themselves, if possible (Juhnke et al., 2013). In the maintenance stage, the solutions are in effect to reduce the negative behavior of bullying (Juhnke et al., 2013). Finally, the relapse stage is an opportunity to reinforce the clients' solutions when the negative behaviors resurface (Juhnke et al., 2013).

Researchers have demonstrated that motivational interviewing techniques have been effective in schools to correct negative behavior and poor academics (Juhnke et al., 2013; Strait et al., 2012). Juhnke et al. (2013) noted that motivational interviewing reduced bullying behaviors in a school setting. In two other studies, researchers found that academics improved, particularly in math, when counselors used motivational interviewing in a classroom setting (Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013). Students who attended motivational counseling groups participated more in class, had positive academic behavior, and increased their academic grades (Pincus, 2016; Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013). Channon et al. (2013) found that ninth grade peer mentors were positively affected themselves during training in motivational interviewing preparing to work with seventh grade students. Additionally, the ninth graders were using motivational interviewing techniques to assist the seventh graders' transition to middle school, but were not consistently working with the younger students throughout the school year (Channon et al., 2013). Participants in the study by Channon et al. (2013)

suggested adding more peer-mentors because they were concerned about communicating about bullying issues and believed there was an overemphasis on the importance of the school culture in the program over other important aspects. Channon et al. (2013) suggested that professional counselors trained in motivational interviewing were better equipped to assist students than non-counselors who received training.

Problem Statement

Professional school counselors throughout the country are looking for techniques to counsel at-risk students. Schulz (2011) stated that the role of school counselors is discovering issues at school creating obstacles for students, working with teachers for culturally appropriate instruction, and creating a school environment conducive to student learning. One of the biggest issues in student disaffection from schools is the lack of meaningfulness—a disconnection between school classes and the real world (Schultz, 2011). Motivational interviewing could be a technique that allows school counselors to assist at-risk students in their schools.

Gaps in Literature

In the literature review, I found that there are no direct studies on school counselors' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of motivational interviewing techniques in middle and high schools. In my search for literature, I used the Walden University library to search academic databases for the terms *school counselor* and *motivational interviewing* under the *counseling* category. I searched for articles published in the past 5 years in several databases including Academic Search Complete, Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts Client Narratives and Reference Works, Counseling and

Therapy in Video, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycEXTRA, PsychiatryOnline, Psychological Experiments Online, PsycINFO, and PsycTESTS.

Based on these searches, I received results from 14 peer-reviewed articles, including one dissertation that was a study about school counselors using motivational interviewing with students. Hadraba (2011) discussed the importance of school counseling in motivating at-risk students to graduate from high school. The author did not discuss school counselors' perceptions of motivational interviewing, but noted the technique was another intervention tool available for use in response to intervention (RTI; Hadraba, 2011). When using the same search terms under the topic of *education*, I found 18 peer-reviewed articles. While many of the articles were similar to the search under the counseling topic, one journal article showed the links between motivational interviewing and disciplinary problems at an alternative school (Ratanavivan, 2016).

The terms *motivational interviewing*, *schools*, and *academic* turned up 283 peer-reviewed articles published in the past 5 years in the same publications listed above under the category of *counseling*. These included articles showing that motivational interviewing had been successful in schools; however, researchers, not school counselors, used the technique with students (Terry, Smith, Strait, & McQuillin, 2013; Strait et al., 2012). Frey et al. (2013) suggested that schools should consider using motivational interviewing as a Tier Two intervention strategy. The majority of articles focused on motivational interviewing for aspects other than academics, such as bullying (Juhnke et al., 2013), substance abuse (Hawkins et al., 2016), obesity (Bonde, Bentsen, & Hindhede,

2014; Love-Osborne, Fortune, Sheeder, Federico, & Haemer, 2014), hypertension (Boutin-Foster et al., 2016), and peer support programs (Channon, Marsh, Jenkins, & Robling, 2013). These researchers discussed various aspects of motivational interviewing with adolescents, but not professional school counselors' perceptions of the technique.

When I searched the databases for the terms *motivational interviewing* and *self-determination theory*, 30 peer-reviewed articles published in the last 5 years were listed under the category of *counseling*. Vansteenkiste, Williams, and Resnicow (2012) noted that both motivational interviewing and self-determination theory allow students a form of autonomy regarding their school careers. A study by Walter and Friedman (2013) exemplified the majority of journal articles in which motivational interviewing and self-determination theory were used for behavior changes related to health, obesity, and substance abuse.

This research project could fill the literature gap regarding the perceptions of professional school counselors currently using motivational interviewing techniques with student clients. The literature showed a lack of research connecting motivational interviewing with school counselors. Thus, for this study I determined that heuristic inquiry would allow me, a school counselor, to use my personal experiences with motivational interviewing techniques to help fill in the gaps in the literature (see Miller, 2009; Patton, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of school counselors who use motivational interviewing when providing counseling services

to middle and high school students. Frey et al. (2013) discussed using motivational interviewing in school settings for mental health purposes. This study could assist current school counselors in understanding how some counselors are using a new technique for working with at-risk students who have academic or behavioral issues at school.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of middle and high school professional school counselors who have used motivational interviewing techniques when counseling their student clients?

Theoretical Foundation

Self-determination theory was the theoretical framework for my study. Wilding (2015) stated that self-determination theory focuses the need of students to be confident in their abilities to complete activities, gain acceptance from others socially, and develop autonomy to follow their interests. Using self-determination theory, I studied the experiences of school counselors who use motivational interviewing. Students who do not believe classwork is geared toward their current interests or future career goals may not be successful in school, and potentially are at risk of dropping out of high school (Wilding, 2015). Zoffman et al. (2016) emphasized that motivational interviewing and self-determination theory support each other as both work to empower clients toward making good life choices. Gourlan, Sarrazin, and Trouilloud (2013) noted a link between self-determination theory and motivational interviewing in the increased reporting of physical activity by obese adolescents.

Hardre (2012) found that self-determination theory could be used to motivate students to become involved in school activities, which in turn may help them develop self-confidence. In short, students who set personal goals to challenge themselves are more likely to have the motivation and self-confidence to progress to graduating from high school (Hardre, 2012). Students who believe their needs are not being met in high school are more likely to drop out (Hardre, 2012). For example, a student who is interested in the military and is not placed in a requested Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps class that the school offers might lose interest in school due to the lack of relevance to his or her future plans. Motivational interviewing empowers students to set personal goals for the future (Zoffman et al, 2016).

Nature of the Study

I used heuristic phenomenological inquiry for this qualitative study. Creswell (2013) explained that researchers use qualitative methods when studying a specific phenomenon such as school counselors' perceptions of the effects of motivational interviewing with student clients. School counselors' use of motivational interviewing in their practices is a new phenomenon in the profession. Moustakas (1990) suggested using heuristic inquiry when personal experiences could assist the researcher in studying a topic. For example, Moustakas (1990) used his personal experiences to research the topic of loneliness. Heuristic phenomenological inquiry was an appropriate approach for this study because I have experience using motivational interviewing in my school counseling practice (Moustakas, 1990).

In this study, I used Moustakas's (1990) method of heuristic inquiry because I was studying a topic I had personally experienced. The phases of heuristic inquiry Moustakas developed are initial engagement, immersion, incubation, explication, and creative synthesis. This framework incorporates the expert viewpoint I have personally developed using motivational interviewing with my student clients, along with data collected from participants who have used the same techniques in their school counseling practice (Moustakas, 1990). I interviewed study participants using open-ended questions to discover their personal experiences with motivational interviewing (Moustakas, 1990). I used heuristic inquiry to understand the effectiveness of motivational interviewing from professional school counseling peers.

Definitions

The terms and definitions I used in this study are listed below. The terms are defined according to their use in this research study.

Ambivalence in the context of motivational interviewing: In the contemplation stage of motivational interviewing, clients are weighing the positives and negatives of changing their behavior (Miller & Rose, 2015). Once clients decide to make changes they become open-minded and will consider alternative behaviors (Miller & Rose, 2015).

Client: In this study, a client is defined as a student attending schools in Grades 6 through 12 in middle and high schools throughout the county.

Motivational interviewing: A person-centered technique for counselors to intentionally direct clients using intrinsic motivation to help them decide changing their behavior will better their lives (Miller & Rose, 2015).

Stages of change: The motivational interviewing stages of change are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Miller & Rose, 2015). In the precontemplation stage, clients are not considering any changes to their behavior. In the contemplation stage, clients reason the pros and cons to changing their behavior (Miller & Rose, 2015). Once clients decide on changes in their lives they move to the preparation and action stages to move forward with behavioral modifications (Miller & Rose, 2015). The final maintenance stage allows clients to work towards continuing the positive behavioral change in their lives (Osterman, Carle, Ammerman, & Gates, 2014). In some cases clients might revert back to an earlier stage and once again need to work through the stages (Miller & Rose, 2015; Osterman et al, 2014).

Assumptions

I assumed school counselor participants who reported using motivational interviewing in their practices understand the foundations of the theory and the techniques associated with it when working with student clients. I also assumed all participating school counselors would be honest in their self-evaluations of their work with student clients. These two assumptions were necessary to collect accurate data from participants for this study.

Given my personal experiences, I also assumed that motivational interviewing positively affects student clients in individual and group counseling (Moustakis, 1990). The personal experience I have had with motivational interviewing compelled me to use heuristic inquiry for this study (see Moustakis, 19990). However, in Chapter 3, I outline the methods I used to prevent bias and promote the trustworthiness of my research.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I focused on the experiences of professional school counselors when using motivational interviewing with their student clients. I studied only professional school counselors working with middle or high school populations. My personal experiences using motivational interviewing with student clients led me to choose heuristic phenomenological inquiry over other phenomenological designs.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that I recruited for this study only from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Scene website, thereby missing professional school counselors who were not members of ASCA or were not active on the website. A second limitation, despite using a heuristic approach, was my personal bias as a user of motivational interviewing in my practice.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it contributes knowledge to the school counseling profession. This study addresses a gap in the literature related to professional counselors using motivational interviewing with student clients. The outcomes of this research project could set the foundation for further research. It is especially relevant in the field of the social sciences, specifically in the discipline of counseling, because in it I contribute to a new way of working with student clients to promote future life success (see Miller, 2009). The results of this study also have the possibility of enriching counselor education programs by providing insight into how motivational interviewing skills could assist future school counselors working with clients (see Miller, 2009). This

research study is the first step to opening doors for further research to understand the practice of motivational interviewing in the field of school counseling.

Summary

This chapter began with a brief background of motivational interviewing and the need for this study. This led into the problem statement and discussions of the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided this study. I then provided in-depth explanations of the theoretical framework and operational definitions to help the reader understand terms in the dissertation. The chapter concluded with discussion of the significance of the study and paved the way for the literature review in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Counselors have used motivational interviewing since the 1980s with clients suffering from substance abuse (Miller, 2009). Counselors who use motivational interviewing techniques work on empowering clients to control their own life choices (Miller, 2009). Motivational interviewing is now being used with adolescents struggling with various mental health issues (Colby et al., 2012; D'Amico et al., 2015). Researchers have explored how mental health counselors have used motivational interviewing in motivating teenagers to stop drug and alcohol abuse, unsafe sexual practices, and other destructive behaviors (Colby et al., 2012; D'Amico et al., 2015).

Frey, Sims, and Alvarez (2013) suggested that motivational interviewing is flexible enough for working with individuals on various personal and academic issues. For example, motivational interviewing could be used as part of a counseling intervention with low performing students to boost their self-efficacy (Frey et al., 2013). Additionally, D'Amico et al. (2015) found motivational interviewing techniques were effective with adolescents with alcohol and substance issues. However, I found no literature on the professional school counselors' perceptions of the effectiveness of motivational interviewing in schools. Few professional school counselors use motivational interviewing, given that the approach is new to the school counseling profession (Strait et al., 2012). Several researchers have noted the effectiveness of motivational interviewing for interventions with students in the academic, personal/social, and career domains

(Juhnke et al., 2013; Kittles & Atkinson, 2009; Pincus, 2016; Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013).

Professional school counselors throughout the country are looking for techniques to counsel at-risk students. Schulz (2011) stated that the role of school counselors is to discover issues at school creating obstacles for students, work with teachers for culturally appropriate instruction, and create a school environment conducive to student learning. The lack of meaningfulness and disconnection between school classes and the real world is one of the biggest issues in student disaffection with school (Schultz, 2011).

Motivational interviewing combined with self-determination theory could be an approach that allows school counselors to assist at-risk students in their schools. However, the professional and scholarly literature currently lacks direct studies on school counselors' perceptions of the effectiveness of motivational interviewing in middle and high schools.

In this chapter I briefly explain my search methods for this literature review. Additionally, I review research on self-determination theory, the theoretical framework for this study, and the heuristic phenomenological research design. Next, I offer an extensive review of literature on motivational interviewing, including that on methods used with adolescents. Finally, I provide a summary of the entire literature review.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the Walden University library to search for the terms *school counselor* and *motivational interviewing* under the *counseling* category in several academic databases. I limited the searches to articles published in the past 5 years of articles searched databases including Academic Search Complete, Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts Client

Narratives and Reference Works, Counseling and Therapy in Video, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycEXTRA, PsychiatryOnline, Psychological Experiments Online, PsycINFO, and PsycTESTS. This search resulted in 14 peer-reviewed articles including one dissertation about school counselors using motivational interviewing with students. Hadraba (2011) discussed the importance of school counseling in motivating at-risk students to graduate from high school. However, Hadrababa did not discuss school counselors' perceptions of motivational interviewing, but rather noted that the technique is another intervention tool available to motivate at-risk students. When using the same search terms under the topic of *education*, I found 18 peer-reviewed articles. While many of the articles were similar to those in the previous search, I found one journal article examining the links between motivational interviewing and disciplinary problems at an alternative school (Ratanavivan, 2016),

A search for the terms *motivational interviewing*, *schools*, and *academic* under the category of *counseling* turned up 283 peer-reviewed articles published in the past 5 years. There were articles showing that motivational interviewing had been successful in schools. However, in these studies it was researchers and mental health counselors, not school counselors, who used the technique with students (Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013.). Frey et al. (2013) suggested that counselors in schools should consider using motivational interviewing as a Tier 2 intervention strategy. The majority of articles focused on motivational interviewing for aspects other than academics, such as bullying (Juhnke et al., 2013), substance abuse (Frey et al., 2013), obesity (Bonde et al., 2014; Love-Osborne et al., 2014), hypertension (Boutin-Foster et al., 2016), and peer support

programs (Channon et al., 2013). These articles addressed various aspects of motivational interviewing with adolescents, but not professional school counselors' perceptions of the technique.

When I searched for the terms *motivational interviewing* and *self-determination theory* under the *counseling* category in the same databases, I found 30 peer-reviewed articles published in the past 5 years. Vansteenkiste et al. (2012) noted that both motivational interviewing and self-determination theory allow students a form of autonomy regarding their school careers. A study by Walter and Friedman (2013) was an example of the majority of journal articles in which motivational interviewing and self-determination theory were used for behavior changes related to health, obesity, and substance abuse.

Theoretical Framework: Self-Determination Theory

In the educational context, self-determination theory holds that students who are intrinsically motivated will be more enthusiastic and successful academically than students who are not self-motivated (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). The researchers found the key to intrinsic motivation educationally is allowing the student autonomy in making his or her own academic decisions (Deci et al., 1991). In short, the foundation of self-determination theory in education is allowing a student to choose his or her path to graduation. Doing so may not only empower their intrinsic motivation to excel at classes needed for graduation, but may also directly affect the potential career of the middle or high school pupil (Deci et al., 1991). For example, when working in my school district, I could assign interested students welding classes to create additional

enthusiasm for core subjects such as math, science, English, and social science, which are required for graduation and for high school students to receive their industry-based certification in welding at the local career and technical center.

Deci and Ryan (1991) suggested that self-determination theory is different than other forms of motivation because with it students choose to improve academically to reach a desired goal for self-satisfaction versus a controlled motivational technique such as rewards. Self-determination theory focuses on competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci et al., 1991). Competence allows a student the understanding and enjoyment of the steps for achieving a desired personal outcome, such as learning geometry for higher performance as a future carpenter (Deci et al., 1991). Seema, Udam, and Mattisen (2016) noted a lack of competence and motivation could create negative attitudes toward external reviews, such as tests or observations, due to a lack of confidence in understanding subject matter. Relatedness refers to the student being socially accepted and connected with peers (Deci et al., 1991). Wilding (2015) defined relatedness academically as teachers showing respect to individual students and creating a positive relationship leading to students feeling safe in the learning atmosphere. Autonomy is described as having control of individual actions based on personal interests (Deci et al., 1991; Wilding, 2015). Students believing they have a choice in classes supporting their interests could do better academically than students perceiving no autonomy in their school lives (Wilding, 2015).

Self-determination theory encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1991). Individuals who are intrinsically motivated enjoy doing activities they

are interested in completing due to passion about the action (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Extrinsic motivation is based on completing needed activities to reach a predetermined goal (Deci et al., 1991). When students combine intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the process forms internalization (Deci et al., 1991) For example, a student might want a career in the medical field, but not enjoy English class. However, when the student realizes there are many reasons to want to do well in English for his or her future career, the motivation to pass the core subject becomes an identified regulation to the students' academic process (Deci et al., 1991). In this case, the outcome of doing well in English to be successful on the SAT or ACT or to prepare for a college-level medical terminology class is classified as integrated regulation because learning the subject is a step toward reaching a specific goal (Deci et al., 1991).

Taylor et al. (2014) found a pattern in a meta-analysis of several studies showing a correlation between students' high intrinsic motivation and good academic grades. The researchers also discovered external and introjected regulations impede academic success (Taylor et al., 2014). Deci et al., (1991) defined external regulation as receiving a reward or punishment based on the person's actions. Introjected regulation is based on students feeling guilty for their actions, thereby forcing them to change to please an authority figure (Deci et al., 2014). For example, when students do not do their homework, their mothers were disappointed, and then the work was completed to satisfy parents.

Gnambs and Hanfstingl (2016) reported that intrinsic motivation is lowest during adolescence. They found that intrinsic motivation increased for the students when they were content with the psychological components of autonomy, competence, and

relatedness in their school lives (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016). Bohanon, Castillo, and Afton (2015) described a case study in which a failing student was simply given opportunities for discussing and researching his future plans, which increased his intrinsic motivation. In this case, self-determination theory was used throughout various aspects of the school including core and elective classes, the attendance office, the discipline office, and the RTI team (Bohanon et al., 2015; Deci et al., 1991). The school team members and the student collaborated on an action plan to assist him in reaching the goals discussed for future success (Bohanon et al., 2015).

Self-determination theory is a rational choice for researching motivational interviewing because, as Deci admitted, “in general the two approaches do share some sensibilities” (Deci & Terry, 2013, p. 7). Ryan (2012) added that self-determination theory and motivational interviewing were complimentary theories. Both theories support the concept of resolving clients’ presenting issues through the use of autonomy in decision-making (Deci & Terry, 2013). Researchers noted four similarities between the two theories when working with clients including (a) engaging in the counseling process, (b) focusing on collaboration, (c) evoking the reason for changing, and (d) developing a successful plan for implementing changes (Friederichs et al., 2016; Resnicow & McMaster, 2012; Vansteenkiste, Williams, & Resnicow, 2012).

Self-determination theory relates to the present study due to similarities with motivational interviewing (Deci & Terry, 2013; Friederichs et al., 2016; Liu, 2012; Resnicow & McMaster, 2012; Vansteenkiste et al., 2012). Since self-determination theory is closely correlated to motivation interviewing, the theory is certainly related to

my dissertation question on the lived experiences of middle and high school professional school counselors who have used motivational interviewing when counseling their student clients. Miller and Rollnick (2013) noted that due to the similarities of the two theories, motivational interviewing can be assisted through the knowledge and use of self-determination theory.

Research Design: Qualitative Heuristic Phenomenological Inquiry

This was a heuristic phenomenological qualitative study. Haertl (2014) noted heuristic inquiry allows a passionate researcher to use personal experiences on a topic for expanding research to fill gaps in the literature while keeping an open mind for new ideas. Moustakas (1990), the founder of heuristic inquiry, studied the effects of loneliness from a personal standpoint. Another example comes from Shaw (2014), a visually impaired counselor who used heuristic inquiry in researching the effects a therapist's visual impairment had on counseling relationships with clients. The strengths of heuristic inquiry, including a personal connection with the topic, allow researchers to use their passionate understanding of a topic to further study a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic inquiry was the most appropriate choice for this dissertation study because I have used motivational interviewing in my school counseling practice. In fact, I spoke at the Evidence-Based School Counseling conventions in February 2016 and March 2018, and the ASCA convention in July 2016 on the topic of motivational interviewing in schools. My experience using motivational interviewing allowed me to use my personal experiences in understanding collected interview data while also gaining

new information on motivational interviewing perceptions from other professional school counselors.

Moustakas (1990) used heuristic inquiry for the first time when making a major decision about heart surgery for his daughter. The researcher stated he felt completely alone when making a life and death decision involving his daughter (Moustakas, 1990). The intense feeling led him to research loneliness using his personal experiences (Moustakas, 1990).

Other researchers followed Moustakas' heuristic inquiry blueprint for their own studies. Štěpánková (2015) used phenomenological heuristic methodology in explaining her personal experiences as a psychologist using pre-therapy with autistic persons forming an important communicative relationship. The researcher reflected her experiences and clients' reactions in a journal and used the collected data for the study (Štěpánková, 2015). Likewise, Edwards et al. (2013) used a heuristic approach in determining how meditation assisted clients' understanding of their counseling issues by the researchers participating in contemplation exercises and journaling personal reactions. Carroll (2001) also used a heuristic approach in describing her personal experience interviewing nurses working with patients who had advanced cancer discovering how spirituality was incorporated into daily care. The researcher, while not personally working with the patients, repeatedly listened to the audiotapes from participants' interviews for immersion in the topic for better understanding of the collected data (Carroll, 2001).

Heuristic inquiry had previously been used in the counseling profession for various studies (Brooks & Howie, 2008; Shaw, 2014). Brooks and Howie (2008) used their personal experience for explaining nuances of Gestalt therapy to the counseling community. Shaw (2014) used heuristic inquiry to show disabled counselors could work effectively with non-disabled clients. I am a professional school counselor who uses motivational interviewing in my practice, which allows me the opportunity to showcase a varied perspective on this topic.

Literature Review

Miller (1983) designed motivational interviewing as a type of person-centered based counseling theory promoting positive changes in the mindset of substance abusers to reduce dependency on alcohol or drugs. Motivational interviewing therapy uses a client-driven partnership between a client and a counselor using tools of person-centered counseling, such as reflective listening and empathy, to assist the client in choosing positive changes (Miller & Rollnick, 2004). The main concept of motivational interviewing is the counselor using the “client’s own values, motivations, abilities, and resources” (Miller & Rollnick, 2004, p. 299) to support the client towards positive change. Miller and Rollnick (2004) said that motivational interviewing is a humanistic approach to counseling therapy.

Motivational interviewing focuses on the ambivalence of the client (Miller & Rollnick, 2004). Westra and Avir (2013) noted the importance of counselors discussing aspects of change with clients in the motivational interviewing process. Additionally, counselors listen for openings to encourage clients to explore the possibility of changes

that can improve their lives (Westra & Avir, 2013). Miller and Rollnick (2004) emphasized clients either want to change or don't want to change. In many cases the client is resistant to change and could remain in the ambivalence stage for a long period without assistance from counseling (Miller & Rollnick, 2004; Westra & Avir, 2013). The motivational interviewing theory was originally designed for use in substance abuse counseling where the positive change was for the client to reduce and eliminate using drugs or alcohol (Miller & Rollnick, 2004). In education, the changes might be harder to understand, as there are several different pathways toward graduation in most states including diplomas based on future college matriculation or earning industry-based certifications allowing students to join the workforce immediately after leaving high school.

The foundation of motivational interviewing is person-centered theory that was introduced by Carl Rogers (Miller & Rollnick, 2004; Westra & Avir, 2013). Miller and Rollnick (2004) stated that the theory of motivational interviewing is based on a directive person-centered approach. Westra and Avir (2013) noted clients are experts on their own lives, so a directive approach using person-centered counseling allows counselors and clients to explore changes needed to improve their lives. In using motivational interviewing with clients suffering from substance abuse, Resnicow and McMaster (2012) used key concepts of person-centered counseling such as reflective listening, that allowed counselors opportunities to build deeper relationships with clients and eventually elicit change talk. In using a directive approach, counselors should be careful not to lead clients toward change talk, but to use direct questions to assist clients to discuss changing

to better their lives (Miller & Rollnick, 2004). Clients must make decisions to change without prompting from the counselor (Miller & Rollnick, 2004).

Counselors using motivational interviewing would utilize reflective listening to identify change talk from clients (Miller & Rollnick, 2004). The change talk could be the client deciding to change a behavior or being ambivalent and staying with the current behavior (Miller & Rollnick, 2004). The goal of motivational interviewing is to allow clients to come up with effective changes in their lives (Miller & Rollnick, 2004; Westra & Avir, 2013). For example, through motivational interviewing a student who is failing algebra decides to engage in tutoring after the counselor uses a directive approach leading the client toward that conclusion without ever advising the specific course of action. In this example, the student is empowered due to discovering a solution to the issue on his or her own without being told by the school counselor to go to tutoring.

Motivational interviewing uses the concepts of rolling with resistance, client change talk, and finding discrepancies to assist clients towards positive change (Miller, 1983; Miller & Rollnick, 2004; Westra & Avir, 2013). Resistance could include struggling to change behaviors or the treatment being discussed (Westra & Avir, 2013). A client's ambivalence can be of varying degrees but could result in being stuck in the same situation as change is being contemplated (Westra & Avir, 2013). The client could also resist the counselor's ideas or treatment plans; particularly due to a directive approach (Westra & Avir, 2013).

Westra and Avir (2013) advised that counselors roll with client resistance using the information gathered for exploring the ambivalence. By emphatically supporting the

resistance of clients, counselors promote communication and collaboration with their clients (Westra & Avir, 2013). In motivational interviewing the counselor supports resistance even if the idea stated is incorrect or clients were unfairly blaming others for their situations (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012).

Rollnick, Kaplan, and Rutschman (2016) found that teachers and professional school counselors who supported students' resistance positively empowered the students' decision-making process. Instead of not offering options to students, counselors question students about any behavior changes that might improve the situation (Rollnick et al., 2016). Stoltz and Young (2013) noted that when counselors do not disagree with resistant clients, the resistance is reduced as there is no longer an adversarial-type relationship. Along with the reduction in resistance clients should feel empowered in their personal decision-making process, which opens up opportunities for collaboration with counselors to discuss change talk (Miller & Rollnick, 2013; Stoltz & Young, 2013).

Counselors could identify change talk through the language being used during the session by clients (Miller & Rollnick, 2004). Counselors should be careful to not control change talk, as motivational interviewing requires that change come from the clients themselves (Miller & Rollnick, 2004). Once counselors and clients have moved past resistance and closer to collaboration, action questions should be used to generate change talk (Resnicow et al., 2012). At this point, counselors should focus on action questions using "how, when, or why" (Resnicow et al., 2012, p. 474) to promote action behavior from clients. This technique forces clients to explain reasoning for changing behavior, but

also allows for planning the change through empowered and autonomous clients (Resnicow et al., 2012).

Apodaca et al. (2016) found session techniques that work best in motivational interviewing are giving affirmation, emphasizing control, asking open questions, receiving permission to advise or raise concerns, and using simple and complex reflections. Open questions and reflections are part of the basics for person-centered counseling (Miller & Rollnick, 2004). Counselors affirm clients through complements or self-confidence boosting statements (Apodaca et al., 2016). Counselors emphasize that clients control their own actions, whether it be doing homework or acting out in class (Apodaca et al., 2016; Pincus, 2016).

While open questions are a staple of person-centered counseling, the questions in motivational interviewing are geared toward information gathering, discovery of clients' viewpoints on situations, and developing self-exploration of their goals (Apodaca et al., 2016). In motivational interviewing counselors should ask permission before offering any advice to clients (Apodaca et al., 2016). In the case of a concern with clients' statements, after asking permission to voice their concern, counselors could explain that the discrepancy in the language appears to be contradictory to the stated goal (Apodaca et al., 2016). A simple reflection works to keep clients talking, but a complex reflection is another way to point out discrepancies between clients' goals and statements regarding reaching resolutions of issues (Apodaca et al., 2016). Apodaca et al. (2016) emphasizes that counselors using motivation interviewing should not advise or express concerns without permission, confront, or directly warn the client when trying to change his or her

behaviors. Additionally, counselors should not control clients' thought processes, give information, or support the behavior being changed (Apodaca et al., 2016).

An amplified reflection by counselors could trigger change talk from the client (Miller & Rollnick, 2012; Stoltz & Young, 2013). In using amplified reflections, counselors exaggerate clients' statements using a form of directive person-centered counseling (Stoltz & Young, 2013). Amplified reflections should not be sarcastic but should be statements directly summarizing sessions to create feedback assisting clients in understanding their indecisiveness (Stoltz & Young, 2013).

Rollnick, Miller, and Butler (2008) shortened the stages of change into the acronym DARN-CAT standing for clients' drive, ability, reason, need, commitment, activation, and taking steps toward changing. Clients must not only desire to make changes in their lives, but also need a detailed action plan to implement the life modifications (Rollnick et al., 2008). Counselors should have clients list all steps they will take to implement and complete desired changes (Rollnick et al., 2008).

Miller and Rollnick (2013) emphasized that counselors using motivational interviewing should empower clients in making their own decisions for changing. Counselors promote self-efficacy for clients, as clients know the best solutions to their personal problems and issues (Stoltz & Young, 2013). This motivational interviewing technique allows counselors opportunities to promote hope, affirm completed goals, and find clients' strengths (Stoltz & Young, 2013). Hope for clients come from collaborating with counselors on several plans to change various behaviors to resolve difficult situations in their lives (Stoltz & Young, 2013). Miller and Rollnick (2013) suggested

that clients determine alternatives based on continued change talk from counselors during sessions. Affirmation comes when counselors refrain from complementing the client on success, but instead reflect clients' feelings then they reach set goals (Stoltz & Young, 2013). Counselors could promote self-efficacy through having clients explain their strengths after successful life changes (Stoltz & Young, 2013).

D'Amico et al. (2015) studied the effect of motivational interviewing during group counseling. Like individual counseling, when the facilitator used motivational interviewing techniques, such as open questions or reflecting content, positive change talk from adolescent group members in a substance abuse group increased (D'Amico et al., 2015). In this study, D'Amico et al. (2015) noted reflections worked best when directly related to the change talk, in this case alcohol and substance abuse.

Resnicow et al. (2012) noted that one technique of motivational interviewing is developing discrepancies during the session, which creates change talk. In looking for discrepancies in change talk, counselors continue showing empathy toward clients, while also listening for differences between session statements and actions of clients (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012; Westra & Aviram, 2013). An example of a discrepancy might be a client suggesting a future positive behavior versus current negative conduct that has been causing problems (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012). Stoltz and Young (2013) stated that counselors using discrepancies could have clients discuss the positives and negatives of continuing current behavior or changing to better reach specific goals. If clients agree the behavior must change in order to reach goals, then counselors might collaborate to create an action plan for changing behaviors (Stoltz & Young, 2013).

Discrepancies could be used as a specific activity during counseling sessions (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012). For example, counselors might ask clients to list five goals or values they want for their lives (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012). Resnicow and McMaster (2012) suggested that counselors lead discussions on whether current behaviors were aligned with clients' goals and values for the future. Additionally, counselors might create change talk by asking clients which behaviors need to change in order to reach desired goals and values in their lives (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012; Westra & Aviram, 2013). Basically, counselors ask what the benefits of continuing current behavior versus changing behavior were to reach personal goals (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012). For example, a student wants independence from parents and sets a goal of going to a four-year college out of state. However, the student is not doing homework and has poor grades. The counselor might reflect the discrepancy in wanting to be admitted to an out of state four-year college but having poor grades due to not completing homework assignments (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012). In this case, the counselor could question the student on whether he or she believes changing his or her behavior is needed for reaching educational and independence goals he or she has set (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012).

Jones, Latchford, and Tober (2016) researched clients' perceptions of motivational interviewing techniques used during their sessions and their effectiveness. The researchers discovered clients' appreciated counselors' active listening and reflections, which clients stated often led to a feeling of empowerment (Jones et al., 2016). The study showed that clients believed there had to be a relationship with their

counselors, leading to a collaborative effort to resolving issues (Jones et al., 2016). Clients in the study noted that counselors acknowledging discrepancies during sessions encouraged a more emotional response, leading to greater awareness of the impact changing behaviors could have in their lives (Jones et al., 2016). In this study, motivational interviewing techniques stressing client autonomy were seen as positively promoting motivation for changing poor behaviors and reaching desired results (Jones et al., 2016). Clients reported that autonomy in sessions increased their self-efficacy and self-esteem in helping them understand that they had the opportunity to change their behaviors to increase the likelihood of reaching goals and values for bettering their lives (Jones et al., 2016).

Stages of Change

Miller and Rollnick (2013) developed motivational interviewing stages of change to assist counselors throughout the progress of clients during sessions. The six stages are precontemplative, contemplative, preparation, active change, maintenance, and relapse (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). In the precontemplative stage, clients do not see any issues with their behavior despite confrontation from possibly family and friends (Kittles & Atkinson, 2009). In the contemplative stage, clients consider the positives and negatives of changing their behavior (Kittle & Atkinson, 2009). In the preparation and action stages, clients plan for changing and implementing the decision for changing their behavior (Kittles & Atkinson, 2009). Clients work to maintain their new behavior in the maintenance stage (Kittles & Atkinson, 2009). In the last stage, clients could relapse to their old behavior (Kittles & Atkinson, 2009). Several researchers noted that a negative

aspect of motivational interviewing is the relapsing to old behaviors in the long term (Kittles & Atkinson, 2009; Li, Zhu, Tse, Tse, & Wong, 2016; Wagner et al., 2014).

Substance Abuse

Motivational interviewing was originally designed for substance abuse counseling (Miller, 1983). Moyers, Houck, Glynn, Hallgren, and Manuel (2017) found in substance abuse counseling sessions, counselors trained to use motivational interviewing influenced and strengthened client change talk. The researchers reported clients' willingness to use change language was greater when engaged in motivational interviewing versus other therapies (Moyers et al., 2017). Moyers et al. (2017) noted that motivational interviewing concepts were simple to explain and received positive results in this study.

Li et al. (2016) used a meta-analysis that demonstrated the effectiveness of motivational interviewing with adolescents suffering from substance abuse. The researchers noted that motivational interviewing had a higher effect on changing the attitudes of adolescents versus changing their behavior (Li et al., 2016). Like other studies, Li et al., (2016) reported motivational interviewing was more effective as a short-term fix (Wagner et al., 2014).

Tucker, D'Amico, Ewing, Miles, and Pedersen (2017) showed that motivational interviewing significantly lowered substance abuse and sexual risky behavior in homeless young adults. The program's four sessions featured understanding the correlation between alcohol abuse and risky sexual behavior, accessing needed changes for a safer lifestyle, and offering the opportunity to learn about the negative effects of alcohol abuse and resources that assist in fighting the disease (Tucker et al., 2017). A limitation of this

study was not being able to determine whether the self-reporting of participants was accurately described (Tucker et al., 2017).

Wagner et al. (2014) noted the correlation between adolescent alcohol and drug abuse and violent behavior. In this study, Wagner et al. (2014) showed that mental health counselors using motivational interviewing had immediate significant decreases in both substance abuse and violence of the students in the study. However, the positive results almost returned to previous poor levels just six months after the therapy ended.

Obesity

As a result of a meta-analysis, Borrello, Pietrabissa, Ceccarini, Manzoni, and Castelnovo (2015) reported the success in using motivational interviewing over other therapies with obese children assisting them in changing their eating habits. Researchers found counselors using motivational interviewing techniques with obese children were successful due to building a relationship leading to collaboration with the client in discovering healthy ways to lose weight and designing an action plan (Borrello et al., 2015). Szczekala, Ślusarska, and Goś (2017) discovered motivational interviewing assisted clients to change their diets and increase exercise in order to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

Adolescents

While there has been no research on the perceptions of school counselors using motivational interviewing in schools there is research on using motivational interviewing with adolescents. Stewart, Siebert, Arlt, Moise-Campbell, and Lehinger (2016) studied Project READY (Reducing the Effects of Alcohol and Drugs on Youth), which is a 16-

week program using motivational interviewing with students aged 13-18 who were suffering from substance abuse issues. The researchers found motivational interviewing focusing on setting goals and action plan decreased substance abuse in adolescents who completed Project READY (Stewart et al., 2016).

Motivational interviewing was also found to be effective with adolescent substance abusers in juvenile facilities (Clair-Michaud, Martin, Stein, Bassett, Lebeau, & Golembeske, 2016). In this program, mental health counselors met with adolescents for 90 minutes early in the incarceration and again for 60 minutes two weeks before being released (Clair-Michaud et al., 2016). The adolescents treated with motivational interviewing showed a decrease in violent behavior three months after their release (Clair-Michaud et al., 2016). Unlike other studies the researcher used a *booster* session for clients before they were released, which might have affected their long-term behavior (Clair-Michaud et al., 2016).

In two studies, mental health counselors (rather than school counselors) used motivational interviewing in schools in a program designed to improve academic performance (Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013). The results showed students attending the motivational counseling groups participated more in classes, had positive academic behaviors, and increased their academic grades (Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013). The two studies found the greatest academic improvements were in math (Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013).

Channon, Marsh, Jenkins, and Robling (2013) studied a peer-support group of ninth graders who mentored seventh graders after receiving training on using

motivational interviewing with the younger students. The researchers taught motivational interviewing to the older students with the intent of empowering them for success (Channon et al., 2013). The program was found to promote a culture of autonomy within the seventh graders, for example, taking control of their academic success by asking for assistance with tutoring when needed for passing classes (Channon et al., 2013).

Cushing, Jensen, Miller, and Leffingwell (2014), after conducting a meta-analysis, concluded that there was a noteworthy improvement in various behaviors when adolescents were treated with a motivational interviewing approach. In another meta-analysis, Jensen et al. (2011) noted a decrease in substance abuse behavior by adolescents who were treated using motivational interviewing. Gayes and Steele (2014) found the same results in their meta-analysis of using motivational interviewing approached with adolescents but added that parental participation improved the success rate of positive behavior changes in adolescent clients. More importantly to school counselors who generally have limited time with student clients, the study showed motivational interviewing is effective as a brief counseling approach (Cushing et al., 2014; Jensen et al., 2011).

Naar-King (2011) found just four sessions using a motivational interviewing approach with adolescents decreased female clients and HIV-positive clients having unprotected sex. The researcher noted the success of the motivational interviewing approach was due to a collaborative relationship with the adolescents allowing them to be empowered in making their own life choices (Naar-King, 2011). The idea of asking permission before offering information to adolescents was noted as a key component

showing them they control their personal decisions (Naar-King, 2011). Naar-King (2011) suggested a motivational interviewing approach could be used as a counseling foundation before using other theories with adolescents.

Study Justifications

This literature review showed the positives of mental health counselors using motivational interviewing in various settings. The literature review also found motivational interviewing has been successful with adolescents. I am a professional school counselor who has had success using motivational interviewing with high school students. By studying the perceptions of professional school counselors who have used motivational interviewing in schools, I hope the results of my study could assist educators in finding solutions to motivate unmotivated students, keeping them in school through high school graduation.

Barnett et al. (2012) went even further in a study working with adolescent substance abusers in an alternative school setting with a percentage of students taking classes online. The researcher used the same motivational interviewing approach with in-person students and ones counseled over the phone (Barnett et al. (2012). Interestingly, the improved academics and lower substance abuse behavior was almost identical in both groups (Barnett et al., 2012). The researcher suggested that a motivational interviewing approach could be useful as a classroom lesson to boost students' self-efficacy as a response to intervention Tier 1 intervention for all students in a school (Barnett et al., 2012; Burns et al. 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

This literature review demonstrated that motivational interviewing techniques work toward assisting clients to become autonomous, set goals, and create action plans toward reaching their personal objectives (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Research showed that motivational interviewing is successful with adolescents and adult clients for several issues including substance abuse and obesity (Borello et al., 2015; Li et al., 2017; Moyers et al., 2017; Szczekala et al., 2017; Tucker et al., 2017; Wagner et al., 2014).

Motivational interviewing has been successful with adolescents in schools when utilized by mental health counselors (Channon et al., 2013; Clair-Michaud et al., 2016; Stewart et al., 2016; Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013).

The literature review also showed that motivational interviewing positively affects adolescents in schools, but I found no research in which school counselors have used the techniques with students. This study filled the gap in the literature and provided understanding of the lived experiences of middle and high school professional school counselors who used motivational interviewing techniques when counseling their student clients. The qualitative heuristic phenomenological study could fill the gap regarding whether motivational interviewing is a viable option for school counselors assisting their students to improve academics, behavior, and truancy issues.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Motivational interviewing was originally designed by Dr. William Miller to combat substance abuse (Miller, 2009). Miller's idea was simply to empower clients' to make better choices in their lives to reach their goals of sobriety (Miller, 2009). After years of using motivational interviewing for just adult substance abuse, several researchers successfully tried the technique with adolescents who were using cigarettes and alcohol (Colby et al., 2012; D'Amico et al., 2015). Researchers have shown motivational interviewing could change students' perceptions related to negative issues in their lives that interfere with their success (Colby et al., 2012; D'Amico et al., 2015)

In the two previous chapters, I introduced the study and reviewed the literature that showed the experiences of counselors using motivational interviewing with children and adolescents in clinical and school settings. Counselors have used varying techniques of motivational interviewing with clients. In previous studies, researchers found that children and adolescents were sometimes inspired by motivational interviewing techniques. What was not known, however, was school counselors' perceptions of the effectiveness motivational interviewing with student clients. An additional unknown was the techniques school counselors perceived as most effective with students in a school setting. In this chapter, I outline the qualitative method that I used in this study to assist in understanding the experiences of school counselors who use motivational interviewing with their student clients.

In this study, I attempted to describe positive and negative perceptions school counselors have of motivational interviewing regarding its effectiveness with student

clients. I explored the specific motivational interviewing techniques school counselors used with their student clients. School counselors discussed their professional experiences in using motivational interviewing with student clients, leading to a better understanding of the technique in schools during counseling. There was limited research on school counselors' use of motivational interviewing in their practices; therefore, this research study was warranted.

Also pertinent to the study, Deci and Terry (2013) noted that the foundation of self-determination theory is that people need autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their lives for a healthy existence. Self-determination theory has some similarities to motivational interviewing, which allowed me to explore approaches used by school counselors using both concepts. In this chapter, I discuss the study's research design, research questions, methodology, qualitative paradigm, participant selection process, and location of data collection. I also discuss the procedures for data collection and analysis I used for this research project.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of middle and high school professional school counselors who have used motivational interviewing techniques when counseling their student clients?

Heuristic Phenomenological Qualitative Study

This was a heuristic phenomenological qualitative study. Haertl (2014) noted that heuristic inquiry allows a passionate researcher to use personal experiences of a topic to

expand research and fill gaps in the literature, while keeping an open mind for new ideas. Moustakas (1990), the founder of heuristic inquiry, studied the effects of loneliness from a personal standpoint. Another example comes from Shaw (2014), a visually impaired counselor who used heuristic inquiry when researching the effects a therapist's visual impairment has on counseling relationships with clients. The strengths of heuristic inquiry, including a personal connection with the topic, allow researchers to use their passionate understanding of a topic to further the study a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic inquiry was the most appropriate choice for this study because I was using motivational interviewing in my school counseling practice. In fact, I spoke at the Evidence-Based School Counseling Conference in February 2016 and March 2018, and the ASCA conference in July 2016 on the topic of motivational interviewing in schools. My experience using motivational interviewing informed my collection of interview data as I worked to gain new information on professional school counselors' perceptions of motivational interviewing.

Moustakas (1990) used heuristic inquiry for the first time when making a major decision about heart surgery for his daughter. The researcher stated he felt completely alone when making this life and death decision (Moustakas, 1990). The intense feeling led him to research loneliness using his personal experiences (Moustakas, 1990).

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important communicative relationships. The researcher reflected on her experiences and clients' reactions in a journal and used the collected data for the study (Štěpánková, 2015). Likewise, Edwards et al. (2013) used a heuristic approach in determining how meditation assisted clients' understanding of their counseling issues. As part of the research process, the researchers participated in contemplation exercises and recorded personal reactions in journals. Carroll (2001) also used a heuristic approach when describing her personal experience interviewing nurses about incorporating spirituality into daily care when working with patients who had advanced cancer. The researcher, while not personally working with the patients, repeatedly listened to the audiotapes from participants' interviews for immersion in the topic for better understanding (Carroll, 2001).

Research Rationale

I chose qualitative methodology for this study. Nieuwenhuis (2015) said that qualitative studies “look for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (p. 419). Given the lack of research on motivational interviewing involving by the school counselor population, it was difficult to identify variables to study. In the case of motivational interviewing, I found a large number of studies on the effects of the techniques in clinical settings, especially pertaining to substance abuse counseling. For example, researchers have found clients suffering from substance abuse experience quick success rates using motivational interviewing when setting goals designed to fight their disorder (Schumacher, 2011; Slesnick, Erdem, Bartle-Haring, & Brigham, 2013). Researchers have also compared the effectiveness of motivational

interviewing with adults and adolescents in clinical settings (Guom, Slesnick, & Feng, 2014). Researchers have also compared the effectiveness of motivational interviewing of students counseled consistently in the technique by using school records for academics, truancy, and discipline (Pincus, 2016; Strait et al., 2012). In this study, it would have been difficult for me to gain accurate student records due to confidentiality laws. Additionally, it would have been difficult to compare the effectiveness of motivational interviewing and other interventions in school settings.

Role of the Researcher

I am a certified professional school counselor in a rural high school in Northwest Louisiana and I am an adjunct faculty member at a local university. The participants I chose for this study had no professional relationship with me. However, participants were members of ASCA, of which I am an active member. I presented at the 2016 ASCA national convention on the topic of school counselors using motivational interviewing. I also wrote an article for the ASCA Magazine about using motivational interviewing combined with rational emotive behavior theory (REBT) and solution-focused brief counseling (Pincus, 2016). During the recruitment phase, I contacted ASCA members, targeting those who would bring rich meaning to this study. Upon recruitment, I gave participants detailed information about the study. The face-to-face, Zoom, or Skype interviews I conducted with participants consisted of open-ended questions (see Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2012; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2015).

Participants interviews involved an iterative process in which I followed up with participants with additional questions during the original interviews as needed. During the process of developing the interview questions, I was cognizant of my biases (see Creswell, 2013). As someone who has used motivational interviewing in my daily practice with students, I was aware of my biases and, in turn, used check and balance resources from committee members to ensure I wrote my questions and results interpretations in an unbiased manner. My goal was to present the results and myself objectively.

Impartiality is essential but does not mean the researcher has no links to the topic. Involved qualitative research uses their direct experiences and insights regarding the real world data they collect (Maxwell, 2012). For instance, Moustakas (1990) used his personal experiences to research the topic of loneliness. In this case, I worked to achieve neutrality despite being an active user of motivational interviewing with my students as a professional school counselor in a high school setting. Maxwell (2012) noted that two major issues affecting neutrality are selecting data supporting the researcher's conclusions and using only information from participants the researcher believes need highlighting. Impartiality implies an open-minded acceptance of all the opinions of the participants no matter the personal and professional experiences of the researcher.

Brisola and Cury (2016) noted that numerous humanistic psychologists, such as Moustakas, Rogers, and Maslow, contributed to the foundations of heuristic research. Moustakas (1990) explained that the first phase of heuristic research is initial engagement. Several experiences have influenced my opinion in regard to professional

school counselors' use of motivational interviewing with their students. First, data from motivational groups I led primarily using motivational interviewing techniques showed that student participants improved grades and attendance while lowering disciplinary referrals (Pincus, 2016). Second, in using motivational interviewing with students, I discovered this brief counseling technique assisted them in setting long- and short-term goals. I personally believe motivational interviewing works with students; however, I understood the importance being open-minded during this research project. My experience led me to the question of whether other school counselors believed motivational interviewing was an effective tool when working with student clients.

Moustakas (1990) noted the second phase of heuristic research is the researcher immersing in the topic. In my case, immersion was easy because I have used motivational interviewing with students for several years and understood the foundation and techniques of the theory. I have researched various motivational interviewing techniques for various professional development speaking engagements around the country including the ASCA 2016 national convention. My research allowed me to understand the different techniques when using motivational interviewing, particularly as I transcribed my interviews with participants.

The third phase of heuristic research is incubation when the researcher is stepping away from the data for a period of time to create open-mindedness about the research project (Brisola & Cury, 2016; Moustakas, 1990). I took a short break of a week after I completed the interviews and transcribed them before analyzing the data. By stepping away from the study, I was more aware of tacit knowledge and intuition upon returning to

active research activities (Moustakas, 1990). Tacit knowledge is based on subsidiary and focal elements coming together (Moustakas, 1990). For example, my understanding of the concepts of motivational interviewing was subsidiary knowledge; however, the self-confidence of myself and other participants using this technique with students was focal knowledge. Focal knowledge was based on the unseen issues, such as participants' body language or tone of voice when discussing their understanding of motivational interviewing.

During the next phase of explication, I explored my personal biases resultant from my immersion in the topic of motivational interviewing from the perspective of a school counselor (see Brisola & Cury, 2016; Moustakas, 1990). I then focused on the common information collected from participants to identify themes for the study (Brisola & Cury, 2016; Moustakas, 1990).

The last phase is creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). Rogers stated that the researcher must accurately use data while staying on the dissertation topic (Brisola & Cury, 2016). Moustakas noted a researcher must be attuned to bias throughout the process by ensuring the information in the study is complete. I considered both personal and participant experiences when I reviewed the collected interview data (Brisola & Cury, 2016). Moustakas (1990) stressed that the researcher must be open-minded to others' opinions and experiences. I stayed open-minded to others' experiences, while using my own experiences to compile unbiased research on the perspectives of school counselors using motivational interviewing with students. In this phase, I wrote a

narrative of the results of my data collection, including verbatim accounts from selected participants (Moustakas, 1990).

Methodology

Study Participants

Participants consisted of nine school counselors from a convenience sample who were members of ASCA. Miles et al. (2014) suggested using a maximum of 10 and a minimum of five participants in a qualitative study for varied rich descriptions of the topic of motivational interviewing to ensure collecting unbiased data. The ASCA National Model promotes school counselor advocacy for students using proactive interventions through data analysis (ASCA, 2003). The participants in this study used motivational interviewing in their counseling program with individuals or groups for academic or behavioral support.

I recruited participants using the ASCA Scene discussion group where some ASCA members were active participants. Wood, Portman, Cigrand, and Colangelo (2010) used the ASCA website ASCA Scene to contact the organization's members for a quantitative study on perceptions in working with gifted children resulting in 149 participants. I posted an announcement to all middle and high school counselors participating on ASCA Scene asking them to volunteer to participate in interviews on motivational interviewing. I placed the posts on the high school community, middle/junior high school community, and the open forum of the discussion boards. Interested school counselors then contacted me beginning the participant recruitment process.

The note I posted on the ASCA Scene website describing the proposed study for potential volunteers is found in Appendix A. In the note, I explained I was conducting dissertation research on the perceptions of school counselors on the effects of the use of motivational interviewing in schools. I informed the participants that while there were a vast number of studies of motivational interviewing in substance abuse counseling, there was little research on the use of the technique in schools. I explained that this research project was designed to provide insight into the perceptions of school counselors currently using motivational interviewing.

Locating participants who were willing to be interviewed on their perceptions of motivational interviewing posed a barrier because school counselors were very busy, and time was needed to be interviewed via Zoom in order to participate in the study. However, I was able to find the number of participants I needed.

Instrumentation

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of school counselors regarding the effectiveness of motivational interviewing with middle and high school students. In this case, motivational interviewing was one of the counseling techniques used with students in the participants school counseling practice. The motivational interviewing counseling techniques could be used in individual or group counseling sessions. The broad, overarching research questions were formulated to help me better understand their experiences. See Appendix B for specific questions for the one-hour interview with participants and the interview protocol. Moustakas (1990) suggested when using heuristic research inquiry extra time should be provided allowing participants

freedom to express their complete opinions on the effectiveness of motivational interviewing in their school practices. During a face-to-face Zoom interview that was audiotaped, I asked participants open-ended questions to understand motivational interviewing from the perspective of a school counselor using the technique (Moustakas, 1990). I did not have a need for follow-up questions after the initial interviews.

Procedures

The following procedures served as a sequential guide to recruit and inform participants, collect and analyze data, and validate findings. First, I contacted professional school counselors via the high school community and open forum discussion boards on the ASCA Scene website to request participants for the study. I posted an explanation of the study and participation requirements (see Appendix A). I included my contact information in the post for potential participants to contact me about this study.

Second, I sent an informational letter detailing the nature of the study to any school counselors agreeing to participate in the study. This letter was the informed consent the participants would need to sign to participate in this study (see Appendix C). The document included a description of the study, confidentiality, risks and benefits, and explained there would be no financial incentive offered for participation.

I then scheduled informational meetings, via telephone, with identified school counselors presenting my study and providing a copy of the informed consent describing the study. During this telephone conversation I verified the eligibility of the participants, who had to be professional school counselors using motivational interviewing techniques a portion of the time when they counsel students. I asked the participants for open times

they could meet on Zoom to answer several open-ended questions (see Appendix B).

Before the first individual interview, each participant returned the signed Consent Form to me via a scanned copy in email, fax, or regular mail.

Each of the participants received a summary of his or her interview that I had written and then I asked each participant to respond and indicate whether the participant believed my summary was accurate. I asked for anything additional he or she wanted to add to the transcribed interviews. The timeframe allowed for audio recordings to be transcribed and analyzed from participant interviews that were completed over the phone or on camera. I transcribed audiotapes verbatim and analyzed the data I collected according to steps outlined at the end of this chapter. I analyzed all the transcripts for additional needed questions to understand the phenomenon of school counselors using motivational interviewing in schools and decided I collected enough information during the initial interviews.

Data Analysis

Once the data had been collected I prepared a transcript of each participant interview in addition to commentary or analysis based on my observations (see Patton, 2015). While typing the transcription I evaluated the interviews for possible follow-up questions in case of any second interviews with the participants (see Miles et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1990). I reviewed the original participant interviews and decided the data collection was complete and additional interviews were not required (see Miles et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1990). My goal in personally typing the transcripts was to immerse myself in the collected data.

In starting the analysis, I used provisional coding for previously specific labeled codes based on expectations from the topic (see Miles et. al., 2014). Provisional coding is an advantage for a researcher who understands the topic but is searching for additional in-depth information (Miles et. al., 2014). In using provisional coding, I noted when participants covered specific topics related to motivational interviewing (see Miles et al., 2014). Some of the many topics for exploration were specific motivational interviewing techniques such as emphasis on person-centered counseling, exploring discrepancies, and asking permission for providing information. Additionally, the processing of decision-making during sessions with students using motivational interviewing was pre-coded. I also used analytic memos summarizing descriptions allowing for deeper meanings from the observations (see Miles et al., 2014). The memos detailed my relation to the topic, research questions, coding, emergent patterns, networking, issues with the study, personal ethical dilemmas, and continued ideas for the current and future studies (see Miles et al., 2014). Miles et al. (2014) noted the importance of revising codes as needed during the process and defining codes to understand specific meanings of each section. Analytic memos assisted to understand definitions for each code (see Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015).

In the second step in analyzing data, I looked for patterns in coding to find developing themes (see Miles et al., 2014). Patterns allowed me to condense information into larger units (see Miles et al., 2014). For example, I separated motivational interviewing techniques participants noted as positive and negative, and placed into similar coding units for better understanding of the effectiveness of various methods. In

discovering patterns, I analyzed the data during collection for better understanding of the results (see Miles et al., 2014). In this study, I looked for causes and explanations of the successes and failures of motivational interviewing participating school counselors discussed during the interview process (see Miles et al., 2014). Analytic memos or jottings led to narratives on the patterns established during the data collection and coding processes (see Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015).

Organizing the data into analytical thoughts was the third step in the process (see Miles et al., 2014). In preparing data for analysis I readied the data, drew conclusions from the collected data, and confirmed my conclusions with the participants (see Miles et al., 2014). I then went into the incubation phase of heuristic inquiry and stepped away from the data to create fresh viewpoints (see Moustakas, 1990). For example, an assertion in this study from collected data could be motivational interviewing works or does not work in middle and high schools. After a short break, I drew conclusions from the data and then asked participants to confirm my assumptions about the collected data (see Miles et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1990).

The final step was writing the narrative of the data analysis (see Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2015). I used summaries of interviews along with memos that assisted me greatly in the narrative process of the final product (see Maxwell, 2012). Finally, Patton (2015) suggested the researcher cut and paste quotes and information from specific themes to accurately report data analysis, which I did. The result is a detailed narrative that added to the verification of this study (see Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2015).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggested that the viewpoint of the researcher could bias the data. Since the researcher was deciding themes of the study coming from data collection, the researcher could try to persuade the reader to lean toward a specific result (see Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this situation, I have extensive knowledge of motivational interviewing; therefore, the information gathered had to go through a complete verification process. Creswell and Miller (2000) noted researchers should disclose their assumptions, biases, and beliefs, which certainly is important to do in a phenomenological heuristic study. Secondly, sending transcripts of interviews and analysis to the participants for their approval assists in guarding against researcher bias (see Creswell & Miller, 2000). I took several steps to avoid researcher biases that are detailed below.

Trustworthiness or verification in qualitative research is different than validity in quantitative studies (Rudestam, & Newton, 2015). Miles et al. (2014) described verification as the process of increasing the researchers' and readers' confidence in the results of the study. According to Miles et al. (2014), there are 13 possible tactics researchers use to show verification or internal validity. Among the tactics I used for this study included disclosing personal bias, checking for representativeness, soliciting feedback from participants, weighing the evidence, using rich, thick description, and disclosing negative or discrepant information (see Miles et. al, 2014; Patton, 2015). I did not use bracketing for trustworthiness for this dissertation, as a researcher does not want to put aside his or her personal beliefs when using heuristic inquiry (see Chan, Fung, &

Chien, 2013; Moustakas, 1990). However, I considered researcher bias, especially in a phenomenological heuristic study, in reviewing results (see Creswell & Miller, 2000; Miles et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2015). I used thick and rich description and extensive quotes from participants to avoid researcher bias (see Miles et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1990).

I have some personal bias related to motivational interviewing as I currently use this approach in both individual and group counseling as a professional school counselor. However, this bias is an asset when using heuristic inquiry as my personal experiences only adds to the study (Moustakas, 1990). Additionally, to teach motivational interviewing techniques to other school counselors, I had given presentations at several state and national conferences on the topic which proves my expertise in the topic. Patton (2015) noted the importance of avoiding preconceptions due to personal bias. Even though I used heuristic inquiry, I made every effort to keep an open mind during this study to understand the perceptions of professional school counselors using motivational interviewing, whether what they related to me about motivational interviewing was positive or negative (Moustakas, 1990).

In critically checking for representativeness, I used both positive and negative perceptions of school counselors using motivational interviewing (see Miles et al., 2014). In some cases, the school counselors might use motivational interviewing, but found particular techniques work better than others with students. The importance of looking for negative evidence, such as counselors believing some techniques do not work well with students, was important in showing trustworthiness of the study (see Miles et al.,

2014). I showed both positive and negative opinions of professional school counselors who used motivational interviewing with their student clients to assist in establishing trustworthiness (see Miles et al., 2014). The results varied when I thoroughly reviewed the process of motivational interviewing in schools based on the nine participants interviewed (see Patton, 2015).

I did not bracket my own thoughts during this process, as Moustakas (1990) noted the importance of using personal experiences to assist in the research. However, Patton (2015) suggested bracketing passages from the participants in a phenomenological study to avoid any preconceptions I might have about school counselors using motivational interviewing with their students. In bracketing, I explored each interview for statements directly relating to motivational interviewing, interpreting their meanings and the participants' interpretations, looking for repetitive features of the technique, and defining motivational interviewing based on data from participant interviews (see Patton, 2015). I broke the content into groups sharing specific patterns (see Miles et al., 2014).

In getting feedback from participants, I sent transcripts of the original interviews to the school counselors to solicit additional comments (see Miles et al., 2014). In using feedback, I did not want to cause any undue hardship for the participants by suggesting original information was incorrect (see Miles et al., 2014). The participants who responded about the accuracy of the transcripts believed their words were transcribed correctly (see Miles et al., 2014).

In weighting the evidence, Patton (2015) noted allowing the interviewees to read their comments and the results of the study assists in the verification process. Different

participants have different viewpoints of the data but can acknowledge other information provided from other counselors as being legitimate evidence (Miles et al, 2014). Sharing my personal story, particularly in a phenomenological heuristic study, assisted the interviewees to speak freely on the topic of motivational interviewing techniques (see Miles et al., 2014). Miles et al. (2014) noted I should follow up on unexpected results with a second interview of participants to consider revision of anticipated information, which I did not believe necessary after data collection.

Creswell and Miller (2000) recommended I use detailed descriptions of the interviews to allow readers to understand the experiences of school counselors using motivational interviewing with students. The rich descriptions allow credibility as readers and stakeholders can experience the phenomenon (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I used the transcriptions and memos to portray the data collected in detail (see Miles et al., 2014).

Finally, some participants would disclose negative or discrepant information not supporting a specific theme I developed in the study. Patton (2015) cautioned that a negative comment does not necessarily undermine the study if explained by the researcher. To show trustworthiness, I gave the negative information and explained why participants' statements were unusual and reasons for developing themes despite this adverse input (see Patton 2015). The positive and negative comments from participants were both important portions of the analysis that showed I was not biased during the research process (see Patton, 2015).

Ethical Procedures

The participants in this study were professional school counselors who were free to choose whether or not to participate. There was no known harm associated with participating in this study. If participants experienced any emotional distress as a result of participating in this study, I planned to refer them a free national hotline for counseling provided by the U.S. government, but had no participants express distress (see Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2016). Participants completed an informed consent form and I protected their confidentiality. Files, audiotapes, and transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet in my home office or on my password secured laptop. I was the only one who had access to the transcripts. I removed identifying information from transcripts prior to data validation. See Appendix C for copies of the Informed Consent Form and see Appendix D for Consent to Audio Record Form.

I did not start collecting data for this study until approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. The IRB ensured I followed all ethical procedures when collecting data and completing the study.

Summary

The research method section begins with an introduction to the research problem and the reasons a heuristic phenomenological qualitative study was the most suitable approach for this project. I discussed ethical implications, my role, and bias as a researcher. The methodology section detailed the data collection and analysis process including the interview protocol. Checking for representativeness, bracketing, feedback

from participants, weighing the evidence, using rich, thick description, and disclosing negative or discrepant information describe methods of ensuring the trustworthiness of the research study.

Chapter 4: Results

In this heuristic qualitative study, I sought to describe the perceptions of middle and high school professional school counselors who have used motivational interviewing techniques when counseling their student clients. In this chapter, I describe the dissertation process from restatement of the research question through confirmability. Additionally, I discuss the various themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Throughout this chapter, I detail variances in the sample size, data collection process, and transcription process from those discussed in Chapter 3. In addition, I discuss data analysis and explain specific issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in the study. Finally, I discuss the study results by using the perceptions of the participants to explain the themes that I identified in the collected data.

The purpose of this heuristic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of middle and high school professional school counselors who have used motivational interviewing techniques when counseling their student clients. To answer the research question, I developed interview questions around the following themes: To explore this phenomenon, the question allowed me to discover the themes listed below:

1. Training opportunities for school counselors
2. Definition of motivational interviewing in schools,
3. Explanation of specific techniques
4. Combination of motivational interviewing with other theories

Setting

I conducted each of the Zoom video link interviews with the participants at their school or home office based on their choice of venue. I was also either in my school or home office during the interviews based on the requested times of the participants and my schedule. Prior to each interview, the participant and I discussed confidentiality, the voluntary nature of the study, the participant's right to discontinue at any time without explanation, and that the interview would be audio recorded. I reminded the counselors of the informed consent they had sent to me before the interviews commenced.

I was not made aware of any personal or organizational conditions that might have influenced any participant or their interview experience. At the end of one interview, a counselor had to stop to speak to a student waiting at the door but returned quickly to finish the questions. Therefore, this encounter did not influence the participant, the data provided, or my interpretation of the data.

Demographics

Participants provided their gender, years of experience as a professional school counselor, location, and work setting including the school's level and classification as rural, suburban, or urban. All participants were professional school counselors who were certified and working in the United States. This information was collected at the beginning of the interviews. I recorded the interviews in their entirety and included participant verbal consent to record their interviews. Prior to the interviews, I emailed all participants the informed consent form, which each returned with their consent to participate in the study.

Participant Biological Sketches

Throughout the study, I assigned pseudonyms to the participants to ensure their confidentiality. Mary was a female first-year school counselor at a rural high school in the Southwest. Jane was a female school counselor with more than 10 years of experience who works at a combination rural middle and high school in the Southeast. Beth was a female school counselor with 6 to 10 years of experience who works at an urban high school in the Midwest. Laura was a female school counselor with four years of experience who works at a suburban middle school in the Northwest. Meredith was a female school counselor with more than 10 years of experience who works at a rural high school in the Midwest. Thomas was a male school counselor with 5 years of experience who works at a suburban high school in the Southeast. William was a male school counselor with 3 years of experience who works at suburban high school in the Northwest. Sonya was a female school counselor with 3 years of experience who works at a rural high school in the Northeast. Darlene was a female school counselor with more than 10 years of experience who works at a combination rural middle and high school in the Midwest.

Data Collection

Participant Recruitment

I used criterion sampling to identify professional school counselors for this study (see Patton, 2015). My initial contact was through the ASCA Scene discussion board pages for high school and middle school professional school counselors. My initial correspondence with participants occurred through these discussion boards by explaining

the purpose of the study along with the criteria of being a current professional school counselor using motivational interviewing techniques with student clients. I also made potential participants aware of the IRB guidelines through an email I sent once I had obtained their email addresses. As noted in Chapter 3, I accepted potential participants only from those who replied to the invitations on the ASCA Scene and chose to take the initiative to contact me directly.

Sample Size

The initial sample size included 10 potential study participants. One of the initial participants recruited was a social worker and not a professional school counselor, and therefore was ineligible for the research study. I began phenomenological interviews with the goal of reaching data saturation (Miles et al., 2014). During the interview process, it was evident that data saturation has been reached when participant interviews repeated data from previous interviews and no new information emerged (see Miles et al., 2014).

Location, Frequency, and Duration

I used the Zoom video conferencing application to conduct and record only the audio of the interviews. I was in a secure location for all interviews; either recording from my private school office or private home office. The participants were either in their school offices or home environments during the interviews. During the recruitment process, I informed participants that the interviews would last 60 minutes with the possibility of a follow up phone call if additional information or more detail was needed. I stayed within those parameters.

Transcriptions

I transcribed the nine interviews within 2 weeks of each individual interview so that I could recall the details of interviews while they were fresh in my mind. I printed each transcript for analysis, verifying the accuracy of the transcripts by listening to each recording to ensure the transcriptions matched each recorded interview. In keeping with heuristic method, once the interviews were transcribed I stepped away from the project for a week to regain an open-minded perspective on the collected data (Brisola & Cury, 2016; Moustakas, 1990). Once I returned to the transcripts, I coded the data into themes using NVivo.

Variations in Data Collection

There were two variations on data collection from what I originally planned. Instead of setting up interview times via a phone call, I set up the interview times through email after participants gave informed consent. Second, while all interviews were conducted through Zoom, two of the interviews were conducted with the participant speaking on the phone and not on camera. This was necessary because two participants did not have access to a camera at their places of employment where they wished to do the interviews. I did confirm that the participants who interviewed on the phone were in a private office where they would not be interrupted during the interview. I determined that these variations were minor and did not corrupt the data collection or the research process.

Data Analysis

Once I collected and transcribed the data, I immersed myself in several readings of the transcripts. Additionally, I read the transcripts while playing the recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. The next step in the process was organizing the data for analysis using NVivo software. First, I organized the transcribed data by the 13 questions that were asked of the participants during the interviews. I then looked for similarities and differences in the statements of the interviewed professional school counselors (Miles et al., 2014). Through this process, I identified eight specific themes, which were organized into 32 subtheme statements based on similarities or differences in the participants' responses. I then reorganized the themes into groups. An example of this process began when I asked participants about the way they perceived the impact on motivational interviewing training on their counseling program. The theme that developed was the importance of training before using motivational interviewing techniques with students. However, after further analyzing the responses, I found that there were two specific subthemes developing regarding training of professional school counselors in motivational interviewing. Therefore, the specific subthemes of graduate school training and post-graduate school training for motivational interviewing emerged under the theme of training. This process continued until all themes were organized into specific subthemes to better understand the lived experiences of professional school counselors using motivational interviewing with their student clients.

I organized the data into eight codes: academic uses of motivational interviewing, school's counseling program, group versus individual uses of motivational interviewing,

high school and middle school, non-academic uses of motivational interviewing, motivational interviewing techniques, motivational interviewing in conjunction with other theories, and training. The eight codes were condensed into the following four themes: defining motivational interviewing in schools, explaining specific techniques, combining motivational interviewing with other theories and training opportunities for school counselors.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In a qualitative study, the data must be collected to accurately reflect the perceptions of participants to ensure the study's credibility (Miles et al., 2014). I used five activities to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. As stated in Chapter 3, I sent transcripts of their interviews to participants, reported positive and negative aspects of using motivational interviewing, bracketed, and used rich detailed descriptions of the interviews to help stakeholders get a better sense of professional school counselors' experiences when using motivational interviewing with their student clients. Additionally, I used triangulation to compare literature review results in Chapter 2 with the interview data.

I sent a transcript of their interview to the participating professional school counselors to ensure the transcript accurately represented their thoughts (see Creswell & Miller, 2000). I requested additional feedback regarding new ideas and any changes the participants believed did not convey their correct ideas in the original transcript (see Creswell & Miller, 2000). Miles et al. (2014) noted the importance of the researcher

being open to positive and negative feedback from participants. I received responses from five of the participants stating the transcripts accurately stated their ideas about motivational interviewing.

Miles et al. (2014) noted the importance of a researcher offering participants' positive and negative point of views to establish credibility. For example, during the research several counselors described the positives and negatives of using motivational interviewing with student in group or individual settings. I used these positive and negative perceptions to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

I read through each interview several times, focusing on bracketing statements that directly related to motivational interviewing, verifying the participants' perceptions, looking for repetition, and identifying their personal definition of motivational interviewing with student clients (see Patton, 2015). I asked follow-up questions during the initial interviews to confirm the exact meaning of participants' statements (see Patton, 2015). For example, there were several comments regarding motivational interviewing training in masters programs and post-graduate conferences that led me to confirm, during interviews, the setting in which each participant was trained in the techniques.

Patton (2015) noted triangulation with previous studies is another form of credibility. Several of the articles in the literature review had similar results to the information gathered during the interviews for this study. For example, Rollnick et al. (2016) noted students are more successful when teachers and mental health counselors support students' resistance to change versus trying to force a change in behavior. Likewise, William said of a resistant student,

I've talked to a student about their drug addiction or failing classes or whatever and we'll have a good conversation about it. But they don't change for a while and that's Okay. I tell them that up front. I care about you the same no matter what you do, no matter what you decide.

Transferability

Creswell and Miller (2000) and Miles et al. (2014) recommended using rich detailed descriptions allowing stakeholders to transfer the experience of motivational interviewing professional school counselors working with student clients. The more detailed the descriptions the more accurate the participants' thoughts are being conveyed to stakeholders. I used verbatim responses from participants in addition to memos written at the conclusion of the interviews to create the rich descriptions needed in qualitative research (see Creswell & Miller, 2000; Miles et al., 2014). In some instances, I reviewed audiotapes to better report the participants' attitudes during the interviews.

Dependability

Shenton (2004) noted dependability could be measured by the ability to accurately replicate the procedures of the study to obtain similar results. To ensure this I completely explain the procedures used in data collection in detail (see Shenton, 2004). The interview protocol used the same questions for all participants with follow up questions during the interviews used to clarify my understanding of statements (see Appendix B).

Confirmability

Creswell (2013) noted the importance of researchers' understanding and overcoming their bias towards their study. For example, when asking questions during the interview process I stayed neutral on the topic of motivational interviewing, while being reflective to ensure complete understanding of the participant responses. I asked followup questions only to clarify participants' statements to ensure their viewpoints were represented accurately. Additionally, interview transcripts were sent to each participant for their approval to ensure an accurate representation of their statements (see Creswell & Miller, 2000). Participants were offered the option to make changes or additions to the transcripts to clarify their views on motivational interviewing (see Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Study Results

The four themes determined from the data are defining motivational interviewing in schools, explaining specific techniques, combining motivational interviewing with other theories and training opportunities for school counselors. The themes informed stakeholders of the lived experiences of middle and high school professional school counselors who have used motivational interviewing techniques when counseling their student clients. The following is an explanation of the connection the themes have in answering the research question.

Training

In this section the participants spoke about their initial and additional training opportunities learning motivational interviewing. The initial training generally took place

during the participants' graduate programs. There were several additional training opportunities discussed by the professional school counselors.

Initial training. Mary reported learning about motivational interviewing by watching a professor demonstrating the strategies in a role-play with another professor peaked her interest in the technique. Discussing this experience, she said,

I really saw the value of how it could be used in the school counseling role. I wouldn't say we learned about it in depth, but we definitely did a couple units in one of my classes. I'm not sure which one it was, but just based on the techniques themselves. I'm always really drawn to person-centered counseling techniques anyway. It really fits with what I do and the kind of counseling techniques I use, so I found it to be really beneficial.

Jane did not learn about motivational interviewing in her masters program, but at a conference for licensed professional counselors (LPCs). The session on motivational interviewing was on creating change talk with clients of private counselors. The professional school counselor was disappointed that school counseling graduate programs are not teaching more classes on relevant techniques, like motivational interviewing, that are effective research-based strategies with student clients. Learning about motivational interviewing was helpful, she said,

I immediately thought about some of my kids back at school and how it could be used in that setting as well. Honestly, I don't feel like school counseling programs really equip you with actual tools that you can use to counsel your kids. That's what grabs my attention, is you can go back and try this out on somebody and you

can put it to use today. It's not where it's a series that you have to kind of research more and figure out how you're going to use it and when you're going to use it, so it was almost like a ready-made. Here you go. Now go use it, kind of thing. I think that's huge for school counselors because you're not really given that a lot in your master's program.

Thomas voiced a similar disappointment that he did not learn about motivational interviewing during his graduate program. He wished he had received more information on motivational interviewing, he said,

Well, if we consider training reading about it and seeing hypothetical or real situations in which it was applied with other similar populations, I guess you could call that training.

William was doing research during a doctoral program and discovered motivational interviewing. He enthusiastically noted how excited he was to find a research-based strategy that could be effective with his high school students. He now uses motivational interviewing in his practice, he said,

I was drawn to MI for the same reason most people are because just the first word of it *motivation*. Students need to be motivated. So that was the initial thing that drew me to it and then as I looked into it I mean it didn't take long to go, "this is tailor-made for school counseling because it works quickly and is client-centered." I believe is a goal of most counselors to be student-centered, and certainly it is from my personal theory and practice. So it just fit perfectly for me.

Darlene noted that she learned of motivational interviewing during substance abuse classes – not school counseling classes. The substance abuse training opened her eyes to motivational interviewing with students, she said,

We talked about motivational interviewing a lot with someone who might be dealing with addiction and who doesn't want to quit. We just kind of guide them to the point where they see the benefits of quitting, as opposed to the cons of staying in addiction.

Additional training. The nine participants all believed more training is needed for school counselors to be effective in using motivational interviewing. The additional training the school counselors participated in ranged from extensive workshops to reading books to watching YouTube videos. The majority of participants hoped for more training opportunities in the future.

William noted he had adequate training in motivational interviewing after reading several books on the topic. This professional school counselor decided to find additional training after reading a study by Miller and Mount (2001) that stated a one-time workshop on motivational interviewing is insufficient to learn all the necessary aspects of the strategy. The books on motivational interviewing were not enough, he said,

The article said the best way to be trained is to have an introductory workshop, advanced workshop, and individual coaching. I went to the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers website, and I found trainers in this area who did all three of those levels and I paid my own money and got trained. So, that was two days of introductory training, and a couple of month later another two

days of advanced training, and then over the next four months I did three sessions where I recorded sessions and sent them to coaches and they gave me individual feedback over the phone.

During the feedback the coaches used the Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity scale to pinpoint areas needing improvement. William stated that the coaching portion from the recorded video sessions was extremely effective in helping him improve his motivational interviewing techniques due to the integrity scale. He was adamant that more research must be done about the effectiveness of professional school counselors using motivational interviewing, he said,

Beth also received extensive school-wide training at her charter school.

Two years ago our charter hired a consultant from Northeastern who is an expert in MI and he did trainings for all the academic advisors, counselors, mentors, and principals across the charter. It was three nights after school so I went to that. And it was kind of more like a refresher, because I had learned a lot about it in grad school.

Other participants stated formal training would be a tremendous opportunity to improve their motivational interviewing techniques and strategies. Several noted they read books and used YouTube to learn the intricacies of motivational interviewing. Several participants suggested practicing motivational interviewing techniques is important to becoming more adapt at using the strategies. Mary agreed with the importance of training, she said,

I wish there were just workshops that you could just go to where you just practice together, you know? I know people hate role-playing, but that's how I learn is through role-play. And I think the more role-play that we're able to do, the better it would be for counselors to be able to go, "Oh yeah, this is so awesome.

[Motivational interviewing] really works. I can see where this is going to really help me when I'm talking to so and so; especially in the middle and high school level."

Defining Uses of Motivational Interviewing in Schools

The participating professional school counselors noted motivational interviewing could be used for academic and non-academic issues in schools. Academic reasons cited included grades, and careers. Non-academic issues suggested included substance abuse, cutting, behavioral problems, and truancy.

Academic issues. The nine participants all used motivational interviewing to assist students to connect grade issues to their potential career goals. Mary tried to connect students' future goals, such as athletics, with the importance of improving their current grades. Future goals could be used as a foundation for motivating students, she said,

I think [motivational interviewing] depends on working with that student to help them understand how their grades are going to affect their future. Again, like with the student with her it's super easy because her main goal is to play sports.

Without sports, she has no motivation. She knew without getting those grades up,

she wasn't going to play sports. She was able to clearly see the connection between her grades and what her ultimate goal was.

Jane noted using the motivational interviewing technique of rolling with resistance with academic or behavioral issues surprises her students. Many times the students will dispute not caring about their grades with an explanation. In some cases the students admit they do not care, she said,

I'll just say to them, "It sounds to me like you're just not ready to change. It sounds to me like you're fine with your grades the way they are," or "It sounds to me like you're okay getting sent to the office three days a week," or that kind of thing. I just kind of push back on whatever behavior it is instead of saying to them, "We've got to do something about this behavior," and "You've got to get these grades up or you're not going to the high school," and different things like that. I'll just pointblank look at them and say, "Gosh, it just sounds to me like you're just really okay with this, like you're kind of okay with what's going on." I think that shocks a lot of them, and then they will start to verbalize, "Well, no. No, because..." and they'll kind of lay out the reasons. Then we go from there. Then, of course, some of them shrug their shoulders and say, "Yeah, you're right. I don't care," kind of thing. I use that a lot. Just kind of calling them out where they are.

Sonya used motivational interviewing to have students list the positives and negatives of changing their grades. For example, she used questions about their beliefs in the importance of graduating high school. The professional school counselor noted the

students coming up with their own positives and negatives list towards passing classes is a powerful tool, as they could explore graduation and their future careers, she said,

Some students are not doing well in a class and they just want to give up. I try to show them why they shouldn't give up and help them find like the inner motivation to not give up, and show a kind of cost benefit analysis showing them both the pros and cons of sticking with it, as opposed to the cons of not graduating or retaking the class or being behind in credits.

Mary noted she did not use motivational interviewing with special education students unless they are high functioning due to their being able to comprehend the change talk that works with motivational interviewing. This is also the reason motivational interviewing doesn't work with younger children, who use concrete thinking skills, she said,

They really have to be able to physically understand or mentally understand what their options are and what the differences are. I feel with some of those students, they have a hard time grasping the causes and effects of their situations. With some of them sometimes it's more of "Let's just get through today."

Laura used motivational interviewing as the foundation to set students' goals and complete some type of action plan towards meeting the new personal expectations. The action plan is one way to motivate students toward making changes they believe will work to better their academic grades, she said,

I'm trying to help tie the end goal of getting them to do their work and participate in class, and stay in class with the goals they want to see for themselves and their

future. I think a lot of times they haven't really been in the space to think about what they want because there are always adults telling them what they should want. Then to be able to wrap it back around to okay, "So what are we going do about that?" And help them kind of figure out the first steps of what that might look like, not really making a plan but like helping them vocalize what might kind of start need to happen.

Non-academic issues. There were mixed opinions on using motivational interviewing with students identified as substance abusers. Miller and Rollnick (2004) designed motivational interviewing to combat substance abuse, yet when working with student clients there is a concern about using some of the techniques.

Mary did not believe motivational interviewing was appropriate to use with student substance abusers. The professional school counselor was personally concerned with whether motivational interviewing worked with young substance abusers and did not want to take any chances with her students' lives, she said,

I think I probably have used [motivational interviewing] less when it comes to substance abuse, which is ironic because I know that's kind of what it was developed for. I feel when it comes to a student, that's something where I'm a lot more inclined to make sure that I get the right people involved. That's not something that I like to roll with the resistance just because I feel like that's something that could turn dangerous really, really quickly. When we're working with students, I want to make sure that I'm getting them the support that they need in that instance.

William only spoke to student when they returned from a substance abuse suspension. He then emphasized he was not speaking to them as a disciplinarian, but only to help them with their addiction if they decided they want assistance, he said,

I say, “it’s okay if you don’t want to quit. I know it will be easy for you to just lie to me and just say I want to quit. But if you don’t want to quit just say you don’t want to quit. But what do you want? Just between you, and me, and the room, what do you want?” And let them think through that. So much of the system, both in the schools, and just our communities, and whatnot is to enforce what we want teenagers to do. There is a good reason for that because they would burn down the world if we didn’t. But it doesn’t change them very effectively. We think it will. Oh, let’s suspend them for even longer, or let’s yell at them, or whatever we think works, but it doesn’t work. So, after all the discipline happens that probably isn’t going to work, I jump in then and say, “Okay what do you want.” And I use MI just like I would for grades or anything else to help them decide for themselves how they want to change.

The participants had divergent views on the effectiveness of motivational interviewing in improving student behaviors. Participants’ felt motivational interviewing did not improve repeated behavior issues, particularly dealing with some type of trauma. However, they noted motivational interviewing could be effective with normal every day behavioral issues of students. Motivational interviewing works with students in middle school, Laura said,

At the junior high level, we have a pretty tough crowd. A small percentage of our kids get in trouble, but it's the same kids over and over and over. I feel like there's always something more going on that they may not disclose to you, kind of like the kid going through the bad home divorce situation, and so I feel like if it's minor things like "I'm acting out because I'm the class clown and I want the attention of my friends." I feel like [motivational interviewing] can help in those situations. I feel like if it's years and years and years of reactive behavior to trauma or some of those outside factors that the kid can't control, I feel like it's less likely to help in those situations.

William believes change talk strategies in motivational interviewing assists students in changing from negative to positive behavior in his high school, he said, Most students who are having behavioral issues don't want to. It's not like their dying to be in trouble all the time. They have gotten into a pattern where that's who they are, or that's their identity, or whatever. Maybe, sometimes they don't even know. "Oops, every day I'm in trouble. What's going on?" So, if you can get them to engage their brain actively, think about why that's a problem, why they wish it were different, they will usually make a change. Sometimes it's pretty deep-seated stuff beyond the scope of 10 minutes in my session. If the kid is coming from foster care or something like that and they had PTSD and some deeper issues than 10 to 15 minutes of MI is not going to change that but for most students that is not really the issue. So I think just thinking through why they want to change things is enough to get them to actually change.

Participants suggested the person-centered counseling portion of motivational interviewing could assist with attendance issues. Jane believed students want to come to school for social and safety reasons. She noted that if students are not attending school on a regular basis, they want to explain their situation to the counselor. Person-centered counseling allows that the comfort to freely express their thoughts, Jane said,

So if we're speaking specifically about attendance, it's more like how are things working out for you? What are some issues that you're having on getting to school? The questions are just a little more open-ended so that the student feels that they can tell their story. And it's not automatically going to be fixed.

Motivational Interviewing Techniques

Reflecting, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Person-centered counseling is the foundation for motivational interviewing (Channon et al., 2013; Juhnke et al., 2013; Strait et al., 2012). Reflection, paraphrasing, and summarizing are key ingredients of Carl Rogers' theory (Channon et al., 2013; Juhnke et al., 2013; Strait et al., 2012). Mary stated the use of person-centered counseling simply when she stated, "I just listen. I reflected and let them tell their story and show that I care about them"

Beth actively used person-centered counseling as the top motivational interviewing technique with students, she said,

We do a lot of affirmations OARS. So the questions are open-ended.

Affirmations, that's the positive strength-based stuff. And I'm always doing active reflections, maybe re-stating, not really re-interpreting, but re-stating. And then if

a student is kind of rambling, you have to pull them back in and just kind of say, “Okay, this is what we said.” And break that down or maybe summarize it.

Darlene believed using open-ended questioning assisted the student in working towards change talk, she said,

The notion of using questions as a tool, just so that I am constantly trying to understand, puts me in a position of always being able to help the other person by honoring their ability to do their own thinking. I use lots of open-ended questions, pausing, reflecting and paraphrasing.

Beth added using this motivational interviewing technique allowed students to feel wanted by the counselor verses being helpless, she said,

I do get to know the students better every time I use it. So it's a very well organized way to do counseling. If you keep those processes in place, always remember to be compassionate. Always remember to listen and just state back what the student said, because most of our students get angry because they feel like they're not being heard. And if you are just doing those basic principles, the students see that you always have time for them, even when you don't. When I'm using open-ended questions, I'm at least getting to the heart of the matter quicker. I'm not interviewing a kid. I'm talking with them. I feel like it just helps give the students an idea that their a partner with me versus I'm just kind of shuffling them around and telling them what to do.

William noted using the person-centered process of empathy in all dealings with students. Person-centered theory is the foundation of motivational interviewing, he said,

I'm doing primarily complex reflecting. I love reflecting. Motivational interviewing says you should have a 2:1 ratio reflecting the open-ended questions. I try to make it higher than that. I don't really like asking questions unless I absolutely have to. I use a ton of complex reflecting and a ton of summarizing so students are hearing from me what they are saying. So they get a sense, or opportunity to consider what they actually think. Most people think after they speak so sometimes the students say something they didn't really mean that. I use that a ton.

One professional school counselor added that he used reflection to create change talk using motivational interviewing. Additionally, Thomas believed summarizing allows students to explain needed changes in their lives, he said,

I reflect as deeply as I can use as complex a reflection as I can. I use scaling questions a ton. How important is this change to you? How confident are you to make this change? I use that one a lot. I think summarizing is something that is considered more of an advanced maneuver and in motivational interviewing I use that a ton. I like summarizing a lot because inevitably students will go, well I kind of meant this and that and they sort of change their story, which is good.

William was the only professional school counselor who used motivational interviewing techniques during parent and student conferences. The conferences with motivational interviewing were mostly successful, he said,

Another thing that I enjoy doing is getting parents involved if students are Okay with it. The parent comes in and doesn't know what I'm doing, but I'm playing off

of the parent and the student doing change talk with both of them. So the parent will say here's what I want to see and I'll rephrase it and reflect it, but instead of reflecting it back to the parent I reflect it to the students and then see how they respond. And they might say well yeah that makes sense but and they will give some sustain talk or something and I'll minimize that and then say, well you know mom was saying this or that and sort of re-reflect what mom was saying and then have the kid think about it again. Or sometimes it the other way around, the kid would like something to change at home and so I'll help the student and sort of be the middle person and I'll be reflecting what the student is saying at the parent and see how they respond to that. I had really good things happen in that regard because ultimately parents have a lot more influence than we have. But I think kids and parents miss each other when they are talking about things even if they want the same outcome. They're in the cycle of fighting and bickering so if I can be the middleperson and using in my techniques to make them both feel like Okay we're going in the right direction, I've seen really great things happen.

Change talk. According to Meredith, the change talk tenet of motivational interviewing could be assisted based on the words the professional school counselor uses with the student. Change talk can empower the student, she said,

Putting it back onto the students' plates. Making them understand that it's their future and that it's up to them to decide what they want. The nice thing about working with high school students is you can empower high school students.

William used two specific activities to assist students to create change talk. The first activity was called the Two Roads Scenario, he said,

I have a whiteboard in my office. I draw that out with the students, here's where you are, where are you thinking of going in the future and how are you going to get there. What's that road called to you? What are your next steps? I'll ask students what are the top three or five reasons that you are thinking about doing this and I have them write it up on the board. And I'll say put those in order from most important to the least important. I'll have them do that as a way to get them to tangibly interact with this idea of change they are considering. I work with high school students for 15 or 20 minutes and then say OK I'll see you in a week or a couple of weeks and then do another 15 or 20 minutes and use different techniques to help them think through and then rethink through and then rethink through the changes they are wanting to do.

William noted how he had artistic student draw their goals on the whiteboard instead of writing their goals in sentence, he said,

I have more artistic students draw on my whiteboard, so what would that look like. They will actually draw here is me, here is me doing this change, here is what it would look like if it were real life and they'll draw it out. Or maybe they will do some sort of mind mapping or something like that. Where it's not just writing words, but it's actually doing something visual that connects to them. I have like 10 different colors of white board markers, so I can just say here they

are, draw it and it doesn't matter what that looks like. Go for it. And we just see what comes out of his brain. It's pretty beautiful stuff a lot of times.

Overall, William wanted to empower the student. He believed a student writing down their goals was preferable to oral presentation, as the written word is powerful, he said,

I have them write down the reasons they would want to change and what would it take to do it. But I do think for most students it's very important to have that tactile moment where they're not just saying things, but they're actually writing it down and looking at it. So instead of us looking at each other face-to-face, we both turn and we are looking at my whiteboard and they're looking at their own thoughts in their own mind basically. And I'm just a bystander. And that's what I want, I want to sort of disappear and let them think about what's important to them.

William added motivational interviewing created change talk helping students focus on their ultimate goals. School counselors are there to assist high school students by giving them options for potential careers, he said,

One of my favorite stories is a student of mine who thought like their future was determined already. I'm going to work for my uncle because that's all I know that I can do. My uncle is some sort of contractor and so that's what I'm going to do. Then he sat in a guidance lesson where we talked about community college and he came to me later and said "That was interesting what you were saying about the community college but I'm going to work for my uncle anyway." I said. "Oh,

something about that was interesting.” So I focused on the change talk, so I got him to talk about this and that and what you said about doing that program where I’d make more money and that would be cool. Why would that be cool? Well, because I want to have a big family, so I know I need to make a lot of money. Okay, so you're seeing that making more money would open doors to you and things that are really important to you. Yeah. And community college is something that could make that happen? Yeah. So that kid went onto go to community college. But previous to using MI he would never have even considered it. It was just something that wasn't even an option, wasn't on the table. So I've seen MI work a ton.

Darlene told a story about a student who wanted to be an NBA basketball player but did not make the middle school team. She used self-determination theory to focus on the student’s NBA dream, while working on an academic action plan. Her open-ended questions are designed to create positive change talk to focus the student on his or her goals. The professional school counselor told the student the league requirement to go to college one year before getting into the NBA, which the student was unaware of at that point, she said,

If you were really serious about it, what would it look like? What would you notice you'd be doing? What are some ways you might be able to achieve that? See how it goes no matter what the situation is? What are some things you might have to learn how to do in order to be able to join the NBA or to be eligible to join the NBA?

Both Jane and William noted they ensure students that if they do not want to change they do not have to change. Students sometimes decided to change after they remarked they did not want to change, Thomas said,

What I like to use, and again, I think it surprises kids sometimes, is I'll just say to them, "It sounds to me like you're just not ready to change. It sounds to me like you're fine with your grades the way they are", or "It sounds to me like you're okay getting sent to the office three days a week," or that kind of thing. I just kind of push back on whatever behavior it is instead of saying to them, "We've got to do something about this behavior," and "You've got to get these grades up or you're not going to the high school," and different things like that. I'll just pointblank look at them and say, "Gosh, it just sounds to me like you're just really okay with this, like you're kind of okay with what's going on." I think that shocks a lot of them, and then they will start to verbalize, "Well, no. No, because..." and they'll kind of lay out the reasons. Then, of course, some of them shrug their shoulders and say, "Yeah, you're right. I don't care," kind of thing. I use that a lot, just kind of calling them out where they are.

Goal setting and action plans. The professional school counselors combined the students' goals with setting action plans. Beth aligned the two concepts during her sessions with the student clients, she said,

We try to do some goal setting, but it just seems we need to create some sort of plan. So my students respond really well to plans. But I always ask them to create that plan. And I just kind of guide them toward it.

Thomas noted the goals discussed are both long- and short-term goals. The goals are not only academic, but also personal/social and career goals, he said,

We usually start talking a lot about the goals that they have for themselves. Not just the school, for life, what kind of person do you want to be, what kind of job you might want to have, what kind of things might that need to fulfill in your life. Knowing those goals we talk about how are things going right now with are you meeting those goals? Is that where you're at? Usually it's like, no. Then we talk about why is it like that or not like that? How can you get back there? Helping them see that those things don't fit together and that they do have the power to change it.

Thomas remarked that human are goal-orientated creatures at heart. He noted motivational interviewing works because change talk created new goals for student clients, he said,

There's no such thing as a living human that doesn't have some sort of goal. And so we'll start from that generality and we'll talk about specific goals that people have, maybe that the students have observed. And then, talk about some of their goals. Then we would differentiate between short-term and long-term goals and some goals that are intermediate. They are going towards a long-term goal but aren't necessarily goals in and of themselves, but are a specific landmark that they could say is accomplished as they pursue a larger goal. So, differentiating between the long-term and short-term goals is important. And then we'll look at, maybe, some short-term goals that had been accomplished, and even longer-term

goals. We will definitely sketch out a short-term, intermediate and long-term goal, as it relates to each student's priorities.

William noted students are told what to do by adults most of the time. He worked to assist the students in deciding what are their personal goals. He believed if students set their own goals, they are much more likely to follow through and complete the goals, he said..

I had a district mandate to meet with ninth graders who are in Algebra I, who failed the state assessment in eighth grade. So we're trying to keep them from failing again in ninth grade. What I'm supposed to do is say, "You need to do better. Work harder in math." That's what the district has told us to do. I don't do that. So, I called her in and say, "How is it going?" So I try and build a relationship for a little while and then say, "So tell me about math." And they say it sucks and it's really hard and some say it's fine, whatever they say. Then I'll ask them what would you say is your goal in math class this year. So I let them define it instead of threatening them. "What is your goal?" So I had this one kid say this week, "I want to do my homework every night when I have homework." I said that's fantastic, so why is that important to you? "Well, because last year I struggled because I got behind and wasn't sure what was going on, but I didn't do well on the test because I never practiced. I thought I knew everything because I'm sitting in class but I never did homework so I didn't do well. So I want to do homework every night." I said awesome see you later. Because he already knew what he wanted. Now that he's able to say it and off he goes and I saw him again

this week, that was last week, I saw him this week and I asked him how is it going. He said I've done my homework every day. I said high five. Awesome. Let me know if you need anything. Of course that is going to lead to him doing just fine in there.

Beth believed the action plans need to be short term covering the basics the student will do to complete their goal. Meredith collaborated with students to write out the steps in the action plan. Sonya suggested various scenarios in the action plan to prepare for possible obstacles. Empowerment worked with her students, Darlene said,

And so then I'll ask them, "What are some ways that you might be able to achieve that kind of success? How could you get there? What are some approaches that you might take to be able to get there?" And so then they might say things like, "Boy, I might have to learn how to not talk to my friends in the hall so long..."

You know, whatever, they'll come up with things and then I'll ask them, "So what are some things that you might have to learn how to do in order to make school the way you want it to be?" People think that they can just tell kids, "Hey you need to do this, you need to do that, hey you should do that and then things would be okay" and that just isn't how it goes.

Rolling with resistance. Mary had an athlete who was not allowed to play due to poor grades. She congratulated her when she raised her grades and was allowed to play basketball. When her grades dropped, instead of getting upset with the student, the professional school counselor told the client she was disappointed she couldn't play that night. She then added that if the student didn't want to do the work to pass classes the

counselor understood as that was the client's choice. The counselor pointed out the discrepancy between the student's wants and actual actions, she said,

Just letting her come to the realization, I think that that's what she needs, but it's about her and what she decides is important, not me and what I want and what's best for her. Just mainly rolling with them. I try really, really hard to never be judgmental.

William remarked the most important role of a professional school counselor is to build relationships with students using person-centered counseling. By acknowledging a student's right to not change the counselor allows the counseling relationship to stay positive, which could result in the student coming back to the counselor to change in the future. This non-judgmental approach strengthens the relationship between the counselor and the student, William said,

A staple of MI is building relationships and that's really important to me because in the end I can't make a kid change and I don't want to make a kid change, but I do want to have a good relationship with them, so that maybe in six months they decide they are ready to change and they'll come back to me and say, "now Okay I'm ready." And I've had that happen. Where I've talked to a student about their drug addiction or failing classes or whatever and we'll have a good conversation about it but they don't change for a while and that's Okay. I tell them that up front. I care about you the same no matter what you do, no matter what you decide and if you fail. Let's say you decide you want to get your grades up and you don't do it, there's no shame. There's no shame allowed in my office. So you

just come back here we'll talk about it again, because I care about you the same no matter what. And I found that that helps a ton. Maybe they don't change for six months or a year, but when they decided Okay I'm ready to change then they come back to me instead of running away from me because I'm one more adult on their back.

Sharing information and advice giving. The majority of participants noted they did not ask permission before sharing information with their students, which is a tenet of motivational interviewing. Mary stated she would get permission to share information as a last resort when a student was making a poor decision. Asking for permission allows the student to feel empowered, she said,

The only time I would say I've done that is if I have a student that's talking about dropping out, trying to share like, "Okay, well, let's talk about what your future goals are and what a better chance you have of meeting those goals if you have a high school diploma, if you have a college degree."

When it came to advice giving the counselors noted trying to collaborate a plan with the students, but not give advice. Sonya remarked that students would more likely follow through on an action plan they choose versus one that an adult was forcing them to complete. The decision to choose must come from the student, she said,

I like the fact that the client or student is more likely to kind of stick with whatever they've decided to do, as opposed to having someone else to tell them to do it. It's kind of harder for anybody to stick with something when they're just told to do something, and you don't really believe in it. And so having somebody

really believe in it, and believe why, and they really want to do something and then kind of sticking with it. I like that part as opposed to, like I said, someone telling you to do it, and then you're not really sticking with it, and then you're kind of like repeating that cycle.

Darlene noted the importance of not overwhelming the student with ideas or potential plans during a session. She sometimes appropriately shares her own experiences, but only after asking permission from the student. In this way, the students stay empowered to make their own decisions, she said,

I'll ask them if they mind if I share a little bit of a personal story. I'll ask for permission like that so that it doesn't appear as though I'm just overpowering them with my own agenda.

Beth suggested collaboration between the student and the counselor when using motivational interviewing is pertinent for the student to support his or her own decisions. Collaboration allowed the counselor to support the student's ideas, while directing the student toward a potentially successful action plan. The action plan is a necessity to changing, she said,

If I just rain down on them and just tell them what to do all of the time, it's not really going to work. They're not really going to want to keep talking. So I kind of try to look at them more like a partnership than just me in charge. And I think that helps the conversation get to a more compassionate place.

Motivational Interviewing in Conjunction with other Theories

Motivational interviewing is based on person-centered counseling (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Some participants noted motivational interviewing could also be used in conjunction with solution-focused brief therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and reality therapy. Several participants noted motivational interviewing is a brief flexible theory that works with various types of therapy.

Person-centered counseling theory. The majority of the participants noted their first theory they used with a student is Rogerian theory, as the person-centered technique assists in building a relationship with their client. Beth noted the unconditional regard of person-centered counseling allows for the counselor/client relationship to foster when using motivational interviewing. Person-centered counseling is the key for her in using motivational interviewing, she said,

I think that the acceptance piece is very important. So the kids are coming to you in all states of emotion. Sometimes it's just a meeting and everybody's fine and even healed. Sometimes it's not. But I think just accepting them in their state and accepting them without doing any automatic judgments is what is important. So if you already are doing that acceptance piece, I think you're already doing what a therapist would do.

Solution-focused brief therapy. Mary noted she is a solution-focused counselor and considers herself “a cheerleader” for the students. Jane noted she uses solution-focused and motivational interviewing theories because they are brief techniques that allow a school counselor to quickly assist students without keeping them out of class for

long periods of time. We cannot have students miss too much class time if it can be helped, Jane said,

Mainly I use a lot of solution focused brief therapy because we do not have a lot of time to spend with these kids. I don't really want to dig deep into why the problem is happening. What can we do is a move forward kind of thing, and so I really try to just steer them towards solutions and outcomes and what's going to happen if we do this, and what's going to happen if we do this, and just kind of give them the tools to make a right decision. I came across motivational interviewing probably about three years ago at my state conference, and I thought that it kind of worked well with solution focused counseling, and so I do incorporate some motivational interviewing into my techniques with kids.

Darlene used the solution-focused technique of scaling with her students, while using motivational interviewing. Scaling was used to assist the students in setting action plans to reach their goals, she said,

I say, “so, right now if you were to rate yourself where would you be? Would you be a zero, one, two, three, or four? A zero is I haven't attempted at all. A one is I'm beginning to be able to do this. Two is I'm developing. Three is I'm secure and I got it. And four is I'm beyond, I'm exceeding this, I'm now going to new levels.” So, they rate themselves at the beginning and then when we talk at different times they then tell me, where do you think you are now? If you were to score yourself now, where do you feel you are? What's telling you that you're a three now where before you were a one?

Cognitive behavior therapy. Beth stated she started off using cognitive behavioral theory, but gravitated towards motivational interviewing. She noted her counseling program uses CBT when appropriate because of supporting research, but now predominately uses motivational interviewing with students due to its brief timeframe and effectiveness at her school. I think I've been doing it in one way or another ever since I started in school counseling, Beth said,

Motivational interviewing kind of covers it all. When I had first started here at [my school], I definitely wanted to take a strength-based approach because I had so many students that were kicked out of school or dropped out, so their motivation was very low. But as I've been using MI more, it is a strength-based approach. So I would say MI's probably my number one counseling method.

Thomas used motivational interviewing in conjunction with rational emotive behavior therapy to assist students in recognizing and overcoming obstacles toward academic success. This was a good combination for his students, he said,

Well, if you're talking to students with the motivational interviewing approach, then, you're obviously going help them to identify obstacles to their goals, once you identify some goals. And then, there would be a reframing of those obstacles, maybe, to seem like they're opportunities for them to overcome, or not things that would ultimately thwart the goal, but just steps towards the goal. So, in my view, that reframing would be cognitive behavioral. But you see the motivational interviewing component as it relates to the students' personal success as they define their goals. That's how I see the things correlated.

Reality therapy. One out of the nine participants noted using reality therapy in conjunction with motivational interviewing. Sonya stated both reality theory and motivational interviewing empower students. The motivational interviewing component she used with students allowed them to set their own goals and action plan, she said,

They don't like being told what to do. They like coming to their own thought process of what to do, so I try to just kind of guide them and make it something that they want to do. If I say, "you need to do X, Y, and Z," then they kind of like tune me out.

Summary

In Chapter 4 I addressed the results of the qualitative heuristic phenomenological study on professional school counselors on the lived experiences using motivational interviewing with their student clients. Several themes emerged in reviewing the participants' interviews. The four themes that emerged were training issues with motivational interviewing, uses of motivational interviewing in schools, specific techniques used in motivational interviewing and using motivational interviewing in conjunction with other theories. The professional school counselors showed evidence of the success of motivational interviewing during their explanations of using specific techniques in schools. All of these stories were summarized as the participants' perceptions of using motivational interviewing with students.

The training theme addressed school counselors' concerns with the lack of training of motivational interviewing techniques in both graduate school and post-graduate levels. The perception of the professional school counselors was motivational

interviewing should be part of the school counseling masters degree program. The school counselors noted the length of time and high cost of post-graduate training on motivational interviewing is a deterrent for professionals, which leads to their suggestion of teaching the theory at the masters' level.

Another theme showed school counselors used motivational interviewing for both academic and non-academic issues. Motivational interviewing has varying degrees of success for academic, behavioral, and truancy issues. Interestingly, there was mixed reactions to using motivational interviewing for students with substance abuse issues even though the theory was designed for addiction counseling.

A third theme showed the various motivational interviewing techniques school counselors' use for each aspect of the theory. The counselors emphasized using open-ended questions along with reflection, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Counselors explained motivational interviewing techniques that promoted the tents of the theory including change talk, goal setting, action plans, rolling with resistance, and asking permission to give advice to the client.

Finally, the last theme was using motivational interviewing in conjunction with other theories. The theories discussed were person-centered, solution-focused, cognitive, and reality theories. The participants noted that motivational interviewing was a brief theory that worked well with other theories; especially person-centered.

As the themes emerged the lived experiences of professional school counselors using motivational interviewing became apparent. The discussions on themes generated from this chapter were the basis for chapter 5. Chapter 5 includes the analysis of the

findings from this study and a review of concepts presented in chapter 1. In addition, chapter 5 includes a discussion on the limitations of this study and recommendation for further research. The conclusion of chapter 5 suggested the possible impact on the education system and the school counseling profession this study posits.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative heuristic phenomenological research study, I focused on the lived experiences of middle and high school professional school counselors who had used motivational interviewing techniques when counseling their student clients. In addition to discovering professional school counselors' perceptions regarding motivational interviewing with their student clients, I used the qualitative interviews to investigate the best techniques the school counselors used to assist their student in improving their academics and behaviors toward school success.

Researchers have extensively documented that motivational interviewing works with adolescents, but school counselors do not generally use motivational interviewing with their student clients (Strait et al., 2012). The gap in the current research involved the perceptions of professional school counselors who used motivational interviewing with their student clients. Therefore, I conducted this qualitative study to understand the school counselors' perceptions of using motivational interviewing with their student clients and to discover some of the techniques they have used to benefit students. University school counseling programs understanding the perceptions of professional school counselors using motivational interviewing allows for the development of evidence-based future practices for school counselors.

I used a qualitative heuristic phenomenological methodology in my study. Nine professional school counselors in middle and high school were recruited using the specific criterion of professional school counselors in middle and high schools who used motivational interviewing with their students (Patton, 2015). Participants were

interviewed and shared stories of their experiences and perceptions using motivational interviewing with their student clients in response to structured qualitative questions. I collected the data, transcribed the interviews, and coded the themes according to the process for a qualitative heuristic phenomenological study developed by Moustakas (1990). After completing a thorough examination of the collected data, four primary themes emerged: defining motivational interviewing in schools, explaining specific techniques, combining motivational interviewing with other theories and training opportunities for school counselors. Each of the four themes is explained and discussed below.

Chapter 5 includes four distinct sections. In the first section, I compare and contrast my results with the current scholarly literature on counselors' use of motivational interviewing with adolescents and discuss the study findings in reference to key concepts outlined in Chapter 1. I then address the limitations of the study and offer recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications the results of this research study have on social change.

Interpretation of Findings

The results of this study confirmed several themes in the existing literature regarding the use of motivational interviewing with adolescents (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Miller & Rollnick, 2013; Rollnick et al., 2016; Strait et al., 2012). The four primary emerging themes were the results of 32 subthemes. The existing research supported the findings of the study as trustworthy and dependable.

The initial findings of the study showed that the professional school counselors participating in this study perceived motivational interviewing as effective when working with students who have academic issues (see Strait et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2013). All professional school counselor participants interviewed for this study shared their experiences of how motivational interviewing was an effective theory when working with students' academic issues. The results in this study were mixed regarding the effectiveness of using motivational interviewing for non-academic reasons such as substance abuse, behavioral issues, and truancy.

As a veteran professional school counselor who has used motivational interviewing when counseling students, my experience was similar to the counselors interviewed for the study. I used motivational interviewing as my primary theory when working with students in the academic or career domains, as this has shown to be the most effective way to empower students and allow them to set their future goals.

Jane mentioned that the *change talk* aspect of motivational interviewing allows students to examine the reasons they are failing and to make changes that could lead to eventual improvement. Motivational interviewing forces students to decide if they want to change or keep the status quo (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012; Westra & Aviram, 2013). However, if a student decides not to change, rolling with resistance allows the counselor to support the student while leaving the possibility of assisting the student with chosen changes in the future (Rollnick et al., 2016).

William must meet with every failing student. He said the students know why he is calling them to the office and reported that many times they come in with the attitude

that they are *bad people* because they are failing a class. Addressing the usefulness of motivational interviewing, he stated,

I can use MI to say, “Hey I care about you. I just want you to think through what you want.” So I’ll often use this question, “What if it wasn't up to me, wasn't up to your teacher, wasn't up to your parents? None of us were involved. It was just up to you. What would you want as a GPA? What would you want to make in this class? Or whatever the scenario is and giving students autonomy to actually make that decision for themselves. It is a new thought to them. Most of them are busy trying to fulfill adult expectations, or shirk them, duck under them, and sort of hide. So when I put it back on them and say, “What do you want?”, they give an answer and it’s almost always higher than what they have right now. Actually, I think every single time it was higher than what they had in the class right now, at least in the scenario where I’m calling them down. So then I can say, “Okay so you want a C and you have an F. What would it take to get to a C?” And they know, so they start rattling them off. “Okay. Why do you want a C instead of an F?” They say, “Oh, here are all the reasons.” Then we start doing the typical change talk MI stuff, and it has great effect because students aren’t focusing on what other people are trying to make them do. They’re thinking about what they want to do.

Two of the professional school counselors I interviewed noted that part of the problem with using motivational interviewing for behavioral issues is the requirement of several sessions, which could overwhelm a counselor with a high caseload. Additionally,

the ASCA Code of Ethics calls for counselors to “practice within their competence level and develop professional competence through training and supervision” (ASCA, 2016, A.7.h). In many cases, traditional mental health counselors can schedule multiple weekly sessions to better handle behavioral issues (e.g., cutting). Several participants suggested behavioral issues in schools could be from past trauma and abuse, which is also beyond the scope of a typical school counselor. Jane, noting that motivational interviewing is generally better suited for academic issues than behavioral issues in the school setting, remarked,

At the junior high level, we have a pretty tough crowd. A small percentage of our kids get in trouble, but it's the same kids over and over and over. I feel like there's always something more going on that they may not disclose to you . . . kind of like the kid going through the bad home divorce situation. And so I feel like if it's minor things like, “I'm acting out because I'm the class clown and I want the attention of my friends,” I feel like it [MI] can help in those situations. But I feel like if it's years and years and years of reactive behavior to trauma or some of those outside factors that the kid can't control, I feel like it's less likely to help in those situations.

A second theme I identified in the interview data was the specific techniques school counselors used in different phases of motivational interviewing. A common point was that professional school counselors used the person-centered techniques of showing empathy, reflecting, paraphrasing, and summarizing to build trusting relationships with student clients (see Channon et al., 2013; Juhnke et al., 2013; Strait et al., 2012). Juhnke

et al. (2013) stated that one of the major tenets of motivational interviewing is the use of person-centered counseling, which was confirmed by the participants. I have found in my practice that the ability to build a relationship with the client through person-centered counseling was crucial for the student client to consider change talk later in the session. In concordance, William discussed research showing that building a relationship with students was crucial in creating change talk to better their lives. He remarked,

I mean there is tons of research showing that it almost doesn't matter what theory you are using as long as you are building a good relationship with the kid. And I think MI has more techniques to do that than anything else because it takes all the client-centered stuff, which is awesome and makes it even better.

Eight of the participants spoke about moving from building a relationship with the student client to leading them towards change talk. Four participants stated using change talk techniques was a key to collaborating on an action plan for the student client. This confirmed Miller and Rollnick's (2012) findings that change talk allowed counselors to collaborate about solutions with their student clients.

Resnicow and McMaster (2012) noted change talk could identify discrepancies in students' goals versus their current actions. The professional school counselors in this study did not specifically use the term *discrepancy*, but used statements about changing student perceptions or being serious about changing. Thomas used discrepancies during change talk to showcase that the student client's actions were not aligned with his or her future career goals. He reported,

I would help the student see how his current failing of classes has an impact on his ultimate goals. And I would do that by, maybe, talking about what he wanted to do, you know, after school. What are some accomplishments that he or she wanted to achieve in life? And then, I would work my way backwards to how this specific challenge for this class does connect and correlate to that ultimate career goal or whatever else was mentioned.

In my school counseling practice, I tend to be more direct with students about their stated discrepancies during sessions. For example, if a student stated he wanted to be a journalist and was failing English, then I would suggest, as William did, that his actions did not correlate with his statements. I identify the discrepancy and ask the student directly if failing English helps him reach his goal of being a journalist who needs to write for his job. Eight participants noted that students agreed their current actions did not facilitate their future career goals, or even their goals of graduating from high school. After having the conversation about discrepancies with students, I started collaborating on a student-led action plan. However, based on the interview data, the counselors I interviewed rarely use direct discrepancies with student clients as a motivational interviewing technique. Instead, the school counselors I interviewed indirectly noted the differences between students' words and actions to develop change talk towards an action plan.

One example of indirectly noting discrepancies came from Darlene, who is subtle when she points out differences to students. Discussing her approach, she stated, "Right,

if you were really serious about it, what would it look like? What would you notice you'd be doing? What are some ways you might be able to achieve that?"

Rolling with resistance was a motivational interviewing technique that many of the participants noted as challenging when dealing with adolescents who were making poor academic and behavioral decisions that could negatively affect their futures. In my work with student clients, I have also found it difficult to allow a student to acknowledge he or she does not want to change, and then let the student leave the office without trying to create change talk. Darlene summed it up best by noting she does not believe school counselors can accept a student's unwillingness to change, noting,

If it doesn't work, we probably haven't really tried it, all the way. Like we haven't given that much effort to it. And that's a cop out. Maybe that's a resistance. I tried that, and that doesn't work. "What did it look like when you tried it? What do you mean? Help me understand what it looked like when you were trying it."

Probably, they really didn't try.

In this study, another motivational technique professional school counselors did not report following closely was asking permission before sharing information. Apodaca et al. (2016) suggested asking permission before sharing information with clients to empower them to make their own changes. I have found that simply asking for permission to show them test data, college information, or other material that could be pertinent to their thought process allows them to be more open-minded to the new information. I have never had a student client state he or she did not want me to share information. However, when in parent meetings, I just show the academic data when we

are placing students in specific career graduation pathways versus a regular high school diploma to explain the reasoning behind the recommendation without asking permission from the student client.

The third finding of the study was motivational interviewing could be used in conjunction with several other therapies. The main theory the participants noted motivational interviewing works in conjunction with is person-centered counseling. This confirms person-centered as the foundational theory Miller and Rollnick (2015) based motivational interviewing theory on in their work with substance abusers. Professional school counselors had differing opinions on which theories could be used in conjunction with motivational interviewing from solution-focused to cognitive behavioral to reality theories. The only consensus from the participants was that person-centered counseling is crucial for motivational interviewing to work with clients. Based on the responses of the counselors I interviewed, it seems motivational interviewing is being used in conjunction with several other research-based counseling theories.

The fourth finding of the study was the participants' disappointment at the lack of training on motivational interviewing during their graduate programs in school counseling. Not one of the nine professional school counselors had received more than minimal training in their masters program classes on motivational interviewing. Furthermore, participants stated they would welcome additional training to improve on their motivational interviewing techniques. The experiences of the participants in this study are much like my own experience. I had no knowledge of motivational interviewing until I was completing an internship at a homeless shelter where many of the

clientele suffered from substance abuse. I was taught motivational interviewing from the director of counseling at that agency to use in counseling clients suffering from substance abuse.

Laura was concerned about using motivational interviewing too often with students because she stated that she has not had enough formal training in the techniques. She was hoping to attend a Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers workshop in the near future to better understand the concepts and techniques of the theory. She stated,

I don't use [motivational interviewing] as much as I would like to, probably twice a week. But that's mostly because I feel like I need a lot more training on it. I've been looking at a training center in this area. I'm planning to do the initial round of the training and you're supposed to do another round like six months later and kind of keep up your skills. I feel like I need a full day of training where someone is going to correct me and tell me, "You sound this way or do it that way," or those sorts of things before I can really integrate it the way I want.

In any qualitative phenomenological study there are limitations. While I collected information from nine professional school counselors for this study, the criteria may have limited others from contributing.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to a heuristic qualitative phenomenological study. One limitation is the study methodology justifies the use of criterion sampling, but the sampling technique of using only professional school counselors who are members of the

American School Counselor Association could limit other qualified counselors involvement in the study who are not members of the national organization.

A second limitation was directed toward me as the researcher. Since this was a heuristic study, I did not use bracketing to put aside my personal beliefs (Moustakas, 1994). However, I was expressly aware of my role as a high school counselor who currently uses motivational interviewing with student clients could bias how I inquired into and gathered data and how I interpreted data during the interview process (Moustakas, 1990). To avoid bias during the interviews, when I discussed my school counseling position with the participants I did not mention that I used motivational interviewing in my practice (Moustakas, 1990).

Another limitation with any type of qualitative phenomenological study is the assumption the narratives told by the professional school counselors are truthful and reflect precise stories. I used clarification and summarizing techniques during the interviews with the participants to ensure the participant responses were accurate and I had no reason to believe the professional school counselors were not being truthful during the interviews. Additionally, the participants were sent transcripts of their interviews to review and correct for clarification.

Recommendations

The results of this study suggested that perhaps motivational interviewing should be taught in some aspect in school counseling graduate programs. Additionally, this study fills a gap in the research regarding the lived experience of professional school counselors using motivational interviewing with their students. The results of this

research study summarized perceived successful motivational interviewing techniques school counselors are using with their student clients. The results also described school counselors' concerns about the lack of training in motivational interviewing in both graduate programs and post-graduate opportunities. In this study, I found school counselors perceived motivational interviewing to be a successful brief therapy when working with student clients. According to the participants, motivational interviewing techniques were especially effective when working with students struggling academically. The results of this study supported multiple concepts in the literature regarding the use of motivational interviewing in schools.

In this research study, I found that professional school counselors perceived motivational interviewing as a successful brief therapy for student clients. However, this research study did not investigate whether students improved after being counseled with motivational interviewing techniques. I recommend that another qualitative study be completed in which students who are receiving counseling from professional school counselors using motivational interviewing for academic issues speak about their experiences during the process. This would allow the perceptions of the student clients to be explored.

Other future research should be conducted quantifying any improvements in students' academics after receiving counseling sessions using motivational interviewing. Additionally, I would recommend using a control group with similar students struggling academically to compare results to determine if motivational interviewing is equal, less, or, more effective than other counseling techniques. Researchers might want to also track

truancy and behavior to determine whether motivational interviewing has a positive effort on attendance and lowering discipline referrals.

Future research could explore the experiences of current professional school counselors as they are being trained to utilize motivational interviewing. It also will be important to complete either quantitative or mixed methods studies to determine whether students improve academically after receiving counseling that utilizes motivational interviewing techniques.

I made the decision not to differentiate between the ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural status of the students at the participants' schools. Based on that decision, the results do not explore whether ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or cultural status was an extenuating factor in the success of the motivational interviewing techniques used by the professional school counselors who were interviewed. Future quantitative research in this area may be warranted and should classify the success of motivational interviewing with students with specific ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural differences.

All nine professional school counselors in this study lamented the lack of motivational interviewing training in their graduate programs in school counseling. Once research is concluded in regard to the success of motivational interviewing, future research could be done with counselor educators programs to gage their interest in providing motivational interviewing instruction in current curricula. Additionally, with the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) increasing credits needed to graduate with a School Counseling masters

degree from 48 to 60 credits in 2023, there could be more opportunities to provide a theories and techniques course on motivational interviewing (CACREP, 2016). Another aspect of training included affordable post-graduate training in motivational interviewing for school counselors who did not receive instruction in motivational interviewing in their graduate programs. Counselor education programs could be surveyed to explore affordable ways to assist present school counselors in receiving training on motivational interviewing techniques.

In conclusion, the professional school counselors in this study were favorable towards using motivational interviewing as a counseling approach with students struggling in academic areas. The inconsistency in motivational interviewing training leads to counselors using many different techniques when working with student clients. This research study explored many of the current motivational interviewing techniques school counselors have used with student clients. This research study has the potential to provide both professional school counselors and counselor educators with insight regarding the perceptions of school counselors who utilize motivational interviewing in school counseling programs.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to address the gap in research on the perceptions school counselors have of the effectiveness of motivational interviewing with student clients and the different techniques they have used to assist students. Previous studies found mental health counselors effectively used motivational interviewing in schools for improving student clients' academic progress (Rollnick, Kaplan, & Rutschman, 2016;

Strait, 2012). The question that remained unanswered was what the experiences of professional school counselors are who use motivational interviewing when working with student clients. The experiences of the school counselors in this study were clarified through data gathered in interviews. Through rich and descriptive stories, a detailed process of the use of motivational interviewing with student clients was discovered.

The emerging themes of this study provided insight to professional school counselors regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of motivational interviewing and regarding some of the techniques they have used that they consider having been successful with student clients. The goal of motivational interviewing is to empower students to reach their personal goals (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). In reaching those goals, students could create positive social change on several levels including individual, family, organizational, and societal/policy.

This study could encourage those who study school counseling to test the effectiveness of using motivational interviewing to increase academic success of students. Potentially, motivational interviewing, which is a brief counseling approach that empowers students to make positive decisions in their lives through change talk, could assist in increasing academic standing and improving high school graduation rates. The societal change in any counseling approach that increases graduation rates, like motivational interviewing, could allow better career opportunities through post-secondary education after graduating from high school. Motivational interviewing, when combined with self-determination theory, could be a counseling approach that would help students discover goals and develop detailed action plans to promote future academic success.

Based on the participants' comments in this study, motivational interviewing was not part of their graduate school training, yet it has become a key part of their school counseling programs. The participants stated that motivational interviewing is a brief counseling approach that could assist students in minutes versus requiring several sessions, which could be a valuable tool for future school counselors. In addition to the current professional school counselors using motivational interviewing, a social change could occur when future counselors could use this counseling approach to motivate struggling students towards being successful academically.

Conclusions

The stories shared by the professional school counselors in this study provided detailed descriptions and perceptions of using motivational interviewing with student clients. The rich descriptions of how motivational interviewing techniques used by school counselors in this study assisted student clients filled the gap on a topic that otherwise has been the focus of limited research. This study suggests that motivational interviewing could be a factor in assisting students to be more successful academically through goal setting, change talk, and action plans. The data generated from this study described several techniques that are perceived as being successfully used by professional school counselors in assisting their student clients to improve academically. This study provided important information for professional school counselors to use to assist their school's students.

In closing, I found the counselors interviewed for this study prefer establishing relationships initially using Person-Centered Counseling techniques and then using the

motivational interviewing techniques to assist students in reaching their announced goals. The participants believed they were not trained adequately to use motivational interviewing in their graduate programs, and that they believed motivational interviewing works best in helping students with academic issues, but not with complicated personal issues.

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Appendix A: Posting on American School Counselor Association Scene Website

Date: xx-xx-xxxx

Dear Counselor,

My name is Bob Pincus and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a dissertation research project on the perceptions of school counselors who use motivational interviewing in schools.

Your assistance in conducting this much-needed research is important. Participants are free to choose whether or not to participate and can discontinue participation at any time. Information provided by the participants will be kept strictly confidential.

If you would be willing to allow me to interview you for this study, please contact me at robert.pincus@waldenu.edu.

Sincerely,

Bob Pincus
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee:

Interview Number: One

1. Please tell me about your school's level (high school, middle school), location, (urban, rural, suburban), student socioeconomic status, number of students and counselors, and your number of years of experience as a counselor.
2. How would you describe your counseling program?
3. What counseling techniques do you use with students?
4. How often do you use motivational interviewing compared to other approaches?
5. Is motivational interviewing the main counseling approach you use with students?
6. Do you use motivational interviewing with group or individual counseling or both?
7. How did you learn about motivational interviewing?
8. What is the extent of your training in using motivational interviewing?
9. What are the specific techniques of motivational interviewing you use with students?
10. Which techniques do you find work best with your students?
11. What techniques do you find do not work with your students?
12. Do you perceive motivational interviewing assisting in improving grades?

13. Do you believe motivational interviewing is a viable approach to use with students?