The Lived Experiences of School Counselors Participating in Yoga: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Self-Care

Susan Giovengo-Gurrera
THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS PARTICIPATING IN YOGA: A
HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SELF-CARE

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ABSTRACT

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. The primary objective of this research was to gain a thick, rich understanding of how school counselors experience the practice of yoga. A secondary objective of this study was to gain an understanding of how the regular practice of yoga can serve as a method of self-care for school counselors. This qualitative, phenomenologically-oriented study employed van Manen’s (1990) four lived existentials, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bio-ecological model of human development, and current mindfulness literature as its theoretical underpinnings.

School counselors regularly face many issues that can create job-related stress. The research literature recognizes role ambiguity, work with traumatized students, excessive caseloads, dealing with school violence, and crisis counseling as potential job-related stressors (Rayle, 2006). If school counselors do not confront job-related stress through regular self-care, compassion fatigue and burnout may result over time (Rayle, 2006). Therefore, the school
counselor has an ethical responsibility to practice self-care (Stebnicki, 2007). Practicing yoga has been suggested in the research literature as a potential method of self-care.

Yoga is becoming exceptionally popular in mainstream Western society. The research literature has identified that yoga can be an effective intervention for many different aspects of self-care, including reduction of stress and anxiety (Khalsa et al., 2009; Telles et al., 2009). However, there is a lack of research concerning the use of yoga and how it may serve as a method of self-care and an intervention for school counselors in preventing burnout and compassion fatigue.

This study is a hermeneutic phenomenological study of yoga as a potential method of self-care. The research conducted in this study was qualitative in nature, and the participants were school counselors who participate in regular yoga practice. The data collection process consisted of semi-structured interviewed designed to illuminate the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. Interview data was considered and discussed through the lens of van Manen’s lived existential framework and Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological model of human development.

The findings in this study indicated that school counselors find yoga to be an effective method of self-care in preventing burnout and increasing professional integrity. The risk and protective factors that enhance or hinder school counselor’s development were explored. Specific recommendations are provided for counselor education programs, school counseling professional organizations, school counselor employers, and school counselors in order to better address the importance of school counselor job stress and self-care.
DEDICATION

For my husband Lawrence E. “Guido” Gurrera; our love will always be my greatest success in life. Also, for my nephew Wyatt Benjamin Northrop; your strength is a greater inspiration than words will ever be.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my family for supporting me through this journey. My mother Jennifer Oakes Giovengo will be always in my heart, my mind, and my soul. I carry the love, compassion, and empathy that I learned through her example every day. I would like to thank my father, Dale Giovengo, for teaching me to “sing out”; this study is direct result of the confidence that you instilled in me from a very young age. Dad, I also thank you for teaching me how to be pragmatic and persistent; these are two of your greatest qualities, which I hope to embody also. SueAnn, thank you for helping me to realize that this dissertation is my artistic expression. Ben and Leah Northrop, thank you for always taking interest and for being involved in my endeavors. Leah, your ambition and interests have always served as a catalyst for me to improve myself, and I thank you for that. I would like thank my nephews, Wyatt, Weston, and Lucas, for always providing me with comic relief and honest opinions. To my “friends” Larry and Carol Gurrera, thank you for your interest in my study and for making this fun for me. I love you all, and I thank all of you for everything that you have done for me.

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Chapter I: Introduction

School counselors face a wide range of issues that can contribute to job-related stress. The research literature has identified several factors that may cause job-related stressors for school counselors. These potential stressors include the following: role ambiguity, work with traumatized students, excessive caseloads, dealing with school violence, and providing crisis counseling (Rayle, 2006).

The field of school counseling has faced significant challenges in defining its role within the educational system. The job description of the school counselor has resulted in a long debate, which has led to role ambiguity in school counseling, as well as in the educational system in general (ASCA, 2012). Role ambiguity has been identified as a significant job stressor for school counselors because it is a negative influence that can lead to burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

The media have documented countless events of school violence and tragedies that occur regularly in school settings. Whereas school counselors often are considered leaders in addressing and confronting school violence (Fein, Carlisle, & Isaacson, 2008), they often feel the pressure of their primary responsibility for ensuring a safe school environment for all students. This pressure can become overwhelming for school counselors because they may not have either the specialized training they need or the administrative support to make the decisions necessary to ensure student safety (Summerlin & Littrell, 2011).

School counselors are expected to provide crisis counseling to students who are negatively affected by a tragedy or event of school violence. Students affected negatively by school violence or another crisis are considered a “traumatized” population. The current research literature has identified several possible negative outcomes for counselors who work with
traumatized students. Exercising an empathetic relationship with a student who has been traumatized puts the counselor at risk for emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion (Figley, 1995; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; McCann & Saakvitne, 1995; Pearlman & MacIan, 1995). Various empirical studies suggest that counselors who work with students experiencing trauma have an increased likelihood of experiencing a change in their own psychological functioning (Chrestman, 1995). In an environment where school violence is not decreasing, the expectation remains that school counselors must be experts in crisis counseling, diffusing school violence, and providing counseling to traumatized populations. Therefore, finding methods of self-care is imperative for ensuring counselor wellness.

Self-care is commonly recognized as a preventive measure that requires counselors to monitor their own level of functioning and to be alert for signs of impairment (Good, Khairallah, & Mintz, 2009). Barnett, Johnston, and Hillard (2006) have suggested that self-care is essential as a part of one’s professional identity and that it should not “be considered as something ‘extra’ or ‘nice to do’ if you have the time” (p. 263). As an ethical responsibility and obligation, a comprehensive self-care plan serves to protect clients, improve counseling, and protect counselors (Porter, 1995).

School counselors are trained to abide by the ethical codes of all professional counseling associations, the two most commonly recognized being the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American School Counselors Association (ASCA). Both organizations have ethical codes that speak directly to effectiveness, impairment, self-care, and non-maleficence. In 2005, the ACA established the following standards that define ethical behavior and best practices for association members:
Section A.4.a., Avoiding Harm: Counselors act to avoid harming their clients, trainees, and research participants and to minimize or to remedy unavoidable or unanticipated harm (p. 4).

Section C., Professional Responsibility: Counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities (p. 9).

Section C.2.d., Monitor Effectiveness: Counselors continuously monitor their effectiveness as professionals and take steps to improve when necessary (p. 9).

Section C.2.g., Impairment: Counselors are alert to the signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering or providing professional services when such impairment is likely to harm a client or others (p. 9).

**Statement of the Problem**

Generally, when we think of the role of the school counselor, we see an emphasis on helping at-risk populations. School counselors are often first responders to tragedy and violence, along with the systemic aftermath that follows these events in a school setting. Conversely, research has shown that counselors who work with victims of trauma are at risk themselves for burnout and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; McCann & Saakvitne, 1995; Pearlman & MacIan, 1995).

What do we do when those responsible for helping at-risk populations are truly at risk themselves? The mental health counseling and social work literature often present the concept of self-care, which has been found to combat secondary traumatization, counselor burnout, and compassion fatigue (Stebnicki, 2007). However, very little published research exists pertaining to school counselors and methods they might use for self-care.
In counseling, self-care is imperative for the counselor. Some authors have gone as far as to say that without practicing self-care, the counselor is putting the client at risk (Stebnicki, 2007). The act of self-care can be defined as any activity that integrates physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual play. The research literature suggests a wealth of comprehensive benefits to practicing self-care. Some of the benefits of self-care include promotion of well-being; physical and psychological health; and prevention and/or management of disease, injury, or trauma (Stebnicki, 2007). Self-care has been found to decrease depression, increase the ability to empathize, and serve as a protective factor against burnout, secondary trauma, and the risk of committing ethical violations (Stebnicki, 2007). Though the counseling research literature often suggests yoga as a form of self-care, little has been written about its implementation and nothing about school counselors’ lived experience of practicing yoga as a self-help strategy.

Yoga is said to be the fastest growing form of exercise in America, with approximately 21 million adults practicing. A National Institute of Health (NIH) survey completed in 2012 found that nearly 9.5% of American adults practiced yoga as a complementary health approach, up from just 5% in 2002. The number of children practicing yoga has also increased, according to the NIH survey, so that approximately 3% of American children were practicing yoga in 2012. It is clear that yoga has penetrated the popular culture in all age groups.

As a result of its surge in popularity, yoga is now empirically supported as an effective intervention in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression among adults and children. According to the NIH, many people who practice yoga do so to maintain their health and well-being, improve physical fitness, relieve stress, and enhance their quality of life. Additionally, yoga is often implemented to address specific health conditions, such as back pain, neck pain, arthritis, and anxiety. Current research, the NIH notes, suggests that practicing yoga may reduce
low-back pain and improve back functioning. Other studies state that practicing yoga can improve quality of life; reduce stress; lower heart rate and blood pressure; help relieve anxiety, depression, and insomnia; and improve overall physical fitness, strength, and flexibility.

However, the process whereby school counselors practice yoga has not been studied. Almost no discussion of yoga for school counselors or of how it may serve as a method for self-care exists in the current research literature. The purpose of the proposed research study is to explore the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga.

Yoga has been recognized by the National Institute of Health (NIH) and Centers for Disease Prevention as a complementary health approach. There is a recognized gap in the research literature pertaining to specific methods of self-care for school counselors, and this is problematic. The current study was proposed to examine school counselor’s perceptions of yoga as a potential method of care. The research project consisted of qualitative interview strategies, ideally involving school counselors who work in urban or low-achieving school settings. The proposed study used a hermeneutic phenomenological method to explore the lived-experiences of school counselors practicing yoga. This study used van Manen’s lived-existentials to focus specifically on lived space, lived time, lived body, and lived relationship. Additionally, the proposed research has used Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model for Human Development as a theoretical underpinning, as well as employing principles of mindfulness and bio-psychosocial beliefs.
Significance of and Need for the Study

This study is important because it has recognized the need for school counselors to implement a self-care plan in order to serve their students effectively and to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue. The school counseling field may benefit from the lessening of this gap in the research literature because this study attempts to offer a better understanding of the job stressors for school counselors and the essential need for self-care implementation.

The research literature has identified several factors that contribute to the job stresses that school counselors contend with, including role ambiguity, work with traumatized students, excessive caseloads, dealing with school violence, and crisis counseling. This study serves to provide a better understanding of those stressors and offers yoga as a potential method of self-care for school counselors.

Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of this research was to gain a thick, rich description of the lived experiences of school counselors who practice yoga. A secondary objective of this study was to gain an understanding of how the regular practice of yoga can serve as a method of self-care for school counselors. The findings this study may allow school counselors, researchers, counselor educators, and mental health clinicians to gain an understanding of how yoga may influence human development and serve as a protective factor for school counselors. In exploring this topic, this study will provide a definition of yoga, a discussion of the benefits of yoga in general, yoga as an intervention for mental health and human development, and a review of previous research involving yoga as an intervention.
Definition of Terms

a. *Yoga* is a practical philosophy that involves every aspect of a person’s being; physical, psychological, and spiritual (Iyengar, 2002).

b. The word *yoga*, translated from Sanskrit to English means “yoke,” reflecting its purpose in joining the mind and body in harmonious relaxation (Dey, Barrett, & Yuan, 2003, p. 172).

c. *Hatha yoga*, a modern practice, involves focused breath work through a series of standing, seated, and balancing postures including twists and backbends or inversions, and concludes with a relaxation or meditation posture (Austin & Laeng, 2003).

d. *Human development* takes place through processes of progressively more complex, reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio-psychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

e. *Lifeworld* is recognized as the concept of everyday occurrences that humans take for granted and that would normally go unnoticed (Seamon, 2012).

f. *Mindfulness* is the awareness that develops as a result of purposely directing nonjudgmental attention to the present moment, to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

g. *Self-care* is any activity of an individual or group with the intention of improving or restoring health, or treating or preventing disease (American Heritage Medical Dictionary, 2007).

h. *Burnout* is a cumulative state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations; typically attributed to one’s work environment, context, or job choice (Figley, 1995).

i. *Compassion fatigue* is a state of exhaustion and dysfunction—biological, psychological, and social—as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion stress (Figley, 1995, p. 253).
Research Questions

The goal of this study is to examine the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga as a method of self-care. Consistent with phenomenological research methods, the questions addressed in this study emphasize their lived experiences, meanings, and descriptions. The overarching question guiding this inquiry is as follows:

1. What are the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga?

This guiding question prompted four subsidiary questions which attempt to illustrate the ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the concept of the lived existentials (van Manen, 1990). The four elements of the existentials—specifically lived space, lived time, lived body, and lived relation—help in examining individuals’ perceptions of their world.

1. What meanings do school counselors associate with their yoga practice and its influence on their professional practice?
2. What lived existentials do school counselors experience in relation to the intersection of their professional practice, the practice of yoga, and self-care interventions?
3. What are the risks and protective factors that affect school counselors in relationship to self-care and burnout?
4. What information can be learned from school counselors’ experiences in regard to yoga as a mindfulness-based intervention?

Delimitations of the Study

This study focused on obtaining a thick and rich perception of the experience of school counselors participating in yoga. This study acquired the perceptions of school counselors
participating in yoga as a method of self-care. An ideal population for participants was sought for the study in order to ensure its reliability, validity, and richness.

For this study an attempt was made to interview school counselors who are actively employed in urban high schools, because they are at the greatest risk for burnout. In addition, an effort was made to include participants who have had several years of experience practicing yoga. The desired population included experienced practitioners who are also at the greatest risk for potential burnout. These characteristics were chosen in order to increase the richness of the study.

**Limitations of the Study**

Because of the nature of qualitative research, particularly with regard to the small sample size, generalizability is not possible (Creswell, 2009), and some may see this as a limitation. However, this study may still provide evidence and ideas that might prove useful to those who want to understand the benefits and effects of yoga, especially as it pertains to use by school counselors. Another potential limitation is misunderstandings in communication during the interview process. Every measure will be taken by the researcher to ensure clarification during the interview process. Finally, it is possible that the participants may feel influenced by the presence of the interviewer. However, the researcher will diligently remain unbiased and will carefully construct an interview that is non-leading.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This study, which is qualitative in design, takes a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for exploring the experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. The qualitative design in this study is based upon a theoretical framework that includes the interpretive lenses of current yoga-related literature, mindfulness theory, van Manen’s (1990)
four lived existentials, and the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005).

The concept of mindfulness is also integrated into this study, which hopes to identify the primary concepts of mindfulness as a secondary theoretical underpinning for the study and, ultimately, to identify the presence of these concepts in the sample population. The concepts of mindfulness observed in this study are quieting the mind, mindful attention, managing negative emotions, and acknowledgement of self and others (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). This research inquiry attempts to observe these mindfulness traits through observation and qualitative interviewing strategies.

Van Manen’s four lived existentials explore lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived human relation. The four lived existentials serve as an anchor for the interpretation of this study. The phenomenological framework for this design seeks to understand the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. This framework was selected to understand those experiences in which strategies learned in yoga have applied in real-life situations, as explained by the participants. Implementing this framework made it possible for interview data to be identified and categorized by the lived existentials.

Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model has been highly recognized for assistance in understanding how environment affects individual human development. This model was selected because it recognizes the interconnectedness between an individual and environmental constructs. Bronfenbrenner’s theory helps to explore and interpret the effect of an environmental factor on another area of an individual’s perceived world. This research project assumes a bioecological lens for exploring yoga as it is introduced to school counselors within their microsystem as method of self-care. An interpretive research position as assumed, with the
objective of the research being to understand how skills learned in yoga may apply in real life situations. Bronfenbrenner’s model will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

**Summary**

Recently, yoga has increased in popularity among all Americans. However, the effects of yoga, when used as a method of self-care for school counselors, have not been studied. This study attempts fill the research gap by exploring how school counselors interpret their experience with yoga, its potential benefits, and the possibility of yoga as a method of self-care.

This study is needed not only to fill the research gap but potentially to contribute to educational research, the development of counselor education programs, and the improvement of school counseling programs. As the demands placed on school counselors are increasingly serious, the need for comprehensive methods of self-care have become more imperative.

This chapter has introduced a study that examines the experience of school counselors in participating in yoga as a method of self-care. The literature on this phenomenon is limited; however, the number of job-related stressors that school counselors contend with continues to increase. The goal of this study is to understand clearly the lived experiences of school counselors practicing yoga as a potential method of self-care. Three guiding questions and six subsidiary research questions are offered to drive the exploration in this phenomenologically oriented study. An overview of the three theoretical approaches used in this study also has been provided.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 has provided an overview of this research, including the significance of the study, purpose, and method. Chapter 2 presents an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework for the study. The chapter also provides a review of the literature on school
counseling, school violence, compassion fatigue, burnout, self-care, yoga-related research, and the integral model for school counseling. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the methodological framework for the study. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and design of the study in extensive detail as well as the rationale for the selection. Chapter 4 provides a review of the results of this study. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the implications of this study.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide an overview of the literature relevant to the topic of inquiry. This chapter illuminates the theoretical underpinnings of mindfulness theory, yoga literature, and human development literature. Additionally, this chapter explores literature on the role of the school counselor, school violence, self-care, compassion fatigue, and counselor burnout, which combine to create a foundation for this research. Specifically, this study is an exploration of the experiences of school counselors’ participation in yoga as a method of self-care. In order to address the relevant topics in the literature, this review has been divided into five sections that outline the information needed to understand this investigation. The first section presents the evolution of the school counseling profession. The second section discusses job related stressors for school counselors, including school violence, crisis counseling, compassion fatigue, and burnout. The third section addresses self-care for school counselors within multiple contexts. The forth section presents yoga-related research, while the fifth section provides a description of the theoretical framework in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model for human development.

The literature reviewed develops the following arguments in support of this study: (a) School counseling is an ever evolving field, in which several job-related stressors are identified. (b) Self-care is an ethical responsibility of school counselors. (c) Individuals who practice yoga are more likely to be resilient to stressful situations that could produce negative physical consequences (Parshad, 2004). (d) Human development is a reciprocal interaction between an actively evolving, biopsychosocial human, organism, person, or object. In order for the interaction to have an effective impact it must occur on a regular basis (Gauvain & Cole, 2004).
Research literature has noted on several occasions that increased self-management may result from mindfulness training, particularly the development of coping skills (Kabat & Zinn, 1982).

**History of School Counseling**

As a profession, school counseling has evolved alongside American history. As economic, political, and foreign affairs fluctuated in the United States of America, so did the role of the school counselor. The research suggests that the profession of school counseling is 100 years old. The field of school counseling began in the early 1900s as vocational guidance (ASCA, 2012). Originally, there was no formal structure or specific educational requirements for the school counselor or vocational guidance counselor. The role could be occupied by either a teacher or school administrator. The functions of the school counselor at that time consisted merely of a list of tasks and responsibilities.

By the 1920s, the concept of mental hygiene had emerged. As a result of the new mental hygiene, along with psychometric and child research studies, school counseling took a more clinical approach (ASCA, 2012). This new clinically orientated approach took the focus of the profession away from economic structures and emphasized counseling for personal adjustment and physiological issues.

Discussion began to emerge in the 1930s concerning the responsibilities, selection, and training of school counselors. Additionally, concern was raised about the various personnel who were filling the role of school counselors. During the 1930s, the concept of pupil personnel services was introduced, which was considered a milestone in the development of the school counseling profession. The new structure allowed for specialization within the range of services provided. Within this time frame, guidance services came to fruition. The job responsibilities of
the school counselor took a more focused approach and fell within the overarching structure of pupil personnel services (ASCA, 2012).

From 1941–1945, the field was focused on contributions to the war effort. In 1946, the Vocational Education Act was passed, which garnered support for training and selecting school counselors. In addition, the American School Counselor Association was established in 1952 as a division of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, and the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was passed in 1958.

The 1960s marked an amendment of the NDEA which led to the start of specified training for elementary school counselors. In the 1960s, elementary school counseling developed in a different way from secondary school counseling, and the role of the school counselor was generally debated as well. The question at hand was should school counseling be psychological in nature, including counseling as the main focus? Or should education be the focus, featuring a wide range of interventions including counseling, academic advisement, assessment, placement, and follow-up activities? At this time, there were also calls for changes in the service model (ASCA, 2012). Popular demand led toward a more comprehensive model for school counseling.

It was in the 1960s and 1970s that the concept of a school counseling program was introduced. This idea of a school counseling program served as an organizational method for the implementation of school counseling in schools during the 1980s through the 21st century. Training programs were also developed to assist school districts in constructing comprehensive programs. It was also during this time that many states began to adopt their own models (ASCA, 2012).

A concern about the terminology in the field emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. The question was often being asked about whether it was guidance or school counseling? This debate
stemmed from differing opinions on the primary focus of the school counselor. Some in the field advocated for a focus on the role of the human development specialist, whereas others felt that the school counselor should be considered a change agent (ASCA, 2012). At this time the school counselor was focused primarily on coordinating, counseling, and consulting.

It appeared that progress was made in developing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in the first decade of the 21st century; however, the debate continued over the primary focus of the school counselor. The literature at that time fluctuated according to the opinions of various authors. Some felt that the primary focus should be on academic achievement rather than career and personal social counseling (ASCA, 2012). Other researchers, however, emphasized the opposite, believing that mental health counseling should take precedence over other issues. It was during that time that a holistic approach encompassing all three areas was suggested. Furthermore, as conversation about program purposes and roles progressed, some authors continued to focus on school counselors as change agents while others emphasized collaboration. Some researchers were still recommending then that school counselors work more indirectly with students and less face to face (ASCA, 2012). The impetus toward data-oriented school counselors also emerged during that time. As a result of the first publication of the ASCA National Model in 2003, school counseling programs were developed and implemented across the country (ASCA, 2012).

In the second decade of the 21st century, accountability has been getting attention. The emphasis on accountability has resulted from the permanency of evaluation within professional practice, decision making, and program needs (ASCA, 2012).

This explanation of the history of school counseling is relevant to this document because it displays the ever changing role of the school counselor and demonstrates that school
counseling as a field adapts to the needs of society as a whole. As societal needs evolve, school counselors are expected to meet needs and to address diverse situations wherein they may lack experience and or education. This evolution of and debate over school counselors’ role has led to recognized confusion in the field and has often been linked to burnout. Additionally, as school counselors become more experienced, they also become further removed from their initial training programs. As a result of this experience and of years in the field, many counselors may be facing issues that they are ill-prepared to handle, including counseling students with a wide range of sexuality issues or severely mentally disturbed students, and dealing with school violence. As previously stated in this paper, providing counseling to victims of trauma can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue. School counselors have been expected by society to address and be involved with school violence incidents. The following section highlights the role of the school counselor with regard to school violence and crisis counseling in school systems.

School Violence and Crisis Counseling in Schools

All students require a safe, violence-free environment for learning. The impact of a crisis or act of violence within the school environment has “a tremendous and lasting effect on the school in which it occurred, the surrounding community and the nation as a whole” (Vossekul et al., 2002, p. 7). The research literature continues to point to the school counselor in taking a leadership role to ensure that schools are safe environments for all students.

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence (2000) considers “any behavior that violates a school’s educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions and disorder” (p. 2) as characterizing an act of school violence. The school counselor’s leadership
role in the formation of a safe school climate will result in the academic and personal success of all students and will help schools achieve their educational missions (Hernandez & Seem, 2004).

School counselors play significant roles in preventing violent incidents, intervening when concerns arise about possible violence and responding when violence occurs. Through the implementation of a school counseling program, school counselors encourage school safety, help students engaging in unhealthy or unsafe behaviors, and make referrals as needed. School counselors are often intimately familiar with the school community and knowledgeable about the roles of community mental health providers and first responders, including law enforcement officials and emergency medical responders. School counselors help with the alleviation of stressors in students and staff, and play significant leadership roles especially in the immediate aftermath of a crisis or act of school violence. School counselors are often trained in crisis response intervention models and serve as integral members of crisis response teams in collaboration with administrators and other school staff members (Fein, Carlisle, & Isaacson, 2008).

Over the past several decades, the news media have reported on tragedies occurring in communities and schools. In relation to everything from natural disasters to school shootings, school counselors are often fully immersed in providing crisis counseling services and support to students and families. Though major disasters and shooting incidents are frequently in the news, many other crisis level events occur in schools that are not reported. Crisis management/prevention and intervention has become a common occurrence in a school counselor’s day. School counselors often provide services that other mental health providers are ill-equipped to perform because of the school counselor’s insight into the unique social structure and sense of community in schools (Allen et al., 2002). As a personal example, I was once asked
to perform crisis counseling at my school when several students were involved in an accident in which a teenage boy fell out of the back of a truck and died. Approximately 20 students who were involved in this accident came to school the following day. The school administrative staff asked the school counselors to provide crisis counseling because we had the closest and best relationships with the students involved. Several other administrative staff and psychologists were on hand, but they did not have the same kind of interpersonal relationships with the students involved.

The school counselor often serves as a leader in safe school initiatives and is considered a vital resource in the creation, development, and implementation of response plans before, during, and after a crisis (Studer & Salter, 2010). A crisis or an act of violence drive school counselors into positions of responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of all students and staff (Fein, 2003).

The safe school and crisis response literature (Carr, 2004; Heath & Sheen, 2005; Studer & Salter, 2010; Stallard & Salter, 2003) suggests several important crisis prevention and response preparedness practices in which professional school counselors should engage, including collaboration with community resources, involvement in safety and response team planning, resolving and debriefing students and staff during critical incidences, supportive interventions for at-risk students; peer mediation training; conflict resolution and anti-bullying programs; sponsorship of student initiated prevention programs, such as Students Against Violence Everywhere; education programs for staff and school community members; facilitation of open communication between students and caring adults; individual and group counseling; and promotion of student safety (Studer & Salter, 2010).
As previously stated, school counselors are leaders in preventing, intervening in, and responding to school violence and crises. The demands placed on the school counselor are unique, complex, and in some cases inhibiting to a healthy lifestyle. As a school counselor takes care of the emotional needs of students and staff during and after a crisis, an emotional toll can wear down the well-being of the counselor (Studer & Salter, 2010).

**Trauma**

Often, emotional trauma is viewed as imposing severe harm on an individual’s psyche. Persons who endure traumatic events often experience intense effects that can be identified as feeling alone, helpless, vulnerable, frightened, betrayed, and overwhelmed (Levers, 2012). The manifestation of trauma can occur in many ways. Some documented effects are universal, whereas others maybe culturally specific. The impact of traumatic events can impede not only a person’s physical but also psychological and emotional aspects (Levers, 2012).

For victims of trauma, the idea of reliving it through counseling is often painful and inconceivable; however, many courageous people come forward and initiate trauma counseling. Such a request for trauma counseling serves as commitment to the journey of healing (Levers, 2012). Trauma counseling requires a holistic view of clients or students and a concentration on the healing process. Such counseling is deeply personal for the victim and, at the same time, is greatly dependent upon the developmental context wherein the victim currently identifies. When providing trauma counseling, the counselor must accept any ubiquity and ambiguity projected by the client (Levers, 2012).

As briefly mentioned, trauma counseling can be deeply intense; thus, it requires the utmost skill, professionalism, and training. Because of school-related events and increased violence, school counselors must often provide trauma counseling. The research literature
surrounding this issue has often questioned whether the competencies and exposure to trauma counseling are adequate for students in school counseling graduate programs.

**Compassion Fatigue**

As a career, counseling is recognized as emotionally demanding. Counselors are expected to be empathic, understanding, and giving; and at the same time, they must monitor their own emotional needs and responsiveness in dealing with students. When exercising an empathetic relationship with a student who has been traumatized, counselors are at risk of experiencing a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion (Figley, 1995; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; McCann & Saakvitne, 1995; Pearlman & Maclan, 1995).

Empirical studies have suggested that counselors who work with students experiencing trauma have an increased likelihood of experiencing a change in their own psychological functioning (Chrestman, 1995). Reactions can include burnout, countertransference, avoidance of the trauma, and feelings of horror, guilt, rage, grief, detachment, or dread. These responses can negatively affect the counseling relationship. If counselors are not aware of this reaction, they may appear uninterested because they avoid asking questions to facilitate dialogue related to the event. This reaction can be damaging to the therapeutic relationship because the counselor then appears unwilling to help. In such a case, the clients, who often have limited environments in which telling their story is safe and acceptable, are revictimized (McCann & Perlman, 1990).

The effects of posttraumatic stress disorder to the primary victims of trauma are well defined. However, it is crucial to understand the effects that working with victims of trauma can have on the psychological well-being of the counseling professional. These secondary effects, commonly experienced by those not directly traumatized, are often defined as secondary trauma or compassion fatigue.
Compassion fatigue is defined as “a state of exhaustion and dysfunction, biologically, psychologically, and socially as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion stress” (Figley, 1995, p. 253). Compassion fatigue is interchangeable with secondary traumatic stress disorder (STSD) and is the equivalent of PTSD” (Figley, 1995, p. xv). In the research literature, compassion fatigue is also known as secondary traumatic stress disorder, secondary traumatization, or vicarious traumatization (Figley, 1995; McCann & Saakvitne, 1995). The definition of compassion fatigue also encompasses the components of cumulative stress, intrusion, avoidance, and hypervigilance (Figley, 2002). Mathieu (2007) identifies the following common signs of compassion fatigue: exhaustion, irritability, misplaced anger, low self-esteem, insomnia, workaholic behavior, depression, anxiety, tardiness or frequent absences from work, substance abuse (food, alcohol, drugs), somatic symptoms (hypertension, headaches), and hypervigilance (easily startled). Compassion fatigue is considered recognizable. It wears down the professional’s ability to function effectively. Depression, caregiver stress, secondary trauma, and post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) are very much a part of the daily landscape for a school counselor.

Research terminology differs significantly in describing the phenomenon of compassion fatigue and working with victims of trauma. However, one common theme emerges: work that focuses on relieving clients’ emotional suffering typically results in absorption of information about human suffering (Figley, 1995). Counselors differ in their responses to stressors: some are able to tolerate exposure to stressors without negative manifestations whereas others are not. Differences in coping techniques for handling stressors can play an important role in the level of compassion fatigue.
Figley (2002) has stated that “[i]n our effort to view the world from the perspective of the suffering we suffer” (p. 1,434). School counselors are expected to have empathy and to understand the worldview of their students, which puts them at risk for developing compassion fatigue. Because school counselors may be expected to deal with students’ trauma, the fact is often overlooked that the counselor needs support. If compassion fatigue is not identified and addressed, it can be harmful to students, and the counseling process may suffer through poor decision-making and ineffective use of techniques. If such is not properly addressed, school counselors may put their students at special risk for harmfully or incorrectly applying counseling techniques or making poor decisions because of their exhaustion and inattentiveness.

Research has recognized a counselor’s psychological well-being as an relevant factor in avoiding compassion fatigue symptoms (Figley, 1995). The concept of spirituality has also been integrated into the research literature in examining the psychological well-being of counselors. Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke (2001) reported that a research study conducted by the ACA indicates that counselors view spirituality as a significant factor in mental health. Additional research was conducted that examined the relationship between religion and spirituality in coping with stress and found a positive correlation between spiritual health and immunity to stressful situations (Graham et al., 2001).

**Burnout**

In addition to compassion fatigue, burnout in school counselors has been well documented. As roles, student caseloads, and duties have increased, school counselors have become stressed, emotionally overextended, and drained. This exhaustion leads to burnout and affects counselors’ effectiveness (Butcke, & McLann, 1984; Freeman & Coll, 1997; Kendrick, et al., 1994; Lieberman, 2004; Morrissette, 2000; NCES, 2007; Rayle, 2006; Sears & Navin,
1983; Vail, 2005; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Burnout is not a natural consequence within all professions. Rather, it occurs when emotional resources are exhausted, negative attitudes toward others build, and the feeling of being unsuccessful increases over a prolonged period of time. The counselor often becomes unmotivated and detached (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Higher levels of counselor burnout have been found in urban school settings (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

School counselors are at risk for leaving the profession because of an increase in job-related stress (Raye, 2006). The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) has suggested that school counselors be dedicated to implementing programs that address the comprehensive needs of a student population. The ASCA advises school counselors to spend at least 70% of their time organizing activities and services to address academic, career, and personal/social needs (Rayle, 2006). The research literature indicates that not all school counselors’ daily routines are consistent with ASCA recommendations because these counselors are often required to spend time completing non-counseling related duties, such as administrative tasks. Additionally, school counselors are often expected to meet the expectations of teachers, parents, administrators, community stakeholders, and school systems (Rayle, 2006). The accumulated stress of meeting this increased set of expectations and demands has placed school counselors at risk for greater rates of job-related stress and lower levels of job satisfaction (Rayle, 2006). Furthermore, school counselors are at-risk for leaving the profession altogether because of job-related stress. In addition, greater levels of job dissatisfaction have been shown to influence individuals’ emotional and physical well-being (Rayle, 2006).

Higher levels of job dissatisfaction, in turn, have been found to affect individuals to whom the counselor is providing services as well, including students, parents, and teachers.
(Rayle, 2006). Job satisfaction is considered an essential piece of the high quality service that a school counselor is expected to deliver daily. Moreover, for school counselors specifically, job-related stress is related to physical, psychological, and workplace variables, including role ambiguity (Rayle, 2006).

The increased levels of job-related stress and burnout reported by school counselors have caused concern and led to many research inquiries into how school counselors can be better supported in their environments. Elementary school counselors report the highest levels of job satisfaction compared to middle or high school counselors (Hardesty & Dillard, 1994), whereas high school counselors report the lowest levels of job satisfaction and the highest rates of job-related stress. These rates may reflect the continuous role ambiguity, pressure, and numerous expectations placed on high school counselors daily (Davis, 2005). These findings have left researchers questioning high school counselors’ quality of life in their professional lives.

The demand for school counselors has become ever more crucial in the 21st century than in previous years. This specialized and demanding profession has evolved over time, along with American cultural, social, and economic needs. School counselors are responsible for assuming a broad range of duties, including but certainly not limited to, providing individual and group counseling, educational outreach as a universal intervention, educational testing, and academic advising, scheduling, and clinical supervision (Butler & Constantine, 2005). For several recognized reasons—including role ambiguity, increased workloads, and countless professional roles—school counselors find themselves at risk for burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Burnout can be identified by emotional fatigue, irritability, disengagement, and apathy subsequent to the work environment (Haddad, 1998). Encouraging and maintaining school counselors’ well-being is critical to their abilities to be attentive and sensitive to student needs.
Additionally, well-being is critical because it can protect school counselors against feelings of burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

School counselors are recognized as having a strong professional identification and possessing a wide range of unique skills, which makes them valuable contributing members of school systems. Although roles have become more defined in recent years, significant misconception, controversy, and ambiguity surround the role of the school counselor. The role of the school counselor often varies, based upon the institution in which he or she may be working. Potential stressors for school counselors are role confusion and role ambiguity. Role conflict, which occurs when two or more simultaneous demands are incompatible to the degree that fulfilling one role compromises the other, can be complex and can place a tremendous amount of pressure on the school counselor. Role ambiguity may occur when school counselors are unsure of their roles and responsibilities, especially if these roles are taken for granted institutionally and professionally. For instance, a school counselor might be asked to fulfill such clerical duties as covering classes, hall duty, and or lunch duty. In such a situation, the counselor may feel that the external expectations placed upon them are inconsistent with their own professional expectations and educational training. As explained previously, role strain, confusion, and ambiguity have been demonstrated as having a negative impact on job satisfaction among school counselors (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

Organizational stressors may also affect school counselor burnout and job satisfaction, including perceived image from other educational staff. In certain settings, teachers, principals, and other administrative staff may not view the school counseling profession positively, an attitude that may become apparent by allocation of non-counseling duties. Additionally, school
counselors may not always appear as visible members of school leadership. This can lead to reduced feelings of value and worth.

Considering the combination of organizational stressors and the demands of professional roles, the risk for burnout may be high for school counselors (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Maslach (1996) defined burnout as a collective stress reaction that occurs in three identifiable factors. The three interrelated factors that constitute burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Briefly, emotional exhaustion may be recognized as the feeling of being drained of emotional energy. Depersonalization can be identified through an act of social withdrawal and the adoption of an apathetic or negative attitude toward others, whereas a diminished sense of personal accomplishment is often evidenced through a deteriorated sense of worth and dissatisfaction with prior achievements. Occupations that entail frequent, intense emotional interactions with a variety of people are at risk for burnout. Strongly linked to burnout are human service professions, including nursing, education, and mental health. Very few research studies deal with school counselors and burnout. However, one study that surveyed self-reported burnout and role stress among school counselors, school psychologists, teachers, reading specialists, and school social workers found that school counselors reported the highest levels of role ambiguity/conflict and the second highest level of depersonalization, as well as reduced rates of personal accomplishment (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Because school counselors are tasked with the unique responsibility of addressing a diverse range of psychosocial issues and maintaining their own work-life balance, it is imperative to take measures to prevent burnout. One protective factor against burnout for school counselors is a collective level of self-esteem and social support (Butler & Constantine, 2005).
A 2005 survey of 538 school counselors found that those employed in urban environments reported significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization than school counselors in suburban school districts (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Because school counselors in urban environments are facing unique challenges that may not be found in suburban settings, they are at specific risk for burnout, and it is essential for them to institute measures to protect against burnout. The 2005 study also indicated that it is critical for school counselors to self-monitor their experiences continually in order to avoid burnout.

School counselors face numerous challenges on the job, including the testing constraints of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, students’ increased use of drugs and alcohol, and a lack of parental availability/support because of two-parent working households or divorce (Summerlin & Littrell, 2011). Additionally, school counselors face a challenge because they hold unique position in the public school system, as they are trained to meet with students, parents, and teachers for counseling (Summerlin & Littrell, 2011). Throughout the last several years the responsibilities of the school counselor have increased extensively. The demands and expectations challenge even the most passionate school counselors.

Avoiding burnout is yet another challenge that school counselors face. Some people consider burnout as a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion that occurs as a result of long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations. School counselors are particularly at risk owing to the nature of the services they are expected to provide. School counselors often keep an “open-door policy,” which means that any student, staff member, or parent can approach them with a question, concern, or desire to seek assistance. School counselors are often expected to react quickly and to help problem solve issues without time to plan or research the best possible solutions. Because they have an open door policy, school
counselors are much more approachable than other school staff members, including teachers, principals, and administrative staff. Specifically in high need schools, counselors are often working with students and listening to problems for the duration of their day; thus, the amount of time that counselors spend listening to problems put them at risk for burnout (Summerlin & Littrell, 2011). Additional risks for burnout include a lack of administrative support, dealing with administrative issues, lack of parental assistance, and role ambiguity (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

Related to burnout is the concept of compassion fatigue, to which school counselors are also uniquely vulnerable. Compassion fatigue occurs after one has listened to the burdens of others, as well as accounts of their traumatic events, daily over a span of several years (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). Compassion fatigue may be manifest in counselors through a loss of passion, lowered professional standards, and emotional exhaustion (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). In previous surveys, school counselors have expressed a lack of personal and professional development in the areas they struggle with, including motivation issues, burnout, and frustration over a perceived lack of support from administration concerning professional development issues (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). Because of school counselors’ unique job expectations, they can also benefit from professional development opportunities that are unique to them. Often, school counselors are assigned professional development activities similar to those of traditional classroom teachers, so they attend presentations that are irrelevant to their professional development needs. The research literature points out the lack of relevant and useful professional development as a point of frustration for school counselors, which negatively affects their levels of job-satisfaction and enthusiasm (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011).
In Summerlin and Litterell’s (2011) study, the researchers completed a qualitative study in which they surveyed nine school counselors, who are identified as “passionate” in their work. The results of this study described spiritual practices as instrumental in school counselors’ avoiding burnout and remaining passionate. Some of the counselors indicated that religion is a part of this spiritual practice; however, other school counselors in the study specifically described practicing meditation as a means of spirituality and self-care (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). The concept of meditation relates specifically to yoga, as meditation is offered in all facets of yoga. Additionally, the 2011 study also specially indicates that self-care, humility, and a sense of positive self-esteem are valuable characteristics in remaining passionate as a school counselor (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). All of the above mentioned attributes are principles consistent with regular yoga practice.

It should be noted that a typical yoga class does not involve worship, prayer, or sermons to a particular denomination or higher being. However, yoga classes often provide a unique platform for participants to explore their own spiritual identification. This unique platform often takes shape by means of inspirational Sanskrit readings, stories, music or quotes. In addition, yoga classes are often themed or structured around particular ideas that are meant to be inspirational. Themes presented in yoga classes often are consistent with contributing to society in a positive manner, self-compassion/healing, and a non-competitive perspective on life.

My personal experience with yoga spirituality may be relevant here. Within a few weeks of my mother’s death in 2008, I attended a yoga class. I remember sitting on the floor at the start of the yoga class in tremendous emotional pain. I had taken care of my mother for nearly one year before she lost her battle to ovarian cancer. In the weeks after her death, I remember thinking, “What am I going to do with my life now?” I was so lost in life and had a tremendous
amount of newly found free time. During the final relaxation known as “Savasana,” the instructor played a song called “Hare Ram” by Krishna Das. The main chorus of this song is, “I have found a way to live in the presence of the lord.” This one song in one class changed my life forever. I knew at that time that I needed to find a way to live in the presence of a higher power. I knew that would be the only thing that I could do to heal the emotional pain in my heart. I went on with my life by incorporating my spiritual inspiration in yoga. It was a long time before I realized that this was the path I had taken—not until one of my classmates pointed it out to me during a multicultural activity in my doctoral studies at Duquesne University.

In addition, I recently attended a class themed around the concept of “Hanuman.” The instructor shared an extremely condensed version of an ancient Sanskrit story concerning the generosity of the Hanuman. The class incorporated a framework of poses dedicated to replicating the actions of the Hanuman and his generosity. Participating in this class inspired me to try to make a small difference in the life of someone else who might be suffering. At school, I conducted a fundraiser for a family who was suffering from a significant tragedy. My school was able to donate several hundred dollars to this family, who ultimately benefitted from the inspirational platform provided in my yoga class.

The research literature has suggested that school counselors take measures to examine their own spiritual and religious identities in order to better assist their students in determining their own identities’ individuality (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). In addition, research has suggested the need for a school counseling model that encourages students to develop a sense of spirituality in the public school setting. It has also been suggested that the idea of a school counseling model that encourages spiritual development may help to mitigate the possible negative stressors that lead to counselor burnout (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). It has also been
noted that school counselors tend to be spiritual people. If school counselors are allowed to combine spirituality with their professional lives, such may provide the opportunity for school counselors to feel a sense of true connectedness to their work (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011).

**Self-Care**

As previously stated, very little research literature exists on self-care as it relates directly to school counselors. The lack of publication and attention given to self-care for school counselors in the research literature is inconsistent with the ASCA standards, which require school counselors to address issues that may result from a lack of proper self-care methods. The ASCA Ethical Standards address issues relating to this matter in “Section E. Responsibilities to Self” and “Subsection E.1. Professional Competence”:

b. Monitor emotional and physical health and practice wellness to ensure optimal effectiveness. Seek physical or mental health referrals when needed to ensure competence at all times.

c. Monitor personal responsibility and recognize the high standard of care a professional in this critical position of trust must maintain on and off the job; be cognizant of and refrain from activity that may lead to inadequate professional services or diminish their effectiveness with school community members’ professional and personal growth, which are ongoing throughout the counselor’s career (ASCA, 2012).

The majority of published self-care research involves mental health professionals, including therapists working in clinical settings, social workers, and trauma counselors. However, the recognized risk factors for burnout and compassion fatigue are relevant and present in the school counseling profession. This lack of published research on school counselor self-care is concerning when considering the well-being and longevity of the school counseling
profession, and it serves as a catalyst for this study. Additionally, very little research exists on the efficacy of self-care methods.

**Self-Care within the Context of Wellness and Impairment**

The counselor is the vehicle through which therapeutic work is accomplished and the counselor’s wellness provides the foundation for this work (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007). The concept of wellness can be described as the “condition of good emotional, mental, and physical health, specifically when maintained by an appropriate diet, exercise, and other lifestyle changes” (*American Heritage Medical Dictionary*, 2007). Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000) defined wellness from a counseling perspective as “a way of life geared toward ideal health and well-being, in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live life more fully within the human and natural community. Wellness can be considered the ideal state of health and well-being that an individual is capable of achieving” (p. 252). Self-care is any activity of an individual or group with the intention of increasing or restoring health, or treating or preventing disease (*American Heritage Medical Dictionary*, 2007). Counselor wellness is essential for a successful helping relationship because it allows the counselor to possess an empathic understanding and positions the counselor to be a healthy model of behavior and emotional expression (Cavanagh & Levitov, 2002). Consistent with the concepts of self-care and wellness used with clients, counselors should maintain positive mental and physical health (O'Donnell, 1988).

The value of understanding counselor wellness has gained greater attention in professional mental health associations as it has progressed from identifying and responding to counselor impairment to promoting wellness as a preventative measure (Barnett & Cooper, 2009). Wellness includes “making choices to create and maintain balance and to prioritize health
of mind, body, and spirit” (Venart et al., 2007, p. 50). Unlike the medical model, the holistic wellness model emphasizes a positive view of human nature and encourages awareness and prevention rather than simply focusing on the treatment of symptoms and disorders when they are present (Lawson & Myers, 2011; Myers & Sweeney, 2008). This is also true regarding the role of self-care in enhancing holistic wellness and preventing counselor impairment.

It has been suggested that counselors should follow the same self-care methods that they present to clients in order to enhance wellness and become personally familiar with the values they advocate (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Skovholt et al., 2001). Because counselor self-care behaviors offer a healthy model for clients, counselors who work when noticeably tired or physically ill “send a message to clients that one’s personal wellness is less important than attending to the needs of others” (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007, p. 50). Furthermore, counselors and mental health professionals benefit from practicing self-care to act as a preventative measure against the negative costs of caring (Barnett & Cooper, 2009; Killian, 2008; Mahoney, 1997). The idea of enhancing wellness in all domains is designed to protect against impairment, and it is vital that counselors adopt a preventive rather reactive approach (Barnett & Cooper, 2009; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Coping is a reaction to stress, whereas self-care is an ongoing proactive practice to prevent impairment. Overall, it is self-care that is most valuable in diffusing distress and preventing counselor impairment (Smith & Moss, 2009).

**Self-Care in the Context of Professional Ethics**

The literature includes the recognition that impaired counselors are more likely to harm clients (Lawson, Venart, Hazler, & Kottler, 2007). The causes of impairment may be preventable if counselors monitor their own vulnerability and employ self-care methods (Figley, 1995;
Killian, 2008). Counselors are at greater risk for developing mental and emotional disorders than the general population and are susceptible to the effects of distress, which, if left unaddressed, may lead to the unethical practices characteristic of impaired professional competence (Barnett & Cooper, 2009; Lawson & Venart, 2005). Such unethical behaviors may include, but are not limited to, breaches of client confidentiality, inappropriate dual relationships, and practicing outside one’s area of competence (Thomas & Levitt, 2010). Therefore, counselor self-care is a serious ethical issue in that the absence of the counselor’s well-being may adversely affect the quality of care given to clients (Barnett, Johnston, & Hilliard, 2006; Norcross, 2000; Norcross, Guy, & Laidig, 2007). The ACA Code of Ethics (2005) set forth the following principles that define ethical behavior and best practices of association members in regard to effectiveness, impairment, self-care, well-being, and non-maleficence:

Section A.4.a., Avoiding Harm: Counselors act to avoid harming their clients, trainees, and research participants and to minimize or to remedy unavoidable or unanticipated harm. (p. 4)

Section C., Professional Responsibility: Counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities. (p. 9)

Section C.2.d., Monitor Effectiveness: Counselors continuously monitor their effectiveness as professionals and take steps to improve when necessary. (p. 9)

Section C.2.g., Impairment: Counselors are alert to the signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering to provide professional services when such impairment is likely to harm a client or others. (p. 9)
In addition to self-awareness, counselors are encouraged to seek assistance in resolving issues and if necessary to “limit, suspend, or terminate their professional responsibilities until such time it is determined that they may safely resume their work” (A.11.b., F.8.b.). Counselors are also tasked with safeguarding the profession by identifying colleagues who suffer from professional impairment and intervening appropriately.

Munroe (1999) stated that counselors have an ethical duty to recognize their responsibility for regular self-care and that well-being should be a priority of all practicing counselors. As the ethical standards suggest, well-being and self-care are to be under continuous self-evaluation by the counselor to determine if services are delivered according to the standards of the profession. The ability to assess one’s own well-being is a key component of one’s self-care practice as they go hand in hand (Edmonson, 2009). Unfortunately, there is a lack of training in self-care as it relates to counselor ethics, as well as little instruction in self-care awareness or self-assessment regarding these topics (Culver, 2011).

Self-Care in Training and Education

Training in self-care, especially for new counselors, is important preparation for the risks of counseling, including stress leading to burnout or impairment (Sommer, 2008). The CACREP standards include information about counselor well-being. For example, Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice Standard II G.1.d. states that “counselors should receive training in…self-care strategies appropriate to the counselor role” (p. 10). Although self-care is emphasized within the curriculum of CACREP accredited programs and included in the ACA Code of Ethics (2005), there is little empirical evidence regarding training provided to counselors about self-care or regarding which strategies are being used by counselors, or which strategies are perceived to be the most effective when implemented (Culver, 2011).
It has been suggested that a possible reason for the lack of research in regard to counselor self-care is that self-care itself is neglected by individual counselors as well as by organizations and institutions in their training on what practices to emphasize (Figley, 2002; Norcross, 2000). Because training is necessary for practicing any counseling skill, it is reasonable to suggest that a lack in self-care training plays a role in the observed chronic lack of self-care (Figley, 1995).

Skovholt, Grier, and Hanson (2001) described traditional counselor education as “other-focused,” pointing out minimal instruction on how counselors develop a focus on their own well-being. Additionally, they proposed a developmental framework for self-care throughout a counselor’s career. Skovholt et al. (2001) emphasized the need for balance between work and life, and self-care and other-care, in order to maintain professional vitality and avoiding working while depleted and exhausted.

In 2006 the APA Advisory Committee on Colleague Assistance (ACCA) conducted an investigation of stressors that graduate students face during clinical training, along with training programs offered to promote self-care and mitigate stress in students (Munsey, 2006). Approximately 500 graduate students were recruited from a professional listserv, with 77% of the sample being counseling students in doctoral programs. In this investigation, 83% of the students stated that educational material on stress and self-care was not made available through their training program. Additionally, 63% stated that their training program did not support self-care activities, and 59% indicated that their program did not encourage or promote an atmosphere of self-care (Munsey, 2006).

The results of the 2006 study led the ACCA to conclude that training programs could begin with initiatives to address problems that contribute to stress, such as lack of clear communication regarding school policies, minimal supervision and guidance, inconsistent
faculty grading and workload expectations, and a lack of mentoring (Munsey, 2006). They also encouraged students to learn to deal effectively with stress during graduate school before they enter the profession. Munsey outlined strategies given by the committee for students to take better care of themselves. Students were encouraged to practice self-care, foster self-awareness, foster change, seek early intervention for impairment, and develop realistic strategies for support (Munsey, 2006). Munsey did not include recommendations for how counselor education programs might incorporate self-care in clinical training beyond reminding students of the importance of sleep, nutrition, exercise, interests and relationships outside of training programs, and setting clear boundaries.

**Yoga-Related Research**

Yoga is an ancient system of Indian philosophy rooted in the practice of specific poses, breathing techniques, concentration, and meditation techniques. In present-day Western culture, yoga has become a popular mind-body approach used to reduce stress and improve physical well-being. Yoga is a practical philosophy that involves every aspect of a person’s being: physical, psychological, and spiritual (Iyengar, 2003). The word *yoga* translates from “Sanskrit to English as to yoke, reflecting its purpose in joining the mind and body in harmonious relaxation” (Dey, Barrett, & Yuan, 2003, p. 172).

The most commonly practiced style of yoga in North America is Hatha yoga, whose goal is to establish a physical and emotional balance between body and mind (Dey et al., 2003). Iyengar is known for creating Iyengar yoga, which is a popular branch of Hatha yoga that emphasizes the “technical alignment” of the body (Riley, 2004, p. 21). Iyengar also is known as an advocate for the practice of yoga “as a form of health care throughout the world” (Austin & Laeng, 2003, p. 284). Ashtanga and Viniyoga yoga are also common types of Hatha yoga and
focus on movement between postures (Riley, 2004). Although there are several styles of Hatha yoga, a modern practice includes focused breath work; a series of standing, seated, and balancing postures, including twists and backbends or inversions; and a relaxation or meditation posture (Austin & Laeng, 2003).

**Benefits of Yoga**

The Western world now considers the ancient practice of yoga to be a holistic approach to healing, as it is classified by the Institute of Health as a form of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (Woodyard, 2011). The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) has stated that yoga can have a positive impact on areas of mental and physical health (NIMH, 2005). Because yoga is considered a mind-body wellness approach, its benefits are present in educational, medical, mental health, and rehabilitative research.

Research has pointed out that movement-based yoga interventions are related to improvements in cardiovascular health, as well as immune system functioning (Singh, Malhotra, Singh, Madu, & Tandon, 2004). In addition, meditation exercises adopted from yoga practices have been found to be an effective intervention for stress management, as well as anxiety-related symptoms and improved coping skills (Shannahoff-Khalsa, 1999; Waelde, Thompson, & Gallagher-Thompson, 2004). Research also notes that regulated breathing exercises, such as those used in Kundalini Yoga, have been implemented in the treatment programs for obsessive compulsive disorder, gastrointestinal disorders and integrated cancer therapies (Shannahoff-Khalsa, 2003).

Many stroke rehabilitation programs offer yoga as an option to patients. Additionally, yoga is included as a therapeutic intervention in a number of rehabilitation medicine contexts. Yoga and mindfulness are often thought of as a main form of alternative medicine therapy.
(Lazaridou, Philbrook, & Tzika, 2013) Finally, regular yoga practice has led to decreased anxiety and depression (Pilkington et al., 2005) and improved concentration (Woolery, 2004).

**Yoga and Mental Health**

The idea of a yogic discipline is the knowledge of the *delicate elements*, which are characteristics of the human personality and the ability to control them in a gentle way. It is argued that in the absence of this discipline, one will always remain in a search for happiness with a persistent sense of emptiness inside and a feeling of an unfulfilling life. Practicing yoga is said to cultivate physical and emotional self-discipline in a way that encourages the mind and body to work in perfect synergy (Lazaridou, Philbrook, & Tzika, 2013). Yoga has been considered an individual treatment for stress reduction and the overall improvement of well-being. Additionally, the regular practice of yoga has been said to support traits of friendliness, compassion, and better self-control, while developing a sense of calmness and well-being. Continued practice also leads to such outcomes as changes in life perspective, self-awareness, and an improved sense of energy, which leads to an improved quality of life (Woodyard, 2011).

Research concentrating specifically on the breath component of yoga has suggested that symptoms of anxiety can be reduced (Descilo et al., 2010; Khalsa et al., 2009; Kozasa et al., 2008; Telles et al., 2010). In addition, Kozasa et al. (2008) found that after one month of practicing breath work and meditation, study participants experienced significant decreases in both state and trait anxiety scores. Khalsa et al. (2009) found that after practicing yoga for two months, participants reported an increase in self-confidence and clarity, as well as a decrease in fatigue and musical performance tension and anxiety. The physical and cognitive symptoms associated with musical performance anxiety decreased owing to the use of yoga as an intervention, primarily the breathing techniques (Khalsa et al., 2009). Telles et al. (2010)
researched the effects of yoga breathing practices on anxiety and observed that there was an increase in feelings of anxiety among participants who did not participate in the yoga practice. In the same year, Descilo et al. (2010) found that yoga breath work was an effective measure in lessening the symptoms of depression and anxiety, mainly posttraumatic stress disorder.

Khalsa (2009) conducted a study using yoga as a therapeutic intervention in which the participants were young musicians with performance anxiety. The young musicians attended three yoga classes per week for 8 weeks. It was found that physical changes occurred among participants who practiced yoga over the 2-month period. The significant changes include improved physical strength, increased flexibility, and reduced physical tension in young musicians with performance anxiety, regardless of the physical intensity of the actual practice (Khalsa et al., 2009). Additionally, it was found that state and trait anxiety scores decreased significantly in 30–40-year-old women who practiced yoga twice a week for 2 months. Javnbakht credits the decrease in anxiety scores to the learned ability to increase body awareness and promote a sense of confidence and control over the body (Javnbakht, Kenari, & Ghasemi, 2009).

A combination of both physically practicing yoga and learning yoga theory have been empirically supported to be effective in reducing stress and symptoms of anxiety (Khalsa et al., 2009; Telles et al., 2009). Learning yoga theory can be interpreted as gaining an understanding of yoga philosophy and its principles. Khalsa’s 2009 study involved two groups. The first group participated in yoga classes while the second group practiced yoga and learned yoga theory. Both groups indicated decreased stress and performance anxiety (Khalsa et al., 2009). While Telles (2009) found similar results in a study that included two groups, one group practiced yoga and the other group viewed a video on yoga theory. All participants reported a decrease in anxiety;
however, participants who completed the 2-hour yoga sessions reported a more significant decrease in anxiety symptoms (14.7%) than participants who watched the video report (3.4%; Telles et al., 2009). When yoga was compared to traditional relaxation methods intended reduce anxiety yoga was recognized to be equally “as effective as relaxation with reducing stress and anxiety” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 81). Smith et al. (2007) also stated that yoga can be a safe way for people to assist themselves in managing symptoms related to anxiety and stress (p. 137).

**Yoga and Children**

Children today have been described as anxious, inactive, and malnourished (Galantino, Galbavy & Quinn, 2008). This characterization would suggest the necessity of interventions that will that improve both the physical and psychosocial domains; hence, the use of mind-body techniques. A recent study found that the body and emotional state are directly associated: if the body is relaxed in the mind will also be in a state of relaxation (Galantino, Galbavy, & Quinn, 2008). Conversely, stress creates a state of physical and mental tension. Yoga is considered by many a “mind-body medicine.” Parshad’s (2004) study found several physical benefits of practicing yoga, including improvements in muscle strength, blood circulation, oxygen uptake, and hormone function. It was also discovered that relaxation, which can occur during the meditative portion of yoga, helps to stabilize the autonomic nervous system, encouraging parasympathetic dominance (Parshad, 2004). Additionally, Parshad has stated that individuals who practice yoga are more likely to be resilient in stressful situations that could produce negative physical consequences. Ultimately, practicing yoga can reduce a variety of detrimental risk factors for various diseases—for example, cardio respiratory disease (Galantino, Galbavy, & Quinn, 2008). Parshad’s research also allows one to infer that regular practice of yoga can be considered a protective factor.
To assess yoga as a factor in memory and recall, performance scores of children ages 11 through 16 in verbal and spatial memory tests were compared for three groups. All groups comprised 30 participants. One group attended a yoga camp while the other group attended a fine arts camp, and the third was a control group that received no intervention. Both groups were evaluated on the memory tasks initially and after ten days. It was found that the yoga group showed a significant increase (43%) in spatial memory scores, whereas the fine arts and control groups showed no change (Manjunath & Telles, 2004). The results indicated that practicing yoga improves delayed recall of spatial information (Manjunath & Telles, 2004).

Yoga has had a positive effect on the motor performance of typically developing children. It has been found that yoga leads to a decrease in visual reaction time and auditory reaction in healthy school-aged boys (Bhavanani, Madanmohan, & Udupa, 2003). This study indicated a potential improvement sensory-motor performance and enhanced processing ability of the Central Nervous System (CNS). Another study indicated trends of improved planning and execution times in a group of students practicing yoga (Manjunath & Telles, 2004). Motor speed is similar to reaction time because it also considered quantification of CNS processing (Galantino, Galbavy, & Quinn, 2008). To measure motor speed in children and adults, Dash and Telles (1999) examined the effects of yoga training through a finger-tapping activity. A control group was used which consisted of 38 children and adults who did not participate in the yoga training (Galantino, Galbavy, & Quinn, 2008). After 10 days, significant results were found within the reaction time of adults who participated in the yoga training, whereas the children’s group showed significant results after 30 days of yoga training (Dash & Telles, 1999).

Yoga has also found to improve balance in children. Two groups of 45 children, ages 9 to 13, were assessed on a steadiness test at the beginning and again at the end of a 10-day period
during which one group received training in yoga, while the other group did not. After 10 days, the yoga group showed a significant decrease in balance errors, whereas the control group showed no change (Manjunath & Telles, 2004).

The 2003 “Yoga Ed” study was conducted in an inner city public charter school in California. The study found that participation in regular yoga classes helped to improve several outcome measured variables. The findings of the study included an improvement in students’ self-esteem levels, a decrease in discipline referrals, and improved school performance among students participating in yoga classes (Slovacek et al., 2003).

The Yoga Ed study specifically examined students’ attitudes toward themselves through pre- and post-test questionnaires, which showed a significant improvement in their attitude toward self (Slovacek, et. al, 2003). Additionally, the pre- and post-test results of students not participating in the program illustrated no change.

The Yoga Ed study also found correlational results indicating that yoga participation helped improve student behavior. The data in the study showed that significant negative correlations exist between student yoga participation and disciplinary actions. Therefore, students who had high rates of participation in the Yoga Ed program had fewer office disciplinary referrals (Slovacek et al., 2003). Class participation was also examined in the Yoga Ed study. When yoga participation and grades were compared, the result indicated a positive correlation (Slovacek et al., 2003).

A pilot study (Berger, Silver, & Stein, 2009) was conducted to examine the effects of yoga on the well-being of children. The study compared children in grades 4 and 5 at two separate after-school programs in New York City. One of the after-school programs offered yoga 1 hour per week for 12 weeks, and the other program did not involve yoga (Berger, Silver &
Stein, 2009). The researchers used pre-intervention and post-intervention data collection methods to measure emotional well-being. It was found that the majority of children participating in yoga reported an improvement in well-being. This study also indicated that children participating in yoga reported using fewer negative behaviors in response to stress and had better balance than the comparison group (Berger, Silver & Stein, 2009). Improvements in well-being, specifically in behaviors directly targeted by the yoga program, were reported in the study. The results found in this study suggest the use of yoga as a preventive intervention, as well as a method for improving children's perceived well-being (Berger, Silver & Stein, 2009).

In previous years, the introduction of yoga into public school systems has sparked controversy. In 2013, Yahoo News featured a story on two families who filed a lawsuit against Encinitas Union School District in California, based on the school’s yoga program. The case became known as Sedlock v. Baird. The families that claimed the school yoga program promoted Hinduism, though the district discouraged any display of Christianity. The trial court determined that the Encinitas Union School District’s yoga program did not violate student and family religious rights. The San Diego Superior Court recognized that

the yoga program was not an establishment of religion, in violation of the California Constitution, because the program was secular in purpose, did not have the primary effect of advancing or inhibiting religion, and did not excessively entangle the school district in religion. A yoga program that merely combines physical poses with breathing and quiet contemplation does not comport with any definition of religious activity (Sedlock v. Baird, 2015).

In April 2015, the 4th District Court of Appeals decided to uphold the San Diego Superior Court decision stating that the yoga program at Encinitas Union School District is
“devoid of any religious, mystical, or spiritual trappings.” In the Los Angeles Times, school superintendent Tim Baird indicated that the program was designed to teach students the benefit of exercise and healthy eating. Baird also stated, "We are not teaching religion, we are not instructing anyone in religious dogma. Yoga is very mainstream." Further legal opinions from this case have pointed out that the Encinitas Union School District can be used as an example for properly implementing a yoga program in a public school system.

Empirical research has suggested that yoga can be a safe and effective method for improving the quality of life in both children and adults. Additionally, yoga is already being implemented in several public and private schools throughout the United States. As an advocate for healthy lifestyle and emotional management skills, a school counselor could incorporate the principles of yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. This research could also be valuable to counselors and mental health professionals in potentially establishing complementary programs such as therapeutic yoga. A school counseling program has the potential to be developed around mindfulness theory. One example of a school counseling program designed around mindfulness theory is the Integral Model for school counseling.

**Integral Model for School Counseling**

In 1995, Ken Wilber introduced the Integral Model, which he states was derived primarily from Kohlberg’s theory of the Stages of Moral Development. The premise of the integral model is to merge the body, mind, soul, and spirit in self, culture, and nature (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). The integral model places an emphasis on integrating the “multiple faces of reality or truth” (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). The focus considering the many truths allows for an ultimate whole truth to be framed. Additionally, Ingersoll suggests that society often “overspecializes,” focusing on one truth to explain a problem while overlooking the multiple
truths that may exist and contribute to the problem. David Forbes has described integral school
counseling as “helping a student move toward full-development or awareness; this includes
quality of compassion toward others” (Forbes, 2003).

Ingersoll and Bauer (2004) explain the integral model through four perspectives of truth.
Additionally, suggestions are included as to how the integral model can be employed in school
counseling. Although the four perspectives emphasize considering truths from each perspective,
it is crucial that all perspectives are considered and not just one when establishing a universal
truth (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). The four perspectives on truth in the integral model are
behavior, intrapsychic, social, and cultural.

The behavioral perspective examines objective facts about individuals (Ingersoll &
Bauer, 2004), taking its cue from the medical or disease model. Objective facts are gathered
through observation, without the student or client engaging in dialogue. For example, if a school
counselor were observing a student’s off-task behavior, the counselor would ask how that student
acts or behaves when off task? The behavioral perspective also encourages school counselors to
observe students and colleagues for spiritual wellness. From these observations, school
counselors can determine the objective characteristics of a spiritually well person. From this
determination of a spiritually-well person, the counselor should incorporate these characteristics
into his or her own practice (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). Essentially, if the school counselor is
going to expect that spiritual wellness is going to be infused as a facet of the guidance program
he or she should “walk the walk” and behave in a way which is perceived to be spiritually well
(Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004).

Furthermore, the integral model supports the idea of school counselors’ providing
students with access to information about spiritual wellness. Ingersoll and Bauer (2004) suggest
that school counselors work with students on issues of hope, forgiveness, compassion, and purpose. Compassion and life purpose are directly related to the tenants of yoga and students can incorporate these concepts into their lives through regular yoga practice or meditation. Although not yet studied in children, the regular practice of yoga has been found to increase compassion in adults, whereas meditation and mindfulness training in children has shown a multitude of results in decreasing problematic and self-destructive behavior. Ingersoll (2004) goes on to point out that many of the ASCA standards for developing the self-concept align with elements of spiritual wellness.

The ASCA suggests that school counseling programs provide activities that allow students to gain self-knowledge by identifying and expressing feelings, using effective communication skills, applying self-knowledge through identifying long- and short-term goals, and knowing how to apply conflict resolution skills.

The second perspective of truth mentioned in the integral model for school counseling is intrapsychic. The intrapsychic perspective on spiritual wellness focuses on actual counseling in which the school counselor will use discussion to generate thoughts, attitudes, and feelings (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). The intrapsychic perspective emphasizes obtaining an “affective education.” In work focusing on the intrapsychic perspective, students should be encouraged to use “I” language and discover what it is that they hold sacred in life (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). Ingersoll and Bauer point out that in order for feelings and thoughts to be expressed freely, a feeling of safety must exist within the setting. Activities that help thoughts and attitudes come to fruition can also include classroom guidance lessons, mentoring, and small group counseling sessions. Ingersoll also suggests that school counselors keep cross-cultural language in mind when facilitating these types of discussions (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). Regularly practicing yoga
can allow students to feel a sense of connectedness to the school environment as well as a sense of vulnerability that may allow feelings and thoughts to come to fruition. Additionally, yoga allows students to be exposed to thought-provoking activities that may lead to a discovery of what they hold sacred. Finally, through the regular practice of yoga, students will gain exposure to a diverse activity that has the potential to promote a culturally diverse education.

The third perspective of the integral model of spiritual wellness for school counseling is the social perspective, which focuses on social situations that may impart truths about individuals (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). The social perspective promotes the consideration of objective facts in their context in order to establish a universal truth (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). Using this perspective, one can examine existing social structures, understanding them as truths in order to discover how they might be contributing to the overall truth of an individual. For example, the social perspective assesses how rules and laws may affect humans. Additionally, constructs in one’s life can be considered through the social perspective, including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language structure, cultural norms, and societal expectations. It is through the third perspective that school counselors can delicately honor the separation between church and state and ensure that spirituality and yoga, rather than constituting an attempt to infuse religion into education, are an attempt to examine a situation in its entirety in order to design activities to foster the development of healthy, productive members of society.

The cultural perspective is the fourth and final lens through which one should examine truth in the integral model for school counseling. The cultural perspective focuses on depicting how individuals fit into larger social structures. This perspective encourages school counselors to formulate activities that would allow students to decide if a certain social structure is a desirable place for them to attempt to fit in. Additionally, implementation of the cultural perspective
suggests that counselors can lead students in exploring different cultural settings and opportunities. Finally, school counselors should be conscientious in promoting spiritual wellness that is broad enough to incorporate the values of the entire student body and staff in the school.

Through implementing the integral model for school counseling, there is plenty of opportunity for yoga practice, meditation, and mindfulness activities. The integral model focuses on understanding each truth about a student versus providing services for the sake of collecting data. This model also supports services that foster students’ individuality. Additionally, the integral model for school counseling encourages an inward process of self-discovery, which appears to align directly with person-centered therapy.

**Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of school counselors who participate in yoga. The selected theoretical approaches for this study included van Manen’s four existentials, Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological model of human development, and mindfulness theory. These theories serve as a structural guide for helping to understand school counselors’ lived experiences with yoga.

**The Bioecological Model for Human Development**

Prior to Bronfenbrenner’s work in the late 1970s, the majority of psychological research literature was conducted in laboratory settings; because of this, there were few insights on how the environment might influence human development (Gauvain & Cole, 2004). The bioecological systems theory is concerned with ecology, the branch of biology which focuses on the interrelationship of organisms with their environment. Bronfenbrenner’s model is concerned with subsystems within one’s ecological position (Gauvain & Cole, 2004).
Bronfenbrenner established a bioecological model for human development, which looks at the lifelong course of human development and the unique environments in which individuals live. The bioecological model also concentrates on how an individual’s sub-systems may interact with or influence each other. Often, Bronfenbrenner’s model, consisting of layers of sub-systems, has been compared to the layers of an onion; they are interconnected, influencing each other’s patterns (Gauvain & Cole, 2004).

The sub-systems within Bronfenbrenner’s model include five layers: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Gauvain & Cole, 2004). The microsystem is considered the most immediate, proximal layer of the human development sub-systems. The microsystem often consists of the very unique internal interactions that occur in an individual. The environments within which the microsystem may occur include family, school, and classroom experiences (Gauvain & Cole, 2004). The mesosystem is designed to illustrate the interactions that occur between the microsystem and the exosystem, whereas the exosystem encompasses any external factor that may influence the development of a child. For example, a parent’s workplace is often considered a factor within the exosystem (Gauvain & Cole, 2004). The macrosystem involves the influence of culture, the economy, customs, and knowledge on human development.

The bioecological model consists of two general propositions that are imperative to the model. The first proposition suggests that human development is a reciprocal interaction between the environment and an active evolving, biopsychosocial human organism or person. In order for the interaction to be effective, it must occur regularly (Gauvain & Cole, 2004). Therefore, the activity can be considered a proximal process. For example, in order for a relaxation technique such as yoga to be effective in reducing stress in children, it should occur weekly.
The second proposition necessary for the success of the bioecological model states that a threefold interrelationship of dynamic forces must occur. The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes that influence development change because of the joint action of the following factors: the characteristics of the developing individual, the environment (both immediate and remote) where the processes are occurring, the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration, and the social changes occurring over time through the life span and historical time period of the individual (Gauvain & Cole, 2004).

The bioecological theory of human development helps in understanding the operationalization of environmental forces and personal traits that influence human development (Sontag, 1996). Human growth does not happen in an empty space (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Examining the behaviors of humans, their interactions with others, and their environments would not be sufficient for comprehending all of the dynamics that contribute to their development throughout life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The bioecological theory allows for a comprehensive perspective of human development because it considers both the intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics that contribute to understanding individuals, their interactions with people, and their situations in their immediate and distant environments. The bioecological perspective does not assume a singular view of human growth, nor does it consider a person’s growing capacities and the environment’s influence as individualized items (Sontag, 1996). Environments that extend beyond the family are said to be the most critical elements that can disrupt the family system as it relates to a person’s growth throughout life (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Essentially, a linear model has weaknesses in examining the complicated dynamics of human development (Sontag, 1996). The ecological context of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory surpasses this weakness, as this theory illustrates the multitude of critical factors that influence a person’s development.
Risk Factors and Protective Factors

Risk factors can be described as conditions associated with a higher likelihood of negative or undesirable outcomes. Recognized undesirable outcomes are increased morbidity and mortality, substance abuse, and behaviors that can compromise health and social well-being (Jessor et al., 1995). In empirical research among children, low expectations for success, low self-esteem, hopelessness about life, and poor school achievement are considered risk factors (Jessor et al., 1995).

Protective factors are those that enable a person to proceed with caution or maintain control over a presented risk (Jessor, Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995). Individual strengths that are developed over time and that serve as support in dealing with barriers to success are considered internal protective factors (Smith, 2006). For children, social and emotional competence is considered an internal protective factor. External protective factors for children are often their network of support, including family, teachers, friends, and role models. Protective factors serve as defenses against risk factors that protect people from difficulties, and promote resiliency (Gilgun, 1996). As previously stated in the research, practicing yoga has demonstrated physical and emotional benefits. These empirical findings substantiate the idea that yoga can have a positive impact on self-esteem ultimately, allowing yoga for children to be considered a protective factor. The flexibility of yoga allows it to be tailored to fostering developmental, preventative, therapeutic, and or transformational goals (Hart, 2008).
**Mindfulness Theory**

Yoga has been identified as the main practice for the development of mindfulness (Lazaridou, Philbrook, & Tzika, 2013). Mindfulness is described as a self-regulation practice that emphasizes developing attention and awareness to achieve a mental process that reinforces mental health, well-being, and mental stability (Lazaridou, Philbrook, & Tzika, 2013). Mindfulness, which refers to the ability to maintain complete attention to the present with a non-judgmental stance (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010), has been widely integrated into positive psychology and educational and counseling interventions. This concept has become relevant in the research literature as a behavioral intervention, because empirical findings have indicated that children with competent social and emotional skills demonstrate resiliency when confronted with stressful situations (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

Like yoga, the idea of mindfulness originates from Buddhist teachings. Mindfulness is often carried out through Eastern practices such as meditation (Hooker & Foder, 2008). It is quite possible for one to become more relaxed physically and mentally as a result of practicing mindfulness. However, its goal differs from that of meditation, which is relaxation, isolation, or higher consciousness. Mindfulness emphasizes awareness of the present moment and encourages one to become not more relaxed but more aware and accepting of our current state of mind and body. Becoming more aware can be accomplished through such activities as mindful eating, mindful walking, mindful driving, or any other life experiences (Hooker & Foder, 2008). Current research recognizes that the majority of mindfulness interventions have focused on studying adults (Hooker & Foder, 2008). Thus, we look next at some of the interventions used in mindfulness training.
Baer (2003) has provided a thorough overview of several interventions for mindfulness training, the most common being mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). MBSR began in a behavioral medicine setting as an intervention for patients dealing with chronic pain and stress disorders. MBSR is an 8–10 week program that consists of 2–2.5 hours of mindfulness instruction and practice of meditation skills. MBSR also includes discussion sessions that are focused on coping with stress as well as homework assignments Baer noted that usually, during the 6th week of the program, a 7–8 hour session is held, which includes a 45-minute body scan. The body scan is a mindfulness activity during which participants lie on the floor with eyes closed. The purpose of the body scan is for participants to practice paying mindful attention to the body in a non-judgmental manner. Additionally, during this session, Hatha yoga postures are introduced to teach mindfulness of physical senses during light movements and stretching. During MBSR, participants also practice mindfulness techniques while completing daily activities, such as walking, driving and eating (Baer, 2003). Mindfulness techniques taught in MBSR instruct participants to maintain attention on the target of the observation and be cognizant of it in each moment. During mindfulness exercises, participants are taught to acknowledge thoughts that may interrupt or pull attention away from the observation. During this process, participants should label thoughts and acknowledge their presence but allow themselves to move away from the distraction. This process allows for participants to realize that interruptions and distractions are just “passing through” (Baer, 2003).

Mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT) as an intervention has been used to treat depression in adults. Researchers have suggested that attentional control skills taught in mindfulness training could prevent a relapse into major depressive episodes (Teasdale, Segal, & Williams, 1995). MBCT is an 8-week group program that is based on MBSR strategies as well as
elements of cognitive behavioral therapy (Baer, 2003). MBCT focuses on incorporating a technique called “decentering,” which is similar to rationalizing and thought-restructuring. Decentering teaches participants that thoughts are not facts, and that one is not designed by one’s thoughts. MBCT is designed to teach depressive individuals to be aware of their thoughts in a non-judgmental fashion and to treat them as mental experiences that pass, not as defining characteristics (Baer, 2003).

Dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) is another intervention that incorporates mindfulness training. DBT has been considered a comprehensive approach to treating borderline personality disorder (Baer, 2003). A primary goal of (DBT) is acceptance and change. DBT mindfulness training sessions are structured in year-long weekly skills groups. During the year-long group training sessions, participants focus on interpersonal effectiveness, emotional regulation, and distress tolerance skills. DBT mindfulness training teaches participants to implement mindfulness “what and how skills.” The three mindfulness what skills are observe, describe, and participate, and the three mindfulness how skills are non-judgmentally, mindfully, and effectively (Baer, 2003). Participants using DBT can also work with individual therapists to determine goals and the applicability of mindfulness to their daily lives (Baer, 2003).

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) does not incorporate specific mindfulness training; however, its teachings strongly mirror mindfulness techniques (Bear, 2003). ACT originates from contemporary behavior analysis, and participants are taught to be cognizant of themselves in terms of emotions, thoughts, and bodily feelings. Additionally, ACT participants are taught to view their emotions in a non-judgmental manner. Specifically, ACT encourages participants to discontinue attempts to control change or manipulate thoughts rather than to acknowledge them in a non-judgmental manner.
Mindfulness training techniques are present as well in relapse prevention work. Individuals with a history of substance abuse who are experiencing urges to use often participate in relapse prevention programs. Mindfulness training techniques implemented in relapse prevention encourage participants accept the changes within their urges. Relapse prevention work attempts to help participants accept that their urges to use will be present and ever changing; thus, mindfulness techniques are useful in teaching such participants to be cognizant of the changing urges and to hang on for the ride (Bear, 2003).

**Conceptual Skills**

Kabat-Zinn (1982) argued that when participants with chronic pain complete MBSR programs, the mindfulness techniques provide a positive exposure to the pain. Traditionally, MBSR includes meditation, which often introduces an element of relaxation. During these activities, the still, seated postures can trigger pain and discomfort. This sequence provides a platform for mindfulness techniques to be implemented during stressful situations. During this process MBSR instructors encourage participants not to readjust their positions to release the pain, but instead to focus careful attention to the pain sensations and cognitions that occur. Participants are instructed to process these cognitions and sensations in a non-judgmental manner. It is suggested that the ability to acknowledge pain in a nonjudgmental manner can reduce the distress often associated with pain. Exposing participants to feelings of chronic pain can reduce an excessively emotional response, which mirrors a desensitization activity (Kabat-Zinn, 1982).

Mindfulness exposure techniques have also been suggested in treatment programs for individuals with anxiety and panic disorders. During mindfulness exposure exercises, participants are encouraged to withstand feelings and symptoms of anxiety without attempts to
divert their attention. Consistent with mindfulness training, acknowledging any feelings of anxiety and panic in a non-judgmental manner is emphasized. Mindfulness training for individuals with anxiety and panic symptoms does include inducing anxiety and panic; rather, it encourages the thoughts and symptoms to originate naturally (Bear, 2003).

The literature has also suggested that mindfulness exposure techniques may be useful in treatment for individuals who have borderline personality disorders (Linehan, 1993). People with this disorder are often described emotion phobic, which means that they are extremely fearful of experiencing negative emotions. Expressing emotions is often avoided because they tend to be very intense; however, such avoidance can lead to maladaptive behavior and other consequences (Linehan, 1993). Allowing individuals to experience extended thoughts and feelings that are typically avoided has been suggested as a mindfulness exposure technique. The hope is that through safely experiencing these thoughts and emotions, the individual’s ability to tolerate these thoughts will improve and more effective coping skills will be established (Linehan, 1993).

Research has suggested that mindfulness may be a catalyst for cognitive change because mindfulness may lead to changes in thought patterns. By observing their thoughts in a non-judgmental manner, mindfulness trainees have been able to recognize their thoughts as “just thoughts” and not truth or reality (Kabat & Zinn, 1982). Additionally, the idea of adding a descriptive label with thoughts allows participants to distinguish the difference between thoughts and reality. For example, feeling fearful does not mean that danger is pending, nor does stating “I am a failure” make it reality. Mindfulness techniques would encourage these thoughts to be restructured to appear as “I am feeling fearful” and “I feel like a failure.”

Teasdale (1999) and Teasdale et al. (1995) have suggested that mindfulness techniques may trigger cognitive change in individuals with major depressive episodes. Assuming a non-
judgmental and decentered view on one’s thoughts and emotions may influence rumination
thought patterns that are often associated with major depressive episodes (Baer, 2003). By
integrating mindfulness training techniques into treatment programs, individuals may learn to
recognize depressive thought patterns and redirect their attention to the present moment, to
current activities such as breathing and walking while avoiding rumination on depressive
thoughts (Teasdale et al., 1995). It has also been noted that mindfulness cognitive skills are
sustainable, because they can be recalled and practiced at any time by a person who has
experienced or is experiencing depression.

The research literature has noted on several occasions that increased self-management
may result from mindfulness training, particularly in the development of coping skills. In
treatment programs for individuals with chronic pain, it has been found that an increased
awareness of pain sensations may promote the growth of additional coping skills that are not
necessarily part of the treatment program (Kabat & Zinn, 1982). It has also been suggested that
self-management skills may be beneficial to individuals with eating disorders, in particular those
who would have a tendency to binge eat. Through improved self-management mindfulness,
individuals may learn to recognize and suppress urges to binge eat when they are presented
(Kristeller & Hallett, 1999). Improved self-management skills have also been suggested as
beneficial to those at risk for potential relapse, including from addiction or major depressive
episodes (Kristeller & Hallett, 1999; Marlatt, 1994). Cultivating improved self-management
skills can allow people to take a non-judgmental position in observing their own behavior.
Through mindful processing of daily cognitive and emotional events, one can begin to recognize
consequences of learned maladaptive behavior (Linehan, 1993). For example, in processing
speeding when driving, one might think “I am a terrible driver.” After intentionally focusing
mindfully on the task of the present moment, one might realize that careless driving involves risks and choose to slow down (Baer, 2003).

The primary purpose of mindfulness training is for participants to learn to acknowledge the present situation with a non-judgmental perspective. Relaxation is not a primary goal but often a natural response to slowing down one’s thoughts (Baer, 2003). Mindfulness training has been suggested often for stressed-related medical disorders, including fibromyalgia and psoriasis, because the relaxation effect often found in mindfulness exercises can make stress-related medical disorders more manageable (Baer, 2003).

Acceptance has been considered one of the pillars of mindfulness theory (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Therapeutic interventions often direct individuals to change or modify behavior in attempt to avoid a catharsis of feeling or a larger scale emotional reaction, without accepting the feelings or the present situation. For example, a person who struggles with panic attacks might learn to accept that the attack will present itself in a safe manner. Additionally, people who experience heightened emotional episodes are susceptible to masking their symptoms with drugs and alcohol, whereas mindfulness-based approaches include the acceptance of emotions, pain, urges, and physical and cognitive sensations without an attempt to escape or avoid them (Baer, 2003).

Review of Empirical Findings of Mindfulness Based-Interventions

At least four published studies have addressed the effectiveness of mindfulness training for patients with chronic pain. The first study on mindfulness as an intervention for chronic pain was conducted by Kabat-Zinn in 1982. This study included a 10-week Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program that teaches chronic pain patients self-regulation skills. The study described pre and post data for 51 participants who had not found success with traditional medical care. Average age for the study participants was 46, and 35% of the participants were male. The
primary pain groupings were lower back, neck and shoulders, and headaches; however, facial pain, angina pectoris, non-coronary chest pain, and GI pain were also measured. After 10 weeks, 65% of the patients showed a reduction greater than or equal to 33% on the mean total Pain Rating Index while 50% showed a reduction of greater than or equal to 50%. Significant reductions in mood disturbance and psychiatric symptoms were also found.

Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, and Burney (1985) conducted a study wherein they administered a Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program to 90 chronic pain patients. Statistically significant reductions were found in measures of present-moment pain, negative body image, inhibition of activity by pain, symptoms, mood disturbance, and psychological symptomatology, including anxiety and depression. Pain-related drug use was found to decrease as activity levels and feelings of self-esteem increased. Follow-up studies were completed, which included evaluations of chronic pain patients who had completed MSBR in preceding years. The follow-up studies indicated that the reduction in anxiety levels was sustained over time. Empirical findings for chronic pain patients have consistently demonstrated statistically significant changes in ratings of pain, physical symptoms, and general mental health-related symptoms (Baer, 2003).

Kabat-Zinn et al. (1992) also studied patients with panic disorders and generalized anxiety disorders. The sample included 22 patients who practiced MBSR. Post-treatments and 3-month follow-up evaluations indicated significant improvement in depression and several measures of anxiety. A 3-year follow-up study of the same participants indicated that improvements in depression and anxiety were sustained over time.

The effects of MBSR were also examined with a sample of 18 female patients diagnosed with binge eating disorders. All patients included in the study recorded statistically significant improvements in multiple measures of eating habits and mood (Kristellar & Hallett, 1999).
Teasdale et al. (2000) studied the effects of MBCT on patients with major depressive disorder (MDD) patients in this study experienced remission from MDD after treatment with medication. This study included a large sample size; and 12 weeks prior to the study, all patients discontinued the use of medication for depression. This study included two randomly assigned groups, one of which included an 8-week manualized group treatment program while the other included treatment as usual (TAU), and were tracked for one year. Patients with a history of three or more previous depressive episodes showed much lower rates of relapse than did participants who completed the TAU program: 37% of the group who participated in the MBCT program relapsed, whereas 66% of the TAU group relapsed. It should be noted, however, that the MBCT and TAU groups did not show different results when examining participants with a history of only one or two major depressive episodes.

Williams et al. (2000) used subgroup participants from Teasdale et al. (2000) to examine MBCT and its effects on memory. Participants who completed MBCT had fewer general and more specific memories when asked to remember events from their past in response to cue words. This study suggests that mindfulness training may change the general autobiographical memory believed to be consistent of individuals with depression (Kuyken & Brewin, 1995).

Summary

Chapter 2 has provided an overview of the relevant literature within the topic of inquiry. This chapter presented the theoretical underpinnings of mindfulness theory, yoga literature, and human development literature. In addition, this chapter has presented literature relating to the role of the school counselor, school violence, self-care, compassion fatigue, and counselor burnout, all of which serves as a foundation for this research. Specifically, this study is an
exploration of the experiences of school counselors’ participation in yoga as a method of self-care.

The literature examined in this chapter supports the following arguments for this study:
(a) School counseling is an ever-evolving field, in which several job-related stressors are identified. (b) Self-care is an ethical responsibility for school counselors. (c) Individuals who practice yoga are more likely to be resilient to stressful situations that could produce negative physical consequences (Parshad, 2004). (d) Human development is a reciprocal interaction between an active evolving, biopsychosocial human, organism, person, or object. In order for the interaction to have effective impact it must occur on a regular basis (Gauvain & Cole, 2004). (e) Research literature has noted on several occasions that increased self-management may result from mindfulness training, particularly the development of coping skills (Kabat & Zinn, 1982).
Chapter III: Research Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to present the method used to investigate the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. In addition, this chapter explores the rationale behind this methodological choice. The theoretical perspective used to analyze and interpret the data in this study is also discussed.

Guiding Philosophy

Traditionally, social science research has involved two types of designs: quantitative or logical positivism, and qualitative or phenomenological research. Qualitative research is considered to be a naturalistic inquiry based upon its grounded assumptions. Tesch (1990) defined qualitative research by saying that “it is actually not a type of research, but the label for an entire knowledge producing paradigm” (p. 67). Glesne (2006) explained that the predispositions for positivist (quantitative) and post positivist (qualitative) inquiry are different because of their respective emphases upon basic assumptions, research purposes, research approaches, and researcher roles.

Levers et al. (2008) stated that qualitative research allows for knowledge acquisition in regard to aspects of human life that are not yet fully examined. Qualitative research strategies are regarded as being able to capture the essence of the lived experience; thus, it allows for the possibility of illuminating the intricacies of the human condition in ways that statistical measures cannot. Patton (1990) stressed the idea of a “paradigm of choices” that encourages “methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality” (p. 39). This approach has allowed for a “situational responsiveness” that strict adherence to one paradigm or another will not (Patton, 1990, p. 39). Each represents a fundamentally different inquiry paradigm, and researchers’ actions are based on the underlying assumptions of each
paradigm (Hoepfl, 1997). Additionally, Levers et al. (2008) emphasized the importance of congruence between the selected qualitative methodology and the theoretical framework for the research inquiry.

Because this study is for investigating the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga, a naturalistic inquiry allows for a holistic examination of the phenomenon. The nature of this inquiry begged for a qualitative research design because very little formal study has been done on the experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. Additionally, this study focuses on exploring the phenomena concerning how school counselors situate their descriptions of the experience.

Phenomenological research sets itself apart from other research methods because the goal is to capture the lived experiences of people in their textual expression. The manner in which human beings situate themselves in the world and their description of its meaning is considered the driving force behind phenomenological methods (van Manen, 1990). The philosophy of phenomenology came to fruition in the early 1700s, though Husserl is considered the founder of phenomenology. Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, as contemporary philosophers, have made notable contributions to phenomenological research methods. Phenomenology emphasizes language, symbols, and icons of lived experience; perception and experience are joined to make meaning of lived experience (van Manen, 1990).

In a qualitative analysis, the researcher serves as the human instrument of data collection, employing inductive data analysis to interpret and explore the meaning of the events as explained by the informants in the study. Qualitative research uses participants’ natural setting as the source of the data; and the researcher attempts to observe, describe, and interpret settings as they appear (Patton, 1990). Additionally, it is imperative for the researcher to display a consistent
sense of “empathic neutrality” (Patton, p. 55). Researchers often consider humans the “instruments of choice” for naturalist inquiries (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) because humans are affected by environmental cues and are able to interact with situations in which human emotions can evolve. Emotional reactions can expose the effect that the studied phenomena may have on a human being. Qualitative research encourages a unique and recursive process for data acquisition because human beings have the ability to collect several cues simultaneously. Additionally, human beings can perceive a situation holistically that allows for data to be processed immediately, and feedback can be provided to help clarify content. As needed experiences with the informants are probed further within the interview session, if unexpected or atypical responses are generated by way of clarifying and observing human reaction, such allows for accuracy in self-reporting by the informants.

As previously discussed, this study has used a phenomenologically-oriented method to explore the lived experiences of school counselors practicing yoga. In order to organize a phenomenologically based inquiry, this study has focused specifically on van Manen’s four lived existentials; lived space, lived time, lived body, and lived existential. The four lived existentials were selected for this study because they have been recognized as a means to ground most human “lifeworlds.” We turn next to the concept of the “lifeworld” and its relevance to this study.

**Lifeworld**

In order to gain a thick, rich, full perception of a phenomenon, the researcher must attempt to understand the lifeworld of the research participants as it they see it. The lifeworld concept was first propagated by Edmund Husserl, and it is phenomenological in nature (Seamon, 2012). The lifeworld can be described simply as everyday occurrences that humans take for
granted and that would normally go unnoticed. The activities in a human’s lifeworld are often disguised by a phenomenon. The lifeworld involves events that go without a real sense of purpose or direction and have been described as *simply there* (Seamon, 2012). The daily routines wherein much of the activity is normal and uneventful are considered part of one’s lifeworld. In my own lifeworld, an example could be my 30-minute commute to work every day, as Monday through Friday, I almost subconsciously take the same route to work. This route does not change; it occurs consistently without thought or intention until an unexpected event happens. In the example here, the unexpected event could be a flat tire, and at that time the lifeworld would be disrupted and a new event with a purpose introduced.

**Van Manen’s Four Lived Existentials**

Van Manen’s four lived existentials are also used in this study to elucidate the lifeworld of school counselors who participate in yoga. Van Manen designed this concept to classify human perceptions into distinct, recognizable categories. It has been argued that the four lived existentials are applicable to all persons, regardless of their personal, social, cultural, or historical situation (Seamon, 2012). Lived space is often considered the first of the four lived existentials. *Spatiality* or lived space can be described as the ways in which people experience places and environments (van Manen, 1990). The second lived existential is “lived body” or *corporeality*. The concept of lived body takes into account perspectives that illustrate the involvement of the human body as described in an experience. For example in a qualitative interview one might point out, “Yoga can physically fatigue the body.” This description would allow us to understand one’s perception on yoga and its perceived effect on the body—that is, yoga as it relates to the body. The third existential is lived time or *temporality*, which illuminates perspectives as they relate to time. Van Manen’s fourth lived existential is “lived others,” or *relationality*. This fourth
lived existential refers to the lived relationships or connections maintained by human beings (van Manen, 1990).

**Sample**

Purposeful sampling was used to select school counselors as participants for this study. According to Patton (2002), “random probability samples cannot accomplish what in-depth, purposeful samples accomplish” (p. 245). A goal of the researcher was to choose participants carefully who can provide in-depth descriptions of the experiences as school counselors participating in yoga. Patton (2002) also stated that “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 244). However, the sample depends primarily on the purpose of the study, the goal of the researcher, the usefulness and credibility, and the availability of time and resources (Patton, 2002).

The sample was obtained in collaboration with the American School Counselors Association. A request for participation was posted on ASCA Scene, which is an information sharing tool for members. In addition, the snowballing method was used to garner interest in the study and to gain participants.

Ideally, this study aimed to include school counselors working in urban high schools, because they are at the greatest risk for burnout. Furthermore, this study attempted to include participants who have had several years of experience practicing yoga. The desire to include experienced practitioners added an element of informed detail, which probably would not exist in interviews with novice yogis. Additionally, seasoned practitioners would be able to speak to their yoga experience as it had transpired over time. I (the researcher) remained open to making adjustments if the desired population was not obtained.
If potential candidates showed interest in participating in the study, the researcher followed up with either a phone call or email to each possible participant. The purpose of this correspondence was to obtain demographic information, including employment information and experience with yoga. After detailed information had been received about each potential participant, a profile was created. The researcher reviewed each profile and decided on the most appropriate participants, based on the interest of the study, then contacted the participants via email to extend an invitation to participate. This invitation included a letter of informed consent.

**Participation Invitations**

The invitation to participate included a brief informational overview of the study, an informed consent statement, as well as a right to withdraw procedures. Contact information for study facilitators was included in the informed consent document. A point-of-contact person for the study was also identified.

**Informed Consent**

Initially participants received the informed consent letter during the recruitment process as it was attached to the recruitment email. Prior to the start of the interview process, as described in the research protocol (Appendix A), I explained the purpose of the study and informed consent procedures. Potential participants had the opportunity to ask questions via email or phone. After questions were answered, each participant signed a consent form and sent to me via email.

**Confidentiality and Subjects' Rights**

Participants were informed about the risks and benefits to participating in this study. This was a minimal risk study, so the participants’ exposure to stressful or uncomfortable topics was not greater than their exposure in everyday life. Participants were told that they would not
directly benefit from the study; however, the results of the study might benefit future school counseling students and help in protecting current school counselors from burnout. Participants were informed that they would not be compensated for their participation in the study. Conversely, participation in the project would require no monetary cost from them. The researcher maintained confidentiality during the interview process by securing a private space (a private room with a closed door) for key informant interviews to ensure that interview dialogue would not be overheard by outside sources. If a face-to-face interview was not possible, the participant was advised that the researcher would be in a private space when conducting the interview, and the suggestion was made that the participants do likewise.

After the interview process was complete, the researcher removed all identifying information including names from research material. Names were replaced with a code name, and participants were referred to by their corresponding code name throughout the remaining duration of research. Before the transcription process, the audio taped interviews were shared only with the dissertation committee as needed for advisement purposes. All written study materials were kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home. Consent forms were also kept in the locked file cabinet, but separate from the other study materials. All electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer, and the researcher is the only person who has access to the cabinet and the computer password. Three years after the completion of the research, all written and electronic data materials—including audio tapes, demographic forms, transcriptions, and field notes—will be deleted.
Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six school counselors as study participants. The location of each semi-structured interview, all of them conducted by the researcher, was determined individually. The semi-structured interviews did not exceed 60 minutes in length. All semi-structured interviews were recorded in order for the transcription process to occur. Additionally, the researcher focused specifically on asking non-leading and non-biased questions. The researcher team worked to establish a guided interview protocol. This interview guide outlined specific questions and suggestions for probing.

Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews

The key informant interviews were recorded electronically for authenticity and later transcribed. The following open-ended questions were used to facilitate the conversation between the researcher and the informants. These questions have served to illuminate the lived experiences of school counselors who participate in yoga as a method of self-care. The procedures for the semi-structured interviews are outlined in the Key Informant Interview Protocol (Appendix A), consisting of three sections as follows: Introduction, Semi-Structured Interview Questions, and Closure. The introduction section of the protocol explains that key informant interviews would be audio recorded, contains the procedures for maintaining confidentiality, and notifies participants of their right to withdraw from the study. The semi-structured interview section contains a list of questions that guided the interview process. The closure section provides an opportunity for participants to give feedback and ask questions. Each participant also was asked to answer several demographic questions (Appendix B). The brief demographic survey consists of age, gender, and years of practicing yoga and working as a
school counselor. The following are examples of questions that were used during the semi-structured interviews.

1. What has it been like for you to practice yoga?
2. How do you define yoga?
3. How do you feel when you are practicing yoga?
4. Has practicing yoga impacted your daily life?
5. Have you ever felt professional burnout?
6. Do you feel that yoga is part of your self-care plan?
7. What was your previous self-care plan?
8. Has yoga impacted your professional abilities?
9. Has your professional life changed as a result of doing yoga?

**Instrument**

Consistent with qualitative research methods, I as the researcher was the primary instrument for acquiring and analyzing data. In qualitative studies, the researcher greatly influences the study (Patton, 2002). The central methods of data collection in this study were observation and participant interviewing. All interviews were video and audio recorded for later transcription and analysis. The researcher also organized thoughts and personal observations through the use of a reflection journal and field notes, which ultimately served to provide in-depth and clear descriptions of the data (Glesne, 2011).

The validity and reliability in qualitative research rely greatly upon the researcher’s competence and skill set. According to Patton (2002), “the credibility of qualitative methods hinges to a great extent on the skills, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork” (p. 14). In an effort to ensure the validity and reliability of the researcher in this study, reflexivity
was employed during the data collection and analysis processes. Patton (2002) describes reflexivity as a way of acknowledging the importance of self-awareness, self-analysis, cultural consciousness, and ownership of one’s perspective. The concept of being reflexive includes self-questioning and self-understanding.

The idea for this research inquiry came from my own experience with several years of working as a school counselor and personally practicing yoga. I have been able to witness the benefits it can have in terms of self-awareness, self-care, and mindfulness education. Additionally, I have worked in a very stressful environment, with traumatized students and a very high caseload, which are potential risk factors for burnout. Thus, the reflexivity tool assisted in ensuring that a biased opinion did not dominate the study. This tool encouraged regular reflection throughout the research process by means of such questions as “What is the purpose of the study? What do I observe? What don’t I observe? How do I know that I am right?” (Glesne, 2011). This line of questioning was designed to assist me in remaining unbiased and to give me an opportunity to recognize personal feelings outside of the actual research study. Finally, I also kept field notes and followed up with participants for clarification about assumptions if needed. Regular consultation with the dissertation chairperson occurred as needed throughout the entire process as well.

As previously mentioned, I am the primary instrument for obtaining and analyzing the collected data. The use of audiotape to record the key informant interviews assisted with instrumentation, however, specifically for analysis. Additionally, field notes and a self-reflection journal were provided an in-depth and clear description of the data for this study. The researcher used field notes to document observable comments while in the field, which were later incorporated into the research process to help produce meaning and an understanding of the
phenomenon being studied. In acquiring field notes, the researcher took abbreviated notes while in the field and later translated them into full field notes. Field note information included date, time, details of what was happening, personal responses, specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations, and questions about people or behavior. In an effort to protect the study from researcher bias and/or prejudice, a self-reflective journal was kept as well. The researcher addressed specific items in the self-reflective journal, including assumptions, values, beliefs, life story, emotional connection with participants, and physical environment. The self-reflective journal served as a reflexive activity for the researcher in assessing the following: What do I think I know? How do I think I know it? Will this information change the course of the research?

**Presuppositions**

As a school counselor who worked for nearly 10 years in a very stressful environment, I used my own experiences and observations to develop this inquiry. In addition, throughout my professional career I have become personally acquainted with many school counselors and have witnessed the effects of unmanaged job stress on school counselors’ lives. Because school counselors’ personalities tend to include a strong desire to help others and improve other human beings’ quality of life, they select a profession that revolves around helping students. I believe that school counselors face a significant amount of stress that, if left unmanaged, may result in professional burnout over time, and the literature presented in Chapter 2 confirms this. As job-role functions, student caseloads, and duties have increased, school counselors have become more stressed, emotionally overextended, and drained. This exhaustion leads to burnout and hinders counselors’ effectiveness (Butcke & McLann, 1984; Freeman & Coll, 1997; Kendrick et.al., 1994; Lieberman, 2004; Morrissette, 2000; NCES, 2007; Rayle, 2006; Sears & Navin, 1983; Vail, 2005; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).
The actual impact of helping and improving lives can be very hard to measure. School counselors are often unaware of any meaningful impact that they may have, and they often cannot see the “fruits of their labor.” Conversely, they also often internalize student failure as they may be held accountable for academic measures like test scores and dropout rates. This disconnect between professional goals and outcomes can often lead to negative consequences for school counselors (Butler & Constantine, 2005). In addition, a general lack of self-care at one point throughout their professional careers was identified in the school counselors in this study. School counselors, especially novice school counselors, do not often remember that they should be taking time to deal with stress and to focus on self-care. The school counseling field tends to be focused on finding ways for school counselors to be more efficient and to justify their roles within the school system. Therefore, counselor education programs, school counseling professional associations, and school counselors themselves can benefit from a greater understanding of the risks and protective factors that affect them.

Furthermore, the research literature concerning school counselor stress provides limited suggestions for implementing self-care plans and effective methods of self-care. As a school counselor, I have always included regular exercise in my self-care regimen. For many years, I both ran and practiced yoga. Although I enjoy running very much, yoga offers something different that running does not: a non-competitive environment, which encourages participants to honor themselves and their accomplishments. Over time I also have realized that yoga serves as a spiritual practice for me that does not involve worship or religion. In my observations, yoga is a spiritual practice that leads to increased self-awareness. The research literature has supported spirituality as a protective factor against burnout for school counselors; in addition, self-awareness is a measure of counselor wellness (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011).
Data Collection

This study consisted of three different methods of data collection: key informant interviews, field notes, and a self-reflection journal. In this qualitative inquiry, digital audio recordings were employed as the main way to collect data in order to derive direct quotes and exact words from interview participants. For further data, field notes, a self-reflection journal, and a consultation with the dissertation committee will also be used in helping to provide a clear understanding of the participants’ actions, interactions, and body language. The main source of data was the key informant interviews with individuals employed as school counselors who practice yoga regularly. The key informant interviews helped to provide richness to the collected data and assisted in assuring validity through triangulation of the data. In addition, if participants requested it via email, they were supplied with a summary of the results of this research at no cost to them.

The process for key informant interviews included one individual interview. The interviews occurred face to face, by telephone, and via the Internet (e.g., Skype or Facetime). The interviews, which did not exceed 60 minutes in duration, were audio recorded. Participants were not required to travel for interviews, and the researcher arranged to conduct the interviews at the convenience of the participants. The location of each interview was a neutral setting agreed upon by both the interviewer and the researcher. If a convenient location was not determined by both parties, the interview was conducted either via the Internet or some other technology. All of the raw data collected from audiotaping the key informant interviews was transcribed. During the transcription process, code names were ascribed to each participant, and all identifiers will be removed from the transcription. The researcher used a transcription service whose workers have accepted or signed confidentiality agreements. Data was analyzed to yield emerging themes that
give meaning to school counselors’ experience in practicing yoga. The intent of this study was to examine the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga, as well as to look at how yoga may serve as a method of self-care to protect against burnout. Therefore, the data was interpreted and analyzed through the lens of van Manen’s four lifeworld existentials of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relations, as well as through Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological lens. In this inquiry, the researcher considered the four lived existentials, as well as risk and protective factors, during the data analysis process for emergent essential themes.

**Analysis of Data**

A phenomenologically-oriented approach was the selected method for interview interpretation. This approach was selected primarily because the phenomenological approach helps in recognizing the interconnectedness between an individual and the world, encouraging a holistic perspective on the nature of the human experience (Garrett, Immink, & Hiller, 2011). This human perspective is congruent with yoga’s philosophy and teaching, and it mirrors the principles of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model for human development, as well. The phenomenological approach is suggested for a small sample (no larger than 10 participants) because it is designed so that the phenomenon can be explored from the perspective of the participants while simultaneously involving interpretive activity by the researcher (Garrett, Immink, & Hiller, 2011).

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory was employed as a theoretical underpinning of the study as well. The theory of these systems—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem—will be combined with the existing yoga literature for understanding the experiences of school counselors participating in yoga.
Van Manen’s four lived existentials provided structure for categorization as the emergent themes were identified and examined. All data were classified based on emergent theme categories. The meaning of a phenomenon has been compared to the identity of an individual, as both are considered multi-dimensional and multi-layered (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, in an effort to discover the meaning of a phenomenon described in the text and following van Manen (1990), the researcher attempted to imagine the text in terms of the structures of meaning or themes. Van Manen stated that “phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience. When a phenomenon is analyzed, the researcher is attempting to determine emergent themes, while also identifying the experiential constructs that contribute to the overall experience” (p. 79). Thus, in phenomenological hermeneutic research, it is imperative to identify the various themes that emerge from narrative text.

Van Manen (1990) has described three possible approaches to isolating phenomenological themes in narrative text: 1) holistic, 2) selective, and 3) detailed. The holistic approach addresses the narrative text in its entirety and attempts to isolate the fundamental meaning of the text as a whole. When using the selective approach, the researcher reads the text several times and identifies statements or elements that are essential to the phenomenon. In the detailed approach, the researcher examines each sentence or sentence cluster to distinguish what is revealed about the experience or phenomenon being studied. After the data collection process has taken place, the researcher will decide which method is appropriate, isolating the phenomenological themes.

Finally, this study also assessed for recognition of the principles of mindfulness theory. During the data interpretation process the researcher attempted to identify the presence of mindfulness principles in the vocabulary of interview participants. The principles that the
research inquiry attempted to identify are as follows: quieting the mind, mindful attention, managing negative emotions, and the acknowledgement of self and others (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

**Summary**

The intention of this study was to examine the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. Hence, a study that places an emphasis on the lived experiences of people was deemed to be an appropriate method for this study. The methodological framework of this study assumed a phenomenological perspective. This qualitative study was grounded in the theoretical framework of van Manen’s (1997) four lifeworld existentials of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relations; Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bio-ecological human development; and mindfulness theory principles. These models were integrated into this study to provide a clear lens of the factors that influence the well-being of school counselors during their careers. This chapter has also presented the methods and procedures of the study, including the semi-structured interview format that will be used. The processes of data collection and data analysis, sample selection, and participant invitations have also been discussed.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the data that were collected and analyzed to illuminate the guiding question of this investigation: What are the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga? This chapter includes in-depth, case-by-case narratives, which serve as the primary descriptive mechanism for answering the research questions in this study. The case narratives, derived from the individual interviews, serve to describe the data collected in this study. In addition, this chapter explains the interrelation between the data collected and the theoretical frameworks included in Chapter II. Finally, a cross-case analysis of the data is presented as a visual representation of the findings of this study.

Recruitment of Participants

After receiving approval from the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, I immediately began recruiting participants, first by initiating contact with professional organizations and counselor educators. The purpose of this contact was to gain assistance in soliciting participants for my study. I recruited by sending a letter as an email attachment to my professional contacts and to professors in counselor education programs (see appendix B for recruitment letter). I sent several emails, introducing myself and my study, along with a copy of my research recruitment letter to my professional contacts. The snowballing method was also used to gain access to other participants.

Individuals who were interested in volunteering for this study contacted me via email, and we arranged for interviews through further email exchanges. Arrangements included scheduling a time and date, planning a method for the interview either Skype or Facetime, and exchanging personal phone numbers. It was also during this initial phase of contact that I would remind the potential participant of the needed consent form. Before all interviews took place, the
participants signed, scanned, and sent a copy of the informed consent to the researcher. Obtaining a signed copy of the consent appeared to be difficult or inconvenient for some participants. After several months of recruiting, six participants were selected for individual interviews based upon the interest they expressed in participating in the study. Six qualitative interviews were conducted; after the sixth interview, the researcher determined that a point of saturation had been reached, and the coding process began. The following pages of this dissertation include a descriptive narrative of each interview, which illuminates emergent themes, isolates descriptions of the van Manen’s four lived existentials, and identifies Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological factors as they exist in the lives of school counselors participating in yoga.

**Demographic Details**

Six individuals who met the selection criteria participated in this study. All participants in this study identified themselves as school counselors who regularly practice yoga. The ages of participants in this study ranged from 26 to 65. All participants in this study were female and have been serving as school counselors for a minimum of 3 years and practicing yoga for a minimum of 5 years. In addition, all participants in this study report having a master’s degree, as well as state school counseling certification. Participants in this study are practicing school counselors in the following states: Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wisconsin, California, Virginia, and Missouri. Demographic details are organized in Table 1.
Table 1

*Individual Interviews Demographic Details*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>State of Residence</th>
<th>Years as a school counselor</th>
<th>Years practicing yoga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Wisconsin</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Minnesota</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Virginia</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Individual Interviews**

In this study, all six of the individual semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded; five interviews took place over FaceTime, and one interview was in person. FaceTime is a feature on smartphones which allows the callers to see each other. This method was chosen to provide for observations of facial expressions, body language, and overall emotional expressions during the interviews. Directly following all of the interviews, I recorded a journal entry reflection. The journal reflection was used to address an awareness of any personal biases and also to organize thoughts and ideas. The semi-structured interview format with a set of structured questions was used in each individual interview, and the interviews were 45-60 minutes in length. This length of time gave the school counselors an opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences about their experiences participating in yoga.
Analysis of Individual Interviews

The data analysis process began simultaneously with the data collection in this qualitative study (Levers, 2006; Patton, 2002). As a qualitative researcher, I remained aware that I had an influence on the study. In an effort to remain neutral, I employed the reflexivity technique during the interviews and the process of data analysis by questioning my understanding and myself. During the data analysis, I paid attention to tone of voice in both the participants and me (Patton, 2002).

After all individual interviews were completed and transcribed, I started the actual analysis. I implemented suggestions from Patton (2002) during the data analysis process. After reviewing the data that were collected through individual interviews, field notes, and a personal journal, I started to organize them by taking notes that were in chronological order. I also did some necessary minor editing to organize field notes, and then I cleaned up any data that appeared to be unrelated.

The next step in the analysis process was to immerse myself in the data. I did this by listening to the digital recordings multiple times, reading and rereading the transcripts, and reviewing the field notes and reflexive journal entries until I felt familiar with the data. When I read the data a third time, I did so with particular attention to van Manen’s four existentials of lived time, lived body, lived space, and lived relation. Then, during my fourth reading of the data, I gave specific attention to Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological lens. The integration of these two theoretical lenses helped me to gain insight and a clear understanding of the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. In addition, the theoretical lenses were helpful in identifying the risk and protective factors for school counselors participating in yoga.
As I began to feel more confident with the data, I started to develop a sense of the emergent themes. I attempted to focus my efforts in isolating silent themes, repeated concepts or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together to engage the ideas and the data logically. This step in qualitative research required me continually to question the process and ask myself “What themes emerge?” and “What is illuminated here?” (Patton, 2002). The themes that emerged during the data analysis were categorized into the risk and protective factors that school counselors face, as well as into van Manen’s four lived existentials, which include lived time, lived body, lived space, and lived relationship. Additionally, I identified other themes that emerged from the data.

I coded the data by using highlighters and different colored markers to label themes, as I read through the transcripts. In addition, I also wrote notes through the use of shorthand codes in the margins of the transcripts (Patton, 2002). The use of coding and shorthand notes provided a transition to the next step in the analyzation process, which was to develop integrative interpretations through the use of analytic memos. After the themes had emerged, I provided integrative interpretations, based upon what I had learned from the data, to bring meaning and coherence to the patterns, categories, and themes.

Throughout the data analyzation process, I continued to practice reflexivity; this was done in an attempt to continue searching for alternative understandings and meanings (Patton, 2002). I identified and described alternative explanations in an attempt to isolate one that was the most conceivable to ensure the accuracy of my work. I also reviewed the data for extreme cases but there were none. The final step in the analyzation process to write the report that presents the findings of this study.
The data review revealed that all of the school counselors interviewed were very passionate about their work and possessed a strong desire to help students. However, they also often pointed out that systemic issues disrupted their goals, causing stress for them. These systemic issues and stress were related to the spheres within the bio-ecological model of human development. For example, the school counselors in this study agreed that workload and job stress were major areas of difficulty. As we discussed these issues, I made an effort to allow for an adequate amount of time by permitting long pauses in the dialog in order to focus on these issues before moving to other sections in the interview protocol. I wanted the participants to feel as though they were able to discuss everything on their minds.

Findings

Case-by-Case Narrative Analysis

This section presents a case-by case narrative discussion of each interview conducted for the study. The interviews are presented in the same order they were done, from one through six. The data reporting begins with a written presentation of the themes that emerged from the interviews, the themes being collapsed into two main categories: protective factors and risk factors (Lynch & Levers, 2007). The “protective factors” consist of those themes that enhanced the development and functioning of school counselors participating in yoga. The “risk factors” consist of themes that pose a potential risk to the development of school counselors throughout their professional careers. Thus, I present here the themes derived through the lenses of the lived existentials and the ecological factors. Themes relating to lived time, lived body, lived space, and lived relation fall within the lived existential category. Themes connecting to social, professional, and family systems are within the ecological section. The written case-by-case analysis is followed by a table of significant phrases that emerged during each interview. Finally,
a cross-case analysis is provided that includes the comparison of themes in the individual interviews to illuminate the themes, both common and uncommon, presented by school counselors participating in yoga.

**Organization of Narratives**

In presenting the case-by-case narratives, I elected to weave dialogue into the themes identified in this research. These narratives provide a review of the in-depth dialogue from each interview, as it relates to the specific themes of this study. Therefore, each interview narrative includes a uniformed sense of organization. Each interview section begins with a brief description of the specific interview. The first subsection in each narrative is a review of the identified protective factors, which include the following five themes: Theme One: centeredness and calming; Theme Two: self-care; Theme Three: spirituality; Theme Four: sense of accomplishment; and, Theme Five: increased professional integrity.

The second subsection in each case-by-case narrative includes a review of the risk factors identified in this study, which include the following four themes: Theme One: job stress; Theme Two: burnout; Theme Three: workload; and Theme Four: lack of self-care. The third subsection in each narrative relates the dialogue to van Manen’s four lived existentials, which are lived time, lived body, lived space, and lived relationship. The fourth subsection in each narrative relates the dialogue to Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory in terms of specific systems as described by each participant. Finally, each case-by-case narrative is followed by a table, which presents the phrases of significance from each interview. The left-hand column of each table lists the themes identified in this study, and the right-hand column provides the dialogue from each interview that corresponds to the respective themes.
Interview One

The first interview took place on June 28th, 2016 at 4:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) and 1:00 p.m. West Coast Time. Approximately one week before the scheduled interview time, the participant sent me a signed copy of the consent form. This interview was conducted via FaceTime because the participant lived in California. When I explained both FaceTime and Skype to the participant prior to the interview, she explained that she had never used FaceTime. I answered some questions that she had about using the program, and she agreed that this would be the most convenient option. After we had agreed to use FaceTime, the participant gave me a phone number to use for the interview. For approximately 20 minutes before the scheduled interview time, I organized my recording devices and reviewed the interview process and protocol.

At four p.m. Eastern Standard Time I called the phone number disclosed by Participant 1 (P1). I started the session by introducing myself and explaining the purpose of this study. I also referred to the confidentiality section of the consent form and explained her ability to withdraw from the study. I clarified the consent and I encouraged her to ask if she had any questions or concerns about the study or the interview process. This interview lasted approximately 35 minutes.

P1 was a 64-year-old female school counselor, who reported having a master’s degree. She had recently retired and was working as a counselor educator in a university on the West Coast. She had worked for 30 years as a school counselor and rated her job stress level as “great.” P1 stated that she practices yoga four to five times per week, the type of yoga being “Vinyasa Flow.” When asked about other methods of self-care, P1 responded, “I also practice mindfulness and I am a trained mindfulness educator for teens.”
I began the interview by asking P1 about her experiences with yoga. She expressed that yoga had provided her with a mechanism to measure her recovery from several health-related issues. In addition to this, she explained that she has a great amount of job stress which has at times led to her feel professional burnout. P1 also explained how she has incorporated principles of yoga into her teaching strategies as a counselor educator and school counselor.

**Protective Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

*Theme One: Centeredness and Calming*

The idea of becoming “centered” is used frequently in the yoga world. It refers to a physical and mental state in which persons feel a sense of balance in their physical, mental, and or emotional world. P1 spoke directly to this idea of “centering” when she was asked to define yoga. She stated that “yoga is harnessing the fluctuations of your mind through the movement of the asana.” The term *asana* refers to any sequence or set of yoga postures. This statement is particularly interesting because P1 indicated that she feels that by physically doing yoga she is able to “harness” the fluctuations of her mind.

During the interview, P1 reflected on how yoga has helped to her be more centered as a person, a school counselor, and a professor. She noted that she was a “hyper person with a monkey mind that is always jumping from one thing to the next.” When asked what has it been like to practice yoga, P1 replied, “As I started practicing yoga, what I grew to understand was yoga was much more about your mind than it is about your body, and I found it to be amazingly calming and helped me center myself in unbelievable ways!”

When asked to speak about how she defines yoga, she went into detail about her mental state when practicing yoga:
And I find that during yoga I’m able to empty my mind and concentrate just on what’s happening in the yoga studio, which gives me the opportunity to center myself and to put away the concerns of the day or the topics that maybe aren’t even anything I need to deal with; but yet I find myself concerned with them. So by practicing yoga every day, I find that I’m able to better address the everyday stressors of my life.

In this statement in particular, the participant speaks of being able to put away the concerns of the day, which highlights a major concern for counselors. Often counselors across the profession struggle with letting go of the issues that their students and clients may face. Unfortunately, a method or mechanism for letting go and detaching from these issues is not often covered in graduate school or training. Counselors are expected to know how to detach or to leave their work at work without any training on how to properly do so. In order for counselors to avoid burnout and at the same time be effective, they must find their own method for bracketing the emotions that occur before, during, and after a counseling session. The concept of bracketing emotions during a counseling session is emphasized in graduate training, and the literature points to self-care as a way to detach from the issues counselors face daily. In addition, after counselors leave their training programs and start working in the field, it is considered best practice to have a comprehensive self-care plan in place. However, this is often a trial-and-error experiment for counselors. Many counselors will try several different hobbies and outlets before knowing what really works for them or serves as an effective method of self-care. Thus, P1’s remarks directly address a major problem and reveal that she is able to detach from the issues of the day and feel more calm and balanced as a result of practicing yoga.

When P1 was asked about how she feels when doing yoga, she replied,
I find myself able to concentrate on just that and the voice of the yoga teacher, and I don’t really pay much attention to the people around me, which is quite a good feeling—to not be worried about what’s going on around me because I’m the kind of person who is easily distracted. So it’s a good time to find a center, feel calm and focus just on the challenge of the movement.

This idea of increased concentration is significant, especially in the case of P1. Earlier in the interview, she identified herself as someone who struggles to maintain an attention span on one item. During this narrative, she explained that she had found herself able to focus her attention in a singular manner on the voice of the yoga teacher. She pointed out that even though she is usually easily distracted, she found that while practicing yoga she was able to ignore any distractions around her. P1 also explained that she enjoys the feeling of being able to ignore distractions because it is not something that is easy for her in other environments.

When asked if yoga is a method of self-care, P1 responded, “Definitely.” She then went into greater detail to describe how practicing yoga serves as a method of self-care for her:

Yoga helps me calm my mind; it helps me get centered; it helps me figure out what it is that I really need to worry about and what I don’t need to deal with. So it helps me let go of the stuff that I shouldn’t be holding onto anyway, and it helps me feel that I’m caring for myself physically in addition, which is a win-win.

Here again we can note P1’s direct indication that practicing yoga provides her with a sense of being centered. She also referenced an ability to “let go” or release “stuff” that she should not be holding onto. She stated explicitly that being able to let go of unproductive or negative thoughts allows her to feel she is doing something productive for herself.
Finally, P1 mentioned that she realizes yoga has a calming effect on her: “On an emotional level, I find myself seeking yoga for the calm that it provides.” This sense of calm can contribute to the effectiveness of a counselor. Any counselor education or training program teaches that an effective counselor is one who should exhibit a calm and open demeanor when working with clients or students. A counselor should interact with active listening skills, portraying empathy and a non-judgmental stance. P1 explained that she has a strong desire to attend yoga classes because of the calming benefit she derives.

Theme Two: Self-Care

This narrative also introduced a concept of self-care. When asked about yoga and self-care P1 stated, “It helps me feel that I’m caring for myself physically in addition, which is a win-win.” P1 talked about being able to let go of issues that occur throughout the day. Acknowledgement of this process has allowed for P1 to feel that she is caring for herself.

P1 also talked about feeling burned out and overworked during her career as a school counselor. However, P1 exhibited a strong sense of self-awareness when she talked about her experience: “I was pretty close to burnout, and one thing I did to deal with that was, I actually worked with the yoga studio where I practiced to bring a yoga class on campus at the high school where I worked.”

In mentioning her burnout at the time and the action she took to deal with it, P1 showed awareness that by participating in yoga classes, she felt as though she was taking care of herself. She stated explicitly in this interview that she chose to deal with the stress by collaborating with her home yoga studio to schedule a class at her workplace.
Theme Three: Spirituality

Spirituality is a broad and general concept. The idea of spirituality often includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, and it typically involves a search for meaning in life. It is also often thought of as a human experience that touches all individuals. For purposes of this study, the term “spirituality” identifies with a modern perspective that deals with the following questions:

1) Where do I find meaning?
2) How do I feel connected?
3) How should I live?

The concept of spirituality has been identified as protective factor in the research literature because it relates to preventing burnout in school counselors. Those who have some level of spiritual identification are less likely to report signs of burnout (Graham et al., 2001). When P1 was asked to talk about how yoga fits into her self-care plan, she spoke directly about needing a sense of spiritual connection:

Well, the more that I learn about the arms of yoga or the limbs rather of yoga, the more I understand that I need to find my higher power. So there’s, for lack of a better term, a philosophical or religious connection that I’m seeking, and in addition there’s a social connection of people who have like thoughts. And so I find that extremely validating.

In this response, P1 was illustrating that through practice, she has developed a desire to connect with a higher power in her personal life. Although P1 did not go into much detail about this “higher power,” she did indicate that when she attends yoga, she feels that she is around people who are like minded in the sense of identifying this sense of spiritual power or spiritual being. In
this explanation, P1 referred to feeling validated by being around others who are also participating in yoga for a sense of spiritual identification.

This concept of being surrounded by like-minded people is an interesting and unique position in which school counselors might find themselves. As the American School Counseling Association states, the single most important role of the school counselor is to be an advocate for students. Often, school counselors find themselves in this role of advocating for students without administrative assistance, support from families, and colleagues. In this role, the school counselor will often have to challenge teachers and parents in order to resolve a conflict.

School counselors often act alone as advocates in order to act in what they believe to be the best interest of student. In addition, the school counselor is in a minority by trade within the workplace. Given the structural makeup of any school, the school counselor will always be far outnumbered by teachers. This feeling of being outnumbered and being the lone advocate can leave school counselors feeling isolated or unsupported and at times unwelcomed within the workplace. They may often feel that they are surrounded by those who do not share similar thoughts, values, and ideas. P1 indirectly mentioned this sense of needing a connection by noting that she feels validated in being surrounded by those who share a similar mindset. Finally, P1’s last statement reiterated how much she values a sense of connection: “I’d say it provides me with a sense of calmness and a sense of connection with other people who have the same value.”

**Theme Four: Sense of Accomplishment**

The fourth theme identified in this research is *sense of accomplishment*. This concept became apparent partly through isolation of emergent themes and partly through changes in participants’ affect as they talked about what they feel they have accomplished as a result of practicing yoga. This sense ranges from a physical to an emotional sense of achievement. It was
identified not only through the narrative text but also through the sense of enthusiasm that came through in participants’ descriptions of yoga experiences. At one point, P1 spoke at length about the impact yoga has had on her life:

Well yes, in a very beneficial way because it allows me, first of all because I have kind of a scoliosis in my back, so it keeps me moving. I’m 64 years old so it keeps me moving which keeps me standing up straight which I’m really proud of because a lot of women my age don’t stand up straight. And then in addition, I’ve found that my bone density has increased, which is great. So on a physical level, I have more flexibility, my bone density has increased, I have more muscle tone. On an emotional level, I find myself seeking yoga for the calm that it provides, so yeah, I would say it provides me with a sense of calmness and a connection with other people who have the same value.

And I find myself even breathing differently. So here’s an example, a few months ago I had to have a MRI with dye on my shoulder because I tore my rotator cuff. It’s just an age thing; I didn’t damage it in any way by falling or anything like that, and it just tore. So when they put me in the MRI machine, they had, you know, a weight on my arm—a sand bag thing—because they didn’t want my arm to move at all, and they had to take me back out of the MRI machine because they said, “You are breathing too deeply! And so your body is moving just enough so we can’t get a good picture. You have to breathe shallowly!” and I said, “Oh, come on!” So I realized, you know what, I breathe completely differently now, and I know that breathing is a calming tool, and I’ve trained myself to breathe all the way to the bottom of my diaphragm.
Theme Five: Increased Professional Integrity

An increased sense of professional integrity has been identified as well throughout this study. For the study purposes, an increased sense of professional integrity can be defined as an increased enthusiasm or passion for one’s work as a school counselor. This increased professional integrity can be detected by narrative scripts, as well as through enthusiasm and a change of tone when speaking. When asked about the impact that yoga has had on professional abilities, P1 offered the following response:

I think it helps me slow down and think a little bit more carefully, and it also brings to me the thought of the stress that the students I work with are carrying, and so I really sought out different training or learning about different issues related to students’ stress. For example, I’m really interested in learning more about how trauma affects students’ behavior. A lot of times we see students who are thought of as misbehaving or intentionally breaking classroom rules or behavioral rules, and in reality these kids are coping with all kinds of crazy stress, and this is how they demonstrate the stress or the trauma that they’ve undergone and we’re interpreting it one way but it’s really a reflection of something else.

P1 illuminated this idea of an increased sense of professional integrity when she stated that she is now a more careful thinker. She then goes on to say that by slowing down, she has become a more reflective counselor. She has been able to think in more detail about what might be the root of some of the issues that she is seeing with her students. P1 explains that she is now very conscious of stress and how it might be the cause of misbehavior that she is seeing among the students in her caseload. It is possible that this counselor has found an appropriate method for dealing with her own stress so that she is now able to have a clearer view of her students and of
what issues they might be dealing with. P1 stated that she is interested in learning about the effects that trauma can have on a student. This sense of intellectual curiosity will help her to become a more informed counselor, which ultimately will allow her to provide better service to her students.

So understanding how trauma affects student behavior, to me, is an outgrowth of my realization that if somebody can’t calm their mind, and their mind is constantly in that fight or flight mode because of trauma or stress in their life over things that we may know nothing about, we could see behaviors and misinterpret those behaviors. So the more that we think about what the student is bringing with them to school and how we can make school a very safe and calm place for kids, the more they’ll learn—which is really our goal.

In the narrative above, P1 explained her curiosity for learning more about the effects of trauma and how it might manifest in her students. She expressed that through her own realizations about stress and its effects, she has been inspired to do more for her students in terms of finding a way to address stress and its effects appropriately. She went on to explain that she is interested in helping students find school to be a safe and relaxing place as opposed to a punitive environment where they are held accountable for the mismanagement of their stress and or trauma. P1’s intellectual curiosity and inspiration to see students from a more holistic perspective demonstrated an increased sense of professional integrity on her part.

**Risk Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

*Theme One: Job Stress*

When asked in the demographic questionnaire, P1 identified her stress level as being *great*, when given the choices of little, moderate, or great. This self-reported identification is
both interesting and alarming on many levels. One major concern to consider in the relationship between job stress and school counseling is the quality of service being delivered to students.

Theme Two: Burnout

As explained in the literature review section of this dissertation, school counselors face the risk of burning out. The research literature has suggested several mitigating factors that contribute to school counselor burnout. Some of the well documented factors include the following: excessive workload, work with traumatized students, lack of self-care, lack of administrative support, and an excessive caseload. When initially asked about professional burnout in the interview, P1 responded with the following information:

I will say yes. You know, I’m retired. I retired at the end of 2014, and now I still connect with school counselors because I am a professor at the local university school counseling master’s degree program, and then I’m also consulting with our local county department of education in two ways. First of all, this is the third year of a conference that we organized for school counselors and in addition, I’m helping with a grant called “The Pathways Grant.” It has to do with career technical education. So I’m really, really busy but in a good way.

In this part of her narrative, P1 stated that in fact she had felt professional burnout. After she initially acknowledged that she has felt burnout, it is interesting that she goes on to list the many job responsibilities and tasks that are consuming her time. In this case, she seems to be indicating that she felt professional burnout as a result of her workload.

Theme Three: Workload

As previously mentioned in this study, caseload has been found to contribute to school counselor burnout. ACSA provides a best practices recommendation, which states that school
counselor ratios should be approximately 250 students to one counselor. In P1’s case, caseload was directly cited as contributing to her feeling of professional burnout. In the narrative presented below, P1 explained that she had a caseload of over 500 students, and it became clear that she felt the heavy load was contributing to burnout.

When asked to speak more about her experience with burnout as a school counselor P1 offered the following response:

So I would say that I was pretty close to burnout when I retired because I was, I not only had my case load of students—which in California is pretty high, it was over 500 students—and then in addition I was the lead counselor at my high school, and I was the lead counselor for the whole district, and I was coordinating the use of the tool Naviance Family Connection district wide. So I was wearing a lot of hats, and it was too much, really. My problem is, knowing when to say no. I was pretty close to burnout, and one thing I did to deal with that was I actually worked with the yoga studio where I practiced to bring a yoga class on campus at the high school where I worked.

Workload has also been often identified in the research literature as a potential risk for burnout. The narrative above clearly indicates that P1 felt that her very large workload was contributing to her feeling of burnout. School counselors must be cognizant of the workload issue so they can manage it before it becomes overwhelming. School counselors identifying as being in the “helping profession” historically struggle when saying no or not agreeing to take something on if it will benefit students in need.

In the above narrative, we again see that P1 has explained a list of tasks that she is responsible for coordinating when she says; “I was wearing a lot of hats and it was too much
really.” She was again clearly referring to the amount of work that she was responsible for as a contributing factor in her feeling burned out by the profession.

Within programs that do not have a strong orientation toward the ASCA model, the workload of a school counselor is often decided by a building principal or upper administration. If building principals and upper administration are not stakeholders in an ASCA national model school counseling program, the daily job functions of a school counselor can be very far from principles set out by ACSA. This lack of identification with the ASCA model has also been known to lead to burnout among school counselors, who face a conflict when administrators assign tasks that counselors may not have time for or that do not align with the ASCA model. Such a predicament was demonstrated by P1 when she said, “My problem is knowing when to say no.”

Theme Four: Lack of Self-Care

P1 introduced another interesting topic, her “lack of self-care,” when she explained that at one time in her life, her priorities shifted toward her marriage and family. When asked about her self-care experiences throughout her career, P1 responded,

I have been involved in many different exercise type programs over the years, but getting married and having kids and working full time and taking on lots of different responsibilities kind of caused me to put care for myself last, especially physical care for myself last.

School counselors clearly fall under the umbrella of the helping professions, and they often find themselves in the role of caretaker outside of their professional lives. It is clear from the narrative provided by P1 in this case that she was putting the needs of her career, family, and marriage before her own personal care.
**Lived Existentials**

Key elements from P1’s experience are described below as they fit into lived dimensions of time, body, relation, and space.

*Lived time*

The concept of lived time surfaced in this interview when P1 reflected upon her mood and feelings as she practices yoga. She explained a noticeable difference in her mood at the beginning of a yoga class versus her mood at the end of a class. During the interview P1, laughed as she described herself at the beginning of a yoga class: “At the beginning, I’m usually probably one of those people that is talking.” It should be noted that yoga studios are often quiet places before, during, and after classes. Often, not much talking takes place; therefore, this behavior is somewhat out of the norm.

As a point of interest, P1 particularly emphasized “the end” of class as when she typically notices the physical and mental changes and benefits. She noted that if her mood is low at the start of the class, it usually improves by the end of the class: “If I went in not happy, I am happy at the end.” P1 also explained that she typically feels better at the end of the class both physically and mentally, as she said, “At the end I feel rested and calm.”

*Lived body*

P1 talked extensively about her experiences with yoga as they relate to the lived body concept. A distinct sense of enthusiasm was detected during this interview as P1 spoke of the improvements she has seen within her physical body as a result of practicing yoga. In particular, P1 expressed enthusiasm about the physical body improvements as they relate to her age, which she stated is 64. It is clear that much of her yoga practice has been motivated by a desire to preserve her health and physical body functions as opposed to improving her physical
appearance or fitness level. P1 explained with pride and enthusiasm how yoga has affected her physical body:

Yoga keeps me moving which also keeps me standing up straight, which I am really proud of, because a lot of women my age do not stand up straight. My bone density has increased, which is great. On a physical level, I have more flexibility, I have more muscle tone. I breathe completely differently now and I know that breathing is a calming tool and I have trained myself to breathe all the way to the bottom of my diaphragm.

P1 also notes that she often gains a sense of feeling physically calm as a result of practicing yoga: “I found it to be amazingly calming and [it] helped me center myself in unbelievable ways.” P1 also noted that through this increased sense of calmness within her body, she finds that she is able to take on a more mindful perspective, which allows her to free herself of distractions and be present during a yoga class: “I find that during yoga, I’m able to empty my mind and concentrate just on what’s happening in the yoga studio.”

*Lived relation*

Identification of the lived relationship between P1 and her yoga experience surfaced as she explained how she interprets yoga. When asked how she defines yoga, she said, “Yoga is harnessing the fluctuations of your mind through the movement of the asana.” It is clear that P1 has identified a strong relationship between the movement of the asana and taking control of the mind. It should be noted that “asanas” can be defined as any pattern of yoga poses, postures, or movements. In making such a profound statement, P1 was explaining her feeling that by practicing yoga physically, she is able to take control of her mind. Interestingly, at another point during the interview P1 described herself as a “hyper person” or a person with a “monkey mind.”
P1’s statements clarified that her relationship with yoga has been beneficial, providing her with a mechanism to manage her thoughts in a productive manner.

*Lived space*

The concept of lived space emerged in this interview when P1 explained that she often feels the desire to be practicing yoga or to be in the space which is her mat when she is not in a yoga class. She said, “I find myself really yearning to be on my mat.” In this way she indicated that being in the space of her mat is desirable to her on occasions when she is not able to be there physically.

**Bioecological factors**

The influence of the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem on her development surfaced when P1 said, “Getting married and having kids and working full time and taking on lots of different responsibilities kind of caused me to put care for myself last, especially physical care for myself last.” This statement, in particular, revealed that P1’s microsystem, which was her family at the time, placed specific demands on her that caused her to neglect herself.

P1 also referred to the influence yoga has had on her exosystem by asserting that her yoga practice has been applicable to her role a counselor educator. During the interview, she explained that she teaches graduate counseling classes in a condensed preformatted sequence. She also noted that her students are fully employed adults who lead very busy lives.

I find myself thinking of yoga principles and applying them at times. I often address the class by saying “let’s all just take a few minutes and take a few deep breaths and stop and center our mind and think about where we’re going from here.” It also helps me kind of see the flow of the class so that students don’t get overloaded.
It is evident that the principals of yoga have influenced P1’s teaching style, as well as how she observes the class. She seems to have integrated concepts of mindfulness into the class as a teaching strategy. P1 also appeared to be mindful of the stress levels of her students. The phrases of significance from Individual Interview #1 are contained in Table 2.

Table 2

_Individual Interview 1 Phrases of Significance_

1. Protective Factors

- Centeredness and Calming

  I feel rested and calm. I find myself extremely calm at the end. And usually happy; if I went in not happy, I am happy at the end.

  It is a good time to find a center, feel calm and focus just on the challenge of the movement.

  Yoga helps me calm my mind; it helps me get centered.

  I snuck a little yoga in one day a week after school.

- Self-Care

  Yoga helps me figure out what it is that I really need to worry about and what I don’t need to deal with.

  By practicing yoga every day, I find that I’m better addressing the everyday stressors of my life.
- **Spirituality**

  It provides me with a sense of connection with other people who have the same value.

  I need to find my higher power. There is a philosophical or religious connection that I am seeking, and in addition there is a social connection of people who have like thoughts. And so I find that extremely validating.

  I am 64 years old, so it keeps me moving, which keeps me standing up straight, which I’m really proud of because a lot of women my age don’t stand up straight.

- **Sense of Accomplishment**

  I have found that my bone density has increased, which is great.

  Yoga helps me slow down and think a little bit more carefully, and it also brings to me the thought of the stress that the students I work with are carrying, and so I really sought out different training or learning about different issues related to student’s stress.

  So the more that we think about what the student is bringing with them to school and how we can make school a very safe and calm place for kids, the more they’ll learn—which is really our goal.

- **Increased Professional Integrity**

  I am 64 years old, so it keeps me moving,
2. Risk Factors

- Job Stress

Getting married and having kids and working full time and taking on lots of different responsibilities kind of caused me to put care for myself last, especially physical care for myself last.

- Burnout

So I would say that I was pretty close to burnout when I retired because I was, I not only had my case load of students—which in California is pretty high, it was over 500 students—.

- Workload

I was wearing a lot of hats and it was too much really. My problem is, knowing when to say no.

I find myself extremely calm at the end.

I’m happy at the end.
Lack of Self-Care

Yoga keeps me moving, which keeps me standing up straight, which I’m really proud of because a lot of women my age don’t stand up straight.

My bone density has increased, which is great. On a physical level, I have more flexibility, I have more muscle tone.

I breathe completely differently now and I know that breathing is a calming tool, and I’ve trained myself to breathe all the way to the bottom of my diaphragm.

3. Four lived existentials

Lived time

I found it to be amazingly calming and helped me center myself in unbelievable ways.

I find that during yoga I’m able to empty my mind and concentrate just on what’s happening in the yoga studio.

Lived body

I started practicing yoga, [and] what I grew to understand was yoga [that] was much more about your mind than it is about your body.

I am a trained mindfulness educator for teens.

Yoga is harnessing the fluctuations of your
mind through the movement of the asana.

I find myself really yearning to be on my mat.

Taking on lots of different responsibilities kind of caused me to put care for myself last, especially physical care for myself last.

I find myself thinking of yoga principles and applying times of, “Let’s all just take a few minutes and take a few deep breaths and stop and center our mind and think about where we’re going from here.”

It also helps me kind of see the flow of the class so that students don’t get overloaded.
4. Bio-ecological aspects of school counselors participating in yoga

**Interview Two**

The second interview took place on July 5, 2016 after Participant 2 (P2) and I had agreed upon a date and time for the interview. P2 shared her phone number with me, and I called her via FaceTime at exactly the agreed upon time. P2 explained that her child and husband were home, so I could expect to hear some background noises from them; however, they did not interrupt the interview at any point. The main themes that emerged during this interview were as follows: A feeling of “centeredness,” a renewed sense of enthusiasm and or professional integrity, and a sense of self-compassion. Themes were isolated through listening to language used in interviews and also through reading interview transcriptions repetitively.

P2 was a 34-year-old female who has a master’s degree, and has been working as a school counselor for 10 years. P2 indicated that she considers her job stress level to be “moderate” when asked to select a choice of little, moderate, or great. Also, P2 reports that she has been practicing yoga for 11 years on an “on and off” basis and that at the time of the interview, she was practicing yoga approximately 2–3 times per week.
I began this interview by asking P2 to describe her experience with yoga. She spent much time during the interview talking about yoga as though it were a curative factor in her struggles with anxiety, depression, job stress, and professional burnout. She indicated in this interview that yoga provided her with a platform for dealing with her stress in a positive and productive manner. In addition, later in the interview she explained that yoga had inspired her to develop new content and programs in her role as a professional school counselor.

**Protective Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

*Theme One: Centeredness and Calming*

The theme of a sense of centeredness emerged during the interview with P2 when I asked what it had been like for her to practice yoga:

It was just a nice form of exercise where I think I finally felt like I could like slow down, but you are still … stretching and doing something active with my body, and I would walk away from it and just feel more grounded, feel more centered. So it's just been a really nice practice or nice observation. I can’t think of the right word, experience that has … come into my life and I’ve just kind of stuck with it ever since I found it.

P2 provided a very comprehensive answer that allows us to see that yoga for her is a multi-faceted activity. She explained that practicing yoga is a form of exercise that allows her to feel active but also provides her with a sense of calmness. Ultimately, in this narrative P2 explained that yoga, for her, is a mind and body activity that benefits her both physically and cognitively: “I felt like I was doing something active with my body, [and I] would walk away from it and just feel more grounded, feel more centered.”

When asked how she defines yoga, P2 said that “on a personal level for me, for yoga, it’s definitely the mindful movement that kind of, I feel like helps calm me and center me.” In this
interview, the concept of being centered or feeling centered appeared repetitively. In this study, the idea of centeredness may be defined as a balance within the mind and body.

When asked how she feels when she actually practices yoga, P2 responded, “I just feel very present on what I’m doing on the mat and so just focused on what is specifically happening there, and I try not to be distracted; I kind of like that it is my space to not worry about anything else. So usually pretty grounded and focused in what I am doing.” This answer is unique because it clarified that P2’s feeling of being grounded, focused, and not distracted is desirable for her. She spoke positively of the fact that yoga allows herself to be singular and focus on one thing at a time, that it made her feel grounded. Many training programs actually emphasize the exact opposite qualities for school counselor trainees. School counseling students often learn that they should be masters of multitasking and that they should be ok with gray areas and unfinished tasks. Thus is it intriguing that P2 finds value in yoga because it gives her a singular perspective in which she can focus on one thing at a time—in stark contrast to her daily work life. When asked to talk more about this sense of feeling being present, P2 responded:

I think it is just that if something else kind of comes to mind, you know I am worrying about this project at work or something at home or a family member, I like that it allows you to be there and then let go and say okay, this isn’t the time for that, to worry about that. You know focus on, on go back to your breath, focus on the pose, focus on what you're doing on the mat, and so I think for me that’s what that being present, it's just like focusing on what I'm actually doing there rather than all the other things that might be going on in my life outside of that.
Theme Two: Self Care

The self-care theme presented in this interview when P2 talked about personal struggles that she was able to overcome. When P2 was asked if yoga had affected her life, she answered, Yes, I think before I found yoga there was definitely, I had a lot more, probably unmanaged anxiety, depression, and I feel like having yoga and probably the other self-care techniques that I use, but yoga in my life has helped me feel a little bit more calm, feel a little bit more grounded and centered when I am in all the other daily life things that I have to do.

P2’s comment here illuminates the impact that yoga has had on her quality of life. She stated that before she began practicing yoga she was not managing her anxiety and depression. She also indicated that because of regular yoga practice, she now feels calm and grounded when addressing her life tasks. It became evident that yoga as a method of self-care has helped P2 manage her anxiety and depression.

P2 also presented the theme of self-care when she indicated that yoga is something that she does for herself and by mentioned that yoga provides a time for her to be by herself: “I kind of like that it is my space to not worry about anything else. Like this is my time just to do the exercise and be with myself.” P2 obviously values this time to be by herself and feels as though she is taking care of herself by providing herself with this opportunity. A problem for many school counsellors, including me, is feeling completely drained daily from continual human interaction. Many of my colleagues have stated that they talk all day so that when they leave work, talking to someone else is the last thing that they want to do. I have felt this way as well, and it is one of the many reasons that I value yoga.

P2 noted that yoga began as a method of self-care but evolved to be much more for her:
So yoga I think has kind of brought me to mindfulness and being present and all of those things and kind of digging deeper into how that can be self-care, and so just I think a philosophy of how I approach life and approach … what I do and … how I talk to people or how I talk to myself, even; and that all started with yoga and having some of the discussions or even just the things that yoga teachers would say in class and then taking that and bringing it further into how I thought about how I interacted in every area of my life …. So I think that’s kind of how its applied to … myself. I think … self-care, it’s more of just an overall like philosophy of how I look at things. Like slowing down and being present and paying attention to all of the different things going on around me.

If we interpret P2’s words remarks, we can understand that the principles she has learned in yoga have become a way of life. P2 explained that she has learned to be more present and engaged in her daily life as a result of practicing yoga, which has provided her with skills that are translatable into many facets of her life.

**Theme Three: Spirituality**

The spirituality concept emerged transparently in this interview when P2 stated, "There is that spiritual aspect that I think you get to also, depending on what you believe. … I'm a faithful person, but I don't necessarily, it's not like I'm doing a lot of prayer or anything in there, but it's just that time to kind of … quiet my mind and think about just other things that maybe I don’t give myself time to think about at other times. So I guess that's probably how I define it, the poses and the movement, but there is that spiritual aspect if you want to invite that in.

Here, P2 explained that yoga offers an opportunity for spiritual benefit should one choose to recognize that or decide that one would like spirituality to be part of one’s personal yoga
practice. Most interesting is P2’s observation that the spiritual aspect is almost voluntary: “there is that spiritual aspect if you want to invite that in.” In the early years of Western yoga, stereotypes surrounding yoga and religion were commonplace. Some people thought that yoga was a form of Hindu or Buddhist worship. More recently, these stereotypes have been rejected for the understanding that yoga is not a formalized method of worship. However, it is also commonly understood, yet rarely stated, that yoga provides an atmosphere in which participants can make the choice to practice their own spirituality while doing yoga. P2 clarified in her narrative that yoga has a spiritual aspect that has been beneficial for her.

Theme Four: Sense of Accomplishment

P2 made it obvious that she felt a sense of accomplishment in her new interests as they relate to her job. During the interview, this sense of accomplishment was conveyed more through a shift in her tone of voice and facial expressions than through her words. Her voice sounded enthusiastic and excited about her work. P2 also talked about how she does in fact enjoy her work more because of yoga, through which she has recognized and increased her sense of motivation.

For me job satisfaction—it's like I get up in the morning, and I’m excited to be at work, I’m excited to try the ideas, the mindfulness, the yoga, those different things with students, and even now my co-workers just to kind of help them. I see that, almost them being less well than maybe some of the students now.... Yoga and mindfulness has given me [a] kind of passion outside of my work, but now I'm tying it into my work as a school counselor. I feel excited to go to work every day and I think that's a pretty easy measure. When I was burnt out, I didn’t feel excited; I didn’t want to go, and I haven’t felt that way in, I don’t know, probably 4 or 5 years.
P2 drew a direct connection between yoga and her interest in mindfulness and feeling more invested, connected, motivated, and excited about her work. P2 also spoke of offering yoga and mindfulness to her colleagues; this is a positive contribution to her work environment and school community. This kind of contribution has the potential for multiple benefits within her school community.

P2 went on to describe her previous burnout in terms of not feeling motivated or passionate about her work, noting that it has been a long time since she felt that way. The ability to recognize this difference is very significant; it indicates that P2 is a very self-aware person who is able to reflect upon her experiences whether they are negative or positive. This sense of self-awareness is an extremely positive trait in a school counselor. Throughout the interview, P2’s statements continued to demonstrate that she has a very strong sense of self-awareness. It was unclear if this sense was something that was learned though yoga or if it had perhaps already existed prior to her experience with yoga.

Theme Five: Increased Sense of Professional Integrity

The theme of an increased sense of professional integrity emerged when P2 was asked about how her yoga practice has affected her professional life. Her response to this question is provided below:

I think there are probably two ways that it's impacted my professional life. I think the one is my personal feeling about being a school counselor and so, you know, after experiencing kind of the burnout I did in being so, kind of, just uncomfortable in my own skin. I think even as a school counsellor. it was just having yoga and having that way of thinking to give myself permission to be, like, you can’t do it. and you can’t control everything; and especially in a school system, there's so much that you can’t control.
And so control what you can and then let go of the things you can’t and give yourself permission to feel upset about those things, but then let it go. … don't let it keep festering inside you and making you upset or feel like you aren't doing your job well or things like that.

Clearly, P2 found a sense of self-compassion through doing yoga. She describes this self-compassion as a way of allowing herself to understand that she has to give herself permission to let go of certain things and not always assume responsibility. Interestingly, P2 emphasized that in a school system, many aspects cannot be controlled. She also spoke specifically about how she has learned how not to take student failures personally:

So I think it's that part of it has impacted me professionally and then kind of, probably over the last three years really looking at yoga, not only as a self-care technique for myself but with my students. I think making the connection between how much this has impacted me and how I look at life and how my overall wellness and resilience and how can I take that and apply that to the students that I work with. So that is what I have done a lot more, research in using yoga as kind of a therapeutic intervention for students especially with stress and anxiety and depression, and then that's led me to kind of the mindfulness stuff which there's so much research out there now with that. Yoga, I think, is just a small piece of some of that, but so now it's been really over the last 3 years, doing a lot of research and implementation of using yoga with my students.

P2’s narrative above is profound for several reasons. The most poignant part of this narrative in terms of increased professional integrity is the following: “I think making the connection between how much this has impacted me and how I look at life and how my overall wellness and resilience and how can I take that and apply that to the students that I work with.” P2 described
the connection that she made through her personal experience with yoga as it relates to wellness and resilience and her interest in incorporating that into her profession as a school counselor. She explained her interest in and research on using yoga as a therapeutic intervention for her students who are dealing with stress, anxiety, or depression. P2 also explains that researching yoga as a therapeutic intervention for her students has led to her own interest in mindfulness. It is clear that yoga has had a significant impact on P2’s life, so much so that it has spilled over into her professional life.

Interestingly, when describing this impact, she used the words “how much.” She also spoke about the fact that she is actively implementing yoga as a therapeutic intervention for her students. If not for her personal experience with yoga, her students would not have been exposed to yoga as a therapeutic intervention in addition to mindfulness theories and techniques. That P2 has both gained a new research interest and implemented new programs with her students because of her personal experience with yoga allows me to conclude that she has gained an increased sense of professional integrity, which has directly affected her as a professional as well as her students.

With regard to professional integrity as well, P2 explained that she had noticed an increased level of job satisfaction as a result of doing yoga:

I think I have more job satisfaction because of the things that I have researched and thought about with yoga—just like I said, being able to control the controllable—and I feel like that is a huge part of kind of practicing yoga, studying mindfulness, those types of things, and I know that maybe it's hard for you, it being mindfulness, because you're researching specifically yoga, but I don’t feel like I can say one—I feel like they are intertwined.
Here, P2 explained that by practicing yoga, she has learned to recognize that there are uncontrollable outcomes in her professional life, which she has to accept and not feel responsible for a negative outcome. She also found that her interest in yoga and mindfulness are intertwined. This connection between yoga and mindfulness motivated her to research the two and find ways to incorporate them into her professional practices.

**Risk Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

*Theme One: Job Stress*

In the demographic questionnaire, P2 identified her stress level as being *moderate* from the choices of *little, moderate, or great*. Thus, P2 did not regard her job as having the highest level of stress; however, she still considered it to be somewhat stressful. This result is still concerning because P2 is dealing with stress on a regular basis.

*Theme Two: Burnout*

When P2 was asked about her experience with professional burnout, she provided the following response:

Yes, I think it was just that feeling. I think for me that burnout came as I put more on myself, … like I'm incompetent in my job. I think it’s probably what people feel when they feel depressed or they feel anxious, and so that's kind of the two things I had, but I do believe it had to do with being professionally burn[ed] out. Just feeling like you didn’t have, for me it was like—that I couldn’t do—I didn’t feel like I could do anything right, and I was just overwhelmed and I couldn’t find … I had no idea where to start in any situation or any project that needed to be taken care of.
Theme Three: Workload

In terms of stress as it relates to workload, P2 talked about feeling overwhelmed by her task list and could not identify an appropriate starting place within her many roles and responsibilities. “I could not find … I had no idea where to start in any situation or any project that needed to be taken care of.”

Theme Four: Lack of Self-Care

P2 pointed out that she did not have a regular and effective self-regimen before she started practicing yoga. She explained that she did make time for herself but that it was not done with purpose or intentionality.

I think it was mostly probably like the traditional way that you look at exercise. So go do my cardio, go lift weights, you know, so for the exercise portion of it and then social part it was probably like, spend time with friends but a lot of times that probably included going to the bars and having drinks or going out for dinner or things like that. So prior to yoga, I would say that's probably what I would have thought of as self-care.

Lived Existentials

During this interview P2 referred to her experiences with yoga that have been influential on her development as a counsellor as they relate to the four lived existentials.

Lived time

During the interview P2 recalled when she first started practicing yoga. “I started right around the time that I moved to Washburn, Wisconsin, which is where I am a practicing school counselor.” She further explained her initial perception of yoga as “just a nice form of exercise where I think I finally felt like I could like slow down.” P2 also stated that she sees yoga as a time to be by herself: “This is my time just to do the exercise and be with myself.” She also
recognized that yoga is not a time to stress or worry about her work: “I think it's that if something else kind of comes to mind—you know, I'm worrying about this project at work or something at home or a family member—I allow it to be there and then let go and say okay, this isn’t the time for that, to worry about that.”

P2 also explains that she considers yoga a time to be in the here and now “focusing on right now what’s going on and what you can control in the moment or if you are going to plan and you have to do that but just kind of controlling the things you can control.”

*Lived body*

P2 explained that yoga is the practice of doing physical poses through the movements of the body. The lived body existential emerged during this interview when P2 described her definition of yoga: “I think for me, I define it as definitely the actually physical movements or the poses that you do.” She also referred to a physical feeling that she noticed in herself when she was burned out: “after experiencing kind of the burnout I did in being so, kind of, just uncomfortable in my own skin.”

*Lived relation*

The concept of lived relationship emerged during this interview when P2 explained how she defines yoga:

So that is how I define it the poses and the movement, but there is that spiritual aspect if you want to invite that in. On a personal level for me, for yoga, it’s definitely the mindful movement that kind of, I feel like, helps calm me and center me, but I do—there is that spiritual aspect that I think you get to also, depending on what you believe.

P2 explained her relationship with yoga in terms of dealing with her stress and anxiety:
Before I found yoga there was definitely a lot more unmanaged feelings like anxiety, depression, and I feel like having yoga and probably the other self-care techniques that I use, but yoga in my life has helped me. I feel more calm, feel more grounded and centred when I am in all the other daily life things that I have to do.

In addition, P2 explained that she has created a relationship between her yoga practice and her teaching methods as a school counsellor: “I kind of just infused a lot of the yoga practices, kind of the breathing, the movement, the poses into some of the things that I do in my classroom lessons.”

Interestingly, P2 explains how yoga has affected her life as well as how she navigates through the world:

I think a philosophy of how I approach life and approach what I do and so just how I talk to people or how I talk to myself. That all started with yoga and having some of the discussions or even just the things that yoga teachers would say in class and then taking that and bringing it further into how I thought about how I interacted in every area of my life and I think, so I think that’s kind of how it’s applied to myself. I think to, like self-care, it’s more of just an overall … philosophy of how I look at things. Like slowing down and being present and paying attention to all of the different things going on around me.

Lived space

P2 talked about lived space in the context of being on her mat. This idea of being on one’s mat is used often in the yoga world. “I just feel very present to what I’m doing on the mat and so just focusing on what’s specifically happening there, and I try not to be distracted; that is my space to not worry about anything else.”
Later in the interview P2 came back to the experience of lived space on the yoga mat. “You know focus on, on go back to your breath, focus on the pose, focus on what you're doing on the mat, I think for me that’s what that being present, it's just like focusing on what I'm actually doing there rather than all the other things that might be going on in my life outside of that.”

**Ecological factors**

P2’s narrative revealed the influence of the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem as well in the following statement:

I definitely think that in any of these helping professions, helping those helpers find something that kind of allows them to offer themselves some forgiveness. And know that when we work with human beings like things aren’t going to go the exact way we want them to and finding tools that help you. Like I said, give yourself permission to know that it's not going to work every time or know that human subjects aren’t like petri dishes in a lab or something; you may try something, and it’s not going to work the way you want to and just knowing that and being okay with that—that’s a hard thing for people that work with other people.

Here, P2 spoke again about the idea of self-compassion as a school counselor. Throughout the interview P2 referred to self-compassion as it relates to school counselors learning how to forgive themselves when a situation does not transpire the way they had envisioned. It is interesting that P2 talked about school counselors’ finding a mechanism that allows them to come to this realization of self-compassion or forgiveness. Clearly, P2 felt that one must find that mechanism of forgiveness and allow it translate into other systems in order to feel motivated professionally.
In the following narrative, P2 reflected on her first recollection of yoga. She explained that she recalls the presence of yoga in her home as a child. She points out that her parents studied yoga in the home, which sparked her interest in yoga as a child. She had her first experience with yoga later in life as an adult.

I had always been interested; my mom and dad did yoga. I don’t remember what the book was, but they always this yoga book around, and they would do some; we would see it around home, but it wasn't something that we practiced as a family. But I was always familiar with what yoga was but didn’t really probably take my first class until I first started in Washburn; that was almost … 11 years ago.

P2 pointed out that yoga serves many purposes for her. She feels that it is calming from a biopsychosocial perspective and that it holds a physical purpose for her. She also explained that she has stuck with yoga; it remains a constant in her life.

It was just a nice form of exercise where I think I finally felt like I could like slow down, but you are still like stretching and doing something active with my body, and I would walk away from it and just feel more grounded, feel more centred. So it's just been a really nice practice or nice observation. It is an experience that has come into my life, and I have just stuck with it ever since I found it.

In the subsequent narrative, P2 explains that she has introduced yoga into her professional life and current practices as a school counselor:

I am a certified yoga youth instructor and a practicing school counsellor, and I'm at the elementary and middle school level, so I have access to students for classroom lessons at the elementary level and so infused a lot of the yoga practices into my lessons; the breathing, the movement, the poses are some of the things that I do in my classroom.
lessons. When I feel like I'm losing the kids in a lesson, I might do a couple of different poses like a forward bend and maybe a downward dog or something just to get some movement back into what they are doing and then transition back into the lesson that I planned for the day.

Table 3

*Individual Interview 2 Phrases of Significance*

1. Protective Factors

- Centeredness and Calming

  I would walk away from it and just feel more grounded, feel more centred.

  On a personal level for me, for yoga; it’s definitely the mindful movement that kind of I feel like helps calm me and centre me.

  I usually feel pretty grounded and focused on what I am doing.

  It's just like focusing on what I'm actually doing there rather than all the other things that might be going on in my life outside of that.

  You know focus on, on go back to your breath, focus on the pose, focus on what you're doing on the mat, and so I think for me that’s what [is] being present.

- Self-Care

  Before I found yoga, there was definitely, I had a lot more unmanaged anxiety and depression.

  Yoga in my life has helped me I feel like, feel a little bit more calm, feel a little bit more grounded and centred when I am in all the other daily life things that I have to do.

  I like that it is my space to not worry about anything else. … This is my time just to do the exercise and be with myself.

  So yoga, I think, has kind of brought me to mindfulness and being present and all of those
things and kind of digging deeper into how that can be self-care.

There is a spiritual aspect that I think you get to also, depending on what you believe.

- **Spirituality**
  That is how I define it, the poses and the movement, but there is that spiritual aspect if you want to invite that in.

  Making the connection between how much this has affected me and how I look at life and how my overall wellness and resilience, and how can I take that and apply that to the students that I work with.

- **Sense of Accomplishment**
  Yoga and mindfulness has given me kind of a passion outside of my work; now I'm tying it into my work as a school counselor.

  I feel excited to go to work every day, and I think that's a pretty easy measure.

- **Increased Professional Integrity**
  I have done a lot more research in using yoga as a therapeutic intervention for students with stress and anxiety and depression and which led me to the mindfulness research.

  Over the last three years, I have been doing a lot of research and implementation of yoga with my students.

  I think I have more job satisfaction because of the things that I have researched and thought about with yoga.

2. **Risk Factors**

- **Job Stress**
  I think for me that burnout came as I put more on myself, … like I am incompetent in my job.

  I was so uncomfortable in my own skin.

- **Burnout**
  I think it’s probably what people feel when they feel depressed or they feel anxious, and so that's kind of the two things I had, but I do believe it had to do with being professionally
burnout.

I didn’t feel like I could do anything right, and I was just overwhelmed.

I had no idea where to start in any situation or any project that needed to be taken care of. So go do my cardio, go lift weights, you know, so for the exercise portion of it and then social part it was probably like, spend time with friends but a lot of times that probably included going to the bars and having drinks or going out for dinner or things like that.

So prior to yoga I would say that's probably what I would have thought of as self-care.

- **Workload**

- **Lack of Self-Care**

3. **Four lived existentials**

- **Lived time**

It is just a nice form of exercise where I think I finally felt like I could like slow down.

This is my time just to do the exercise and be with myself.

If I am worrying about this project at work or something at home or a family member, I allow it to be there and then let go and say okay, this isn’t the time for that, to worry about that.

Focusing on right now what’s going on and what you can control in the moment, or if you are going to plan and you have to do that, but just kind of controlling the things you can control.

I think for me I define it as definitely the actually physical movements or the poses that you do.

I was so uncomfortable in my own skin.

On a personal level for me, yoga is definitely mindful movement.

- **Lived body**

- **Lived relation**
4. Bio-ecological aspects of school counselors participating in yoga

- Lived space

I feel like it helps calm me and center me, there is that spiritual aspect that I think you get to also, depending on what you believe.

I think a philosophy of how I approach life and approach what I do and so just how I talk to people or how I talk to myself.

I thought about how I interacted in every area of my life and I think, so I think that’s kind of how it has applied to myself.

It is more of just an overall like philosophy of how I look at things, slowing down and being present and paying attention to all of the different things going on around me.

I just feel very present to what I’m doing on the mat and so just focusing on what’s specifically happening there and I try not to be distracted; that is my space to not worry about anything else.

You focus on, on going back to your breath, focus on the pose, focus on what you're doing on the mat; I think for me that’s what [is] being present.

It is just like focusing on what I'm actually doing there rather than all the other things that might be going on in my life outside of that.

You may try something, and it is not going to work the way you want to and just knowing that and being okay with that, that’s a hard thing for people that work with other people.

Give yourself permission to know that it's not going to work every time.

I had always been interested; my mom and dad did yoga.

It is an experience that has come into my life and I have just stuck with it ever since I found it.
I have infused a lot of yoga practices into my lessons; the breathing, the movement, the poses are some of the things that I do in my classroom lessons.

When I feel like I'm losing the kids in a lesson, I might do a couple of different poses like a forward bend and maybe a downward dog or something, just to get some movement back into what they are doing and then transition back into the lesson that I planned for the day.

Interview Three

The third interview took place on August 18, 2016. Participant 3 (P3) was interviewed via Facetime. P3 is a 65-year-old female, who reported having a master’s degree and having worked as a school counselor for 18 years. When asked about job stress level P3 did not commit to one of the provided answer choices of great, moderate, or little; instead, she said, “You know sometimes it depends on the time of the school year. At the beginning of the school year things are always crazy: too much work and not enough time.” In addition, P3 reported that she has practiced yoga for 11 years. At the time of the interview, she was practicing yoga approximately four times per week.

I began the interview by asking P3 about her experiences with yoga. She responded by spending much time talking about her experience with yoga and how it has allowed her to feel a great sense of accomplishment, which has ultimately led in an increased sense of self-esteem. Additionally, throughout this interview P3 demonstrated recognition of her job-related stress. She explained during this interview that yoga has served as a method of self-care for her over a span of several years during her professional career as a school counselor.
Protective Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga

Theme One: Centeredness and Calming

The idea that yoga serves as a method for becoming centered and calm emerged in this interview very early. When asked about how she defines yoga, P3 provided the following response: “I guess it is a practice that either for your students or yourself is going to help you with your self-regulation, your concentration and focus. As an adult, it is a way to center yourself; and as a kid, is a way to help them to be able to do the best possible job they can do.” This response was intriguing for several reasons: P3 chose to explain her impression of yoga as an adult as well as to talk about how she has observed yoga to be beneficial for her students. She clearly stated that yoga provides a platform for centering oneself, reinforcing a consistent theme throughout the research study.

P3 went on to provide clarification of how she feels during her yoga practice: “It is a relaxed feeling, it is a centered feeling. You let go of whatever has happened, and you are not concerned about the next day; you are, just at that time, just totally centered and enjoying what you are doing.” This idea has been consistent throughout this research as school counselors have continued to point out that doing yoga allows them to feel centered, which is here defined as a sense of both physical and mental balance. We should note that school counselors appreciate this feeling or state of being centered because it seems to be a direct challenge to the idea of multitasking, a skill that school counselors are encouraged to master. I can recall from my own master’s level training program hearing explicitly that we should become experts at multitasking. It is possible that this pressure to multitask could be counterproductive for school counselors because they tend to need to restore a sense of balance in their own lives.
Theme Two: Self Care

“It’s just a peacefulness that comes over you,” P3 noted. This observation about a mindset of peacefulness is perhaps the most profound statement made in the interview and the entire study thus far. The idea of this peacefulness is unique to P3’s experience during her yoga practice. It clarifies that yoga is serving as a method of self-care for P3 because her mindset and physical body have been transformed to a state of peacefulness as she describes it. P3 goes on to explain that during her yoga practice she does not feel the burdens of what she needs to accomplish in the days to come:

At the end when you have that period of relaxation at the end of your practice, it’s like your body is just melting right into your mat, and your mind is clear; you’re totally not thinking about all the things you need to be doing first thing the next morning.

The described ability to separate professional responsibilities while she practices yoga provided clear evidence that P3 is benefiting from yoga as method of self-care.

The theme of yoga as a method of self-care also presented itself in the interview with P3 when I asked her about her first experience with yoga: “I actually started practicing yoga after finishing treatment for breast cancer.” P3 talked about waking up from her mastectomy feeling that she had to be extremely careful in the way that she moved and breathed. She explained that she needed to train herself to breathe differently:

When I woke up from the surgery and was laying there and I realized I was controlling my breathing and I thought, you know this what I need to be doing right now. I can’t stretch, but I can breathe. Learning how to breathe takes practice, but once you practice, it becomes, you know, second nature to you.
P3 also made the following statement about her yoga practice “yoga has impacted me greatly because as I said you know I started after becoming a survivor.” P3 did not go into significant detail about how yoga affected her specifically as a breast cancer survivor because the interview focused more on how it has influenced her as a school counselor; however, it should be noted in this research that she did state that yoga has affected her “greatly” as it relates to her breast cancer survivorship.

When asked about the impact of yoga on her professional abilities, P3 provided the following response:

There are those pieces that just make you a better person; the way you carry your body. Your outlook and physically the way you carry your body, plus you have strength, it’s not like muscle kind of strength, but that feeling that not only can you stand up but your body is working for you. It is like your yoga is a piece of you that you carry with you all the time, and it holds you.

This narrative demonstrates that P3 feels yoga has made her a better person. This profound realization P3 derived from a feeling of strength and power both physically and mentally. She ended this narrative by describing yoga almost as tool that she can access wherever she goes. This realization of strength indicated that yoga is a self-care activity for P3, who was learning about herself and at the same time making improvements that she felt were valuable. For her, yoga seems to be an activity that feeds her soul.

*Theme Three: Spirituality*

The emergent theme of spirituality presented itself in this interview when P3 was asked about how she felt yoga has affected her. “My spiritual side means a lot of things. I feel that I have gotten into touch with spiritual side, and yoga, I truly believe, has made a difference in my
life.” In addition, P3 elaborated on the sense of strength that she has felt as a result of practicing yoga. When asked to explain this strength, P3 said, “It holds you physically, spiritually, and it holds you naturally. I think that when you not only practice it but when you believe in it, it changes some of that brain chemistry to the positives and trying to look for the positives over the negatives, which is something I'm still working on.” It is clear from this narrative that P3 felt that she is more in touch with her spiritual side, which has led her into what she considers to be a new found “strength.” She identified that strength as carrying her and allowing her to gain a new and more positive perspective in life. P3 acknowledged that this commitment to a more positive perspective will be work for her; however, she felt it would be beneficial. This narrative, in particular, could have fallen under several of the other themes in this research; however, it appeared from the detail offered here that the spirituality aspect seemed to be the culminating factor for P3 with regard to the changes or benefits she had experienced from practicing yoga. P3 referred specifically to the idea of “believing in it,” which implies a relation to a spiritual belief or believing in a spiritual side or component to yoga.

**Theme Four: Sense of Accomplishment**

The fourth protective factor, *sense of accomplishment*, presented itself when P3 made the following statement:

> I get a wonderful sense of accomplishment no matter what my physical being is, how these movements actually are really building strength. I always just feel really good about the fact that with my age I am, I mean when I was your age I thought someone my age was old. I didn’t come from a family where my parents were active people. So to see the things that I am doing just sometimes amazes me, as opposed to how my life was when I was younger. It is impactful in my emotional state, my physical state. My spiritual means
a lot of things, so also my spiritual side, and yoga, I truly believe, has made a difference in my life.

P3 gave more detail about the feeling she notices after being dedicated to her yoga practice:

“after two or three weeks it’s like, oh my gosh! Look what I can do. It gives you a sense of confidence in yourself. I have never been a person who could walk in a straight line.”

P3 goes on to describe the universality that yoga offers and how it has provided her with a sense of self-compassion and accomplishment:

This is something that I can do; yoga is something everybody can do and it just warms my heart. It provides a sense of accomplishment, that there is something I can go out and do physically, and that I feel do a rather good job of it. So my rather good job is [by] my standards, not when I watch a yoga instructor does a forward fold and almost fold herself in half. I am not doing anything fancy but I am proud of what I can do. That is when I have that sense of well-being, because it is a physical accomplishment.

Here, we can see that for P3, yoga provides an aspect of universality. P3 notes that it is inclusive and that therefore she is able to practice and benefit from it. She also stated that this sense of inclusion makes her feel good—an interesting remark given that earlier in the interview, she mentioned that she had never been involved in athletics and has considered herself to be quite uncoordinated. P3 continued by observing that this platform of universality has allowed her to participate in a physical activity that provides her with a great sense of accomplishment. Another interesting point in the above narrative is P3’s indication that her participation and her pride in accomplishment is based on her standards, not the standards dictated by others in the class or the teacher. This statement aligns with the concept of self-compassion and being able to forgive and be satisfied with oneself.
Theme Five: Increased Professional Integrity

P3 spoke of an increased sense of professional integrity when she talked about independent studies of mindfulness and mentioned that she is now leading activities at her school for other educators which relate to mindfulness:

In the last couple of years I have gotten into the mindfulness movement. I am very interested in the brain and how it works, and practicing mindfulness. I had the opportunity to take an online mindfulness course through the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. After that I began a book study with one of my colleagues at school and then extended it to my peer group: social workers, school psychologists, the other counselors and others [including] teachers, and the teachers I had, 7 or 8 teachers in this group, … all of them were relatively taken with the information and loved the book and they were just a very nice group.

Leading professional development activities for peers helped to develop an increased sense of professional integrity in P3. She was learning, taking on new cutting edge research, and sharing positive and healthy coping strategies with her peers. This kind of contribution has the potential to make a profound impact. Teaching mindfulness strategies may benefit the educators in a healthy way, as well as their students. If educators can act in a way that demonstrates mindful thinking and acting, their students may be influenced in the same manner.

In addition, P3 spoke of integrating mindfulness and yoga into her professional responsibilities as a school counselor. She explained that she was assigned to provide an enrichment class for advanced reading level middle school students. “We were given an additional assignment of doing an enrichment class for the month June for the students who were reading above level. We were allowed to select our own activity, so I chose yoga.”
The idea of incorporating yoga into the school curriculum as P3 did speaks to her evident passion for learning and the profession of school counseling. The narrative above captures this passion in a way that any school counselor would find unique. The fact that a secondary school counselor was assigned an additional duty in the month of June and was excited about it is remarkable. Often by June, school counselors are inundated with testing, the closing of one school year, and the responsibilities that go along with planning for the next school year. The end of a school year can be extraordinarily stressful and challenging for a school counselor, but it appears that P3 was aided by her passion for yoga at the end of a school year.

**Risk Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

*Theme One: Job Stress*

The job stress theme also elicited from P3 a unique and interesting emphasis. As her remarks indicated, she clearly feels a sense of stress at her job, which, as she explained, has to do with student dispositions and technology within her school:

> There are a lot of kids that come through my door that I absolutely adore, and there are a lot of not good kids who come through my door for help. The rudeness and even what the teachers have to put up with, kids and their mouths and all the social media stuff these days. I really have to use my strength that I think that if I didn’t have my yoga practice, and something that did center me and move my mind in a different way, I don't know if I could have lasted this long, because kids are not the way they used to be.

As P3 was speaking here, I could hear hesitation in her voice, which indicated that she felt uncomfortable speaking negatively about her students. She clarified that the students’ attitudes and challenges are very stressful for her. P3 spoke about trying to help students who do not want help and who have negative attitudes toward her. She said later in the interview, “no one wants
to be known as the cranky lady who none of the kids like.” From this statement and the intonation in her voice, it became clear that P3 had been hurt by these students in an emotional sense, in the sense of her feelings being hurt. This issue, though hidden, is quite pervasive in education. Educators are traditionally not supposed to express their feelings with students; they are often expected to move on and ignore the rude behavior they observe. Not properly dealing with such feelings when their students hurt them may be more significant for counselors and teachers than has traditionally been perceived.

Theme Two: Burnout

When initially asked about her experience with burnout, P3 said, “I think that I probably have the advanced overview because of my age.” She immediately indicated that she feels she does have burnout and possibly a higher level of it because of her age. When asked to elaborate, P3 explained:

Often I talk with the other counselors at my school and we will say things like “I'm not making any difference, why am I doing this, I'm not helping anyone.” So we talk to one another when we experience professional burnout, which we do. We have each other that we can go to, and that's what I take advantage of because there are three of us in the building.

P3 explained that at times, she questions why she does the job she does; she recalled feelings of helplessness at her job, and then said that she often relies on her colleagues because they talk to each other about their feelings of burnout.

P3 also spoke about feelings of burnout as they relate to specific times during the school year. She explained that certain scheduling demands require longer hours and more time-intensive work, which makes her feel burned out.
There are times in the school year where I feel professional burnout. With the start of the year with schedules and everything that has to happen, we sometimes have put in anywhere from 10 to 14 hour days. I just get both physically tired and mentally tired because in the beginning it’s like can’t see straight. I just want to run out the door. Last year I literally said, I can’t do this anymore, and so it is a profession where sometimes there is no equality between the work load and the time you are given to do it in, and so that can be a huge stressor right there.

In this narrative, P3 explained feeling burned out before the school year had even started. The above narrative is also related to the next theme, which is workload.

*Theme Three: Workload*

P3 described in detail her feelings of stress as they relate to workload in the preceding narrative:

There are times in the school year where I feel professional burnout. With the start of the year with schedules and everything that has to happen, we sometimes have put in anywhere from 10 to 14 hour days. Last year, I literally said I can’t do this anymore, and so it is a profession where sometimes there is no equality between the work load and the time you are given to do it in, and so that can be a huge stressor right there.

This statement clarified that P3’s workload has created a very stressful situation for her. She also stated that she often does not feel that she has the time needed to complete the tasks required for her job. Her reference to working very long hours points to the fact that they often cause physical strain for her. For a school counselor, certain times during the school year can be far more stressful than others, and P3 clearly spells out the effect that this has on her.
Theme Four: Lack of Self-Care

When I asked P3 about any self-care that might have been implemented before she started practicing yoga she stated simply, “Oh, there wasn’t one previously.” Before P3 began practicing yoga she was not actively implementing a self-care plan. Though it is clear that yoga eventually became a method of self-care, P3 did not indicate how soon she realized she needed some type of self-care. A clear risk factor for P3 in this case was lack of self-care.

Lived Existentials

During this interview, P3 referred to her experience with yoga and explained that it has been influential to her work as a school counselor. Her explanations are here categorized as they relate to the four lived existentials.

Lived time

P3 referred to the lived existential of time when she stated, “I enjoy the practice, the relaxation at the end. You know I usually do not want to get up when it is over; there are times when I put a blanket on, shut the door and go, ‘I want to wake up here tomorrow morning’ and I know it will be just fine.” Clearly, P3 feels very relaxed toward the end of class and recognizes that she does not want to leave because she feels so relaxed.

Lived body

P3 talked about the overall change in her body that she has noticed as a result of practicing yoga. She talked about trying to be more conscious of her posture while she is at work: “It makes me very aware when me when I am sitting at my desk, my posture and even when are walking in the halls, just how I hold myself, and just releasing that tension in my shoulders and bringing my shoulders up and down.”
In addition, P3 told more about her physical state when she practices yoga, noting the following: “It is very relaxing. It triggers those endorphins that make you feel good.” She observed as well that at the end of each yoga class, “[i]t is like your body is just melting right into your mat.” P3’s statements indicated that she feels a great sense of physical relaxation when she does yoga, specifically pointing out that she feels a change within her body.

P3 emphasized the aspect of the body again when she was asked about how yoga has affected her professionally:

There are those pieces that just make you a better person, the way you carry your body. Your outlook and physically the way you carry your body, plus you have strength, it’s not like [a] muscle kind of strength, but that feeling that not only can you stand up but [also] your body is working for you. It is like your yoga is a piece of you that you carry with you all the time, and it holds you.

Obviously, P3 felt that she has gained strength as a result of her yoga experience. She described being aware of greater strength and a new perspective.

Lived relation

“Your mind is clear; you are totally not thinking about all the things you need to be doing first thing the next morning. It is just a peacefulness that comes over you.” Here, as P3 described her feelings doing yoga, she chose to use the term “peacefulness” to describe the relationship between herself and the feeling she gets when she does yoga.

Lived space

At one point, P3 said, in referring to leaving insecurities behind during yoga, “If you haul your baggage with you there is not going to be room for both of you on the mat.” Here, she was describing a colloquial expression that she often uses with her students. She explained that she
uses this concept of “hauling your baggage” to talk about the insecurities that people haul around with them in life. She went on to say that if you practice yoga you should plan to check your insecurities at the door. This concept is intriguing because P3 is implying that people will not get the full benefit from yoga if they allow their insecurities to dominate them. However, she chose to put this expression into physical terms, which is often very helpful when works with children and or visual learners.

**Ecological Factors**

P3 mentioned that she does yoga with a work colleague: “I have a friend that I actually need and because of yoga we work together, and now we are yoga buddies.” This is another example of P3 infusing both her personal and professional life with yoga. P3 also talked about how her yoga experience has helped her to deal with stress at work and to change her own thinking:

> I think that the practice with the breathing and with the stress at work, and the countless issues we have along the way that I know how to reflect and focus on the breathing or even doing the poses, just to kind of get your mental state to change a lot. The brain is complicated, but then in the same respect, … if you change your setting you can change how you feel, and yoga, I think, helps with that changing your thinking.

In this statement, P3 pointed out that she feels she has used breathing as a method for dealing with stress at work. She went on to state that she uses the breathing and reflection skills learned in yoga as a way of changing her thinking. She suggested that yoga has provided her with an opportunity to change her setting, which has allowed her to change her thinking.

Table 4

*Individual Interview 3 Phrases of Significance*

1. Protective Factors
• Centeredness and Calming

It is a practice that either for your students or yourself is going to help you with your self-regulation, your concentration and focus.

It is a relaxed feeling, it is a centered feeling. You let go of whatever has happened, and you are not concerned about the next day; you are just, at that time, just totally centered and enjoying what you are doing.

• Self-Care

It’s just a peacefulness that comes over you

At the end when you have that period of relaxation at the end of your practice, it’s like your body is just melting right into your mat, and your mind is clear; you’re totally not thinking about all the things you need to be doing first thing the next morning.

I actually started practicing yoga after finishing treatment for breast cancer.

There are those pieces that just make you a better person.

It is like your yoga is a piece of you that you carry with you all the time, and it holds you.

Yoga has impacted me greatly because started after becoming a survivor.

• Spirituality

My spiritual side means a lot of things. I feel that I have gotten into touch with spiritual side, and yoga, I truly believe, has made me a difference in my life.

It holds you physically, spiritually, and it holds you naturally. I think that when you not only practice it but when you believe in it, it changes some of that brain chemistry to the positives and trying to look for the positives over the negatives, which is something I'm still working on.
To see the things that I am doing amazes me, as opposed to how my life was when I was younger.

It is impactful in my emotional state, my physical state.

Yoga, I truly believe, has made me a difference in my life.

I really have to use my strength that I think that.

I get a wonderful sense of accomplishment.

If I didn’t have my yoga practice, and something that did center me and move my mind in a different way, I don't know if I could have lasted this long, because kids are not the way they use to be.

This is something that I can do; yoga is something everybody can do, and it just warms my heart.

It provides a sense of accomplishment, that there is something I can go out and do physically, and that I feel do a rather good job of it.

I am not doing anything fancy, but I am proud of what I can do. That is when I have that sense of well-being, because it is a physical accomplishment.

In the last couple of years I have gotten into the mindfulness movement.

I am very interested in the brain and how it works, and practicing mindfulness. I had the opportunity to take an online mindfulness course through the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota.

I began a book study with one of my colleagues at school and then extended it to my peer group. All of them were relatively taken with the information, and loved the book, and
2. Risk Factors

- **Job Stress**
  We will say things like, “I'm not making any difference, why am I doing this, I'm not helping anyone.” So we talk to one and other when we experience professional burnout which we do.

- **Burnout**
  There are times in the school year where I feel professional burnout.

  With the start of the year with schedules and everything that has to happen, we sometimes have put in anywhere from 10- to 14-hour days.

- **Workload**
  I just get both physically tired and mentally tired because in the beginning its like can’t see straight. I just want to run out the door.

  It is a profession where sometimes there is no equality between the work load and the time you are given to do it in and so that can be a huge stressor right there.

- **Lack of Self-Care**
  Oh there wasn’t one [a plan for self-care] previously.

3. Four lived existentials

- **Lived time**
  I enjoy the practice, the relaxation at the end.

  You know I usually do not want to get up when it is over, there are times when I put a blanket on, shut the door, and go, “I want to wake up here tomorrow morning,” and I know it will be just fine.

- **Lived body**
  It makes me very aware when me when I am sitting at my desk, my posture and even when are walking in the halls, just how I hold myself, and just releasing that tension in my shoulders and bringing my shoulders up and down.
It holds you physically, spiritually and it holds you naturally.

• Lived relation

It is very relaxing. It triggers those endorphins that make you feel good.

• Lived space

Your mind is clear, you are totally not thinking about all the things you need to be doing first thing the next morning.

It is just a peacefulness that comes over you.

If you haul your baggage with you there is not going to be room for both of you on the mat.

4. Bio-ecological aspects of school counselors participating in yoga

The practice with the breathing and with the stress at work, and the countless issues we have along the way: I know how to reflect and focus on the breathing or even doing the poses, just get my mental state to change.

The brain is complicated, but then in the same respect, … if you change your setting you can change how you feel, and yoga, I think, helps with that changing your thinking.

Interview Four

Interview four took place August 23, 2016, at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

Participant 4 (P4) had submitted a signed informed consent form via email prior to the scheduled interview time. P4 was a 26-year-old female who reported having a master’s degree with a concentration in school counseling and who had been employed full time as a school counselor for three years. P4 also reported that she had practiced yoga, specifically Vinyasa power yoga, approximately 5 years, but with consistency for only the past 2 years.

This interview began with my asking P4 to describe her experiences with yoga. P4 also expressed that yoga has served as a mechanism to allow her to process job-related stress, in
addition to her feelings of anxiety. During the interview P4 also described yoga as an activity that brings together many of her personal values.

**Protective Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

*Theme One: Centeredness and Calming*

The theme of centeredness and calming presented itself in this fourth interview when P4 talked about her initial experience with yoga and the benefit that she has observed in her own life: “I started practicing yoga because I am a really, really, anxious person, and for me practicing yoga is a way to get all of my nervous, anxious energy out and to put it into something that is actually coherent and makes me move.” It is evident from this statement that P4 felt as though directing her energy through the movements of yoga was beneficial in dealing with her frequent anxiety. P4 specifically used the word *coherent* throughout this interview. She chose to use this word in beneficial or positive contexts and with regard to her thoughts, body movements, and feelings. The use of the word *coherent* in a beneficial context implies that, in a previous state, perhaps her thoughts, body movements, and feelings were not coherent—that they might have been scattered, disorganized, and/or fragmented. For purposes of interpretation here, the word *coherent* is taken to relate to a sense of calming and centeredness.

P4 explained that she notices changes within her mind and body that affect her overall state of being as she does yoga: “I feel that my mind calms down naturally because my mind is only paying attention to what my body is doing. I feel that my thoughts hone into what I am doing at this moment rather than what I am going to be doing in an hour or what am I going to be doing tomorrow.” Clearly, P4 feels that yoga helps her to be present in her thoughts as opposed to worrying about what she needs to accomplish in the future.

P4 also described her feelings when she meditates during her yoga practice:
At my studio, we have a 10-minute meditation period, so I can tell when I feel really good when I the instructor is calling me out of meditation and I’m like, “oh my, I’ve actually been lying here for ten minutes,” and I can tell in my body because I just feel better, I can tell my thoughts are more coherent instead of segmented and rushing.

Again, P4 used the word *coherent* in this narrative to explain the change she noticed in her thoughts and overall mental state. It is evident from this statement that she feels a sense of calmness and mental clarity after she practices yoga.

*Theme Two: Self Care*

The theme of self-care emerged when P4 talked specifically about yoga as it relates to her professional abilities. “I know that if I don’t take care of myself by doing yoga I won’t be as good of a school counselor as I think I can be.” This statement indicated P4’s feeling that by doing yoga, she is taking care of herself. In addition she finds that self-care improves her abilities as a school counselor. This statement about self-care and the improvement of professional abilities serves as an example of how self-care has become part of P4’s professional identity. She is aware that self-care in the form of yoga is needed in order for her to be most effective in her role as a school counselor. She explained her self-care plan in more detail as well:

I would say the bulk of my self-care—I can tell in my body, I can tell in my mind when I need it. I am proactive about it in that I do practice yoga like two or three times a week to help with that. I also have a reactive aspect to my self-care plan when I feel like I need a more. I will add the other things in like reading or going to get a facial and a massage or making sure I eat a good dinner. But yoga is definitely the proactive aspect, and I get everything I need from yoga as far as self-care goes.
P4 explained that her self-care regimen consists of needs that she feels from a mind and body perspective, noting that she uses yoga as a proactive measure for self-care. She explained that she also is aware of the need for “reactive self-care.” These activities vary and are more self-indulgent in nature; thus, she ended by identifying yoga as her primary consistent method of self-care.

Theme Three: Spirituality

The idea of spirituality presented itself when P4 spoke of what yoga means to her and the role it has played in her life:

Yoga, to me, is the union of my mind, my body, and my spirit. It is helpful to me to move and to breathe and to calm my mind down and also to bring me more in tune with my spirituality and God. It really combines all the things that are really important to me. This narrative explains that P3 feels the presence of God and spirituality in her life is important. In addition, P4 has indicated that through her practice she feels “more in tune” with her spirituality and God. This statement illuminates the idea that yoga provides a platform for practicing spirituality.

Theme Four: Sense of Accomplishment

P4 described the personal benefits of her yoga practice. When P4 expressed these benefits, she described them from a personal perspective with an observed sense of pride and conviction in her voice, making it obvious that she felt she has developed positively as a person as a result of her yoga practice. As one example, she said, “I am not a closed off person [now]; before, I would probably not have talked to you, and [now] I am not a closed off person; I am very open to other experiences.”
P4 also spoke with the same observable sense of pride and conviction when she acknowledged how she addressed an escalated student situation which she had previously described. “It really sticks out to me because I know that if that had happened and I was not practicing yoga I would have like been—I don’t know that I would ever have let it go.” She also went on to explain that she used her yoga practice to process her experience and that it was also helpful to her: “I themed my yoga class around letting go, and it’s just like with yoga, I was able to deal with it so much more effectively.”

*Theme Five: Increased Professional Integrity*

P4 communicated the integration of yoga into her professional life and spoke of how she feels her yoga practice has improved the quality of services she is able to provide as a school counselor:

I became a yoga teacher because I am a school counselor. My personal yoga practice has improved so much because of my work—honestly, because I know that in order to insert yoga into the schools I need to learn so much more about it. I know that if I don’t take care of myself by doing yoga, I won’t be as good of a school counselor as I think can [be].

P4 explained that she has an interest in presenting yoga in school; however, she realizes that she will need to learn more about yoga before doing this. She also explained that she became a yoga teacher because of her roots as a school counselor. This narrative also suggests that P4 plans to use her education that she has gained as yoga teacher to insert yoga into the schools through her role as a school counselor. This idea of P4 integrating a new concept into her professional repertoire indicates that she feels a professional inspiration and is moving away from stagnation or complacency in her career. In addition, P4 has also indicated that she feels her work as a
school counselor has improved as a result of her personal yoga practice. She also states that by practicing yoga she is able to satisfy her self-care needs and can live up to her professional potential as a school counselor.

P4 provided an example of how she noticed a difference in her counseling skills when she was working with a highly escalated student:

I can tell there is such a difference; for example, a student last year … literally cussed me out, yelling and screaming. I had never been called such terrible names before; I was just able to sit there and be like “okay, it’s okay, we’re going to be fine; you get out what you need to get out; if you want to talk to me just get it out.” No, I’m not going to react to her because that is going to make her react even more. I think before yoga I would have been a blubbing hot mess and taking all that personally and saying, “oh my, this girl hates me,” and she might hate me. But with yoga I was able to say, “I need to take a step back from this and be able to say, ‘she’s mad, okay, but I really didn’t do anything to her so I don’t need to take all of this stress on.’”

This was a new reaction for P4 when she was working with an escalated student who was projecting her anger on her as a counselor. P4 felt that as a result of doing yoga, she had actually gained new and/or stronger skills as a counselor, which allowed her to maintain a calm and collected demeanor when working with a very angry student. She described this new skill almost as a coping skill that she used during her session with the escalated student. She was able to channel her emotions positively by rationalizing the situation versus internalizing it. P4 was able to step back and explain to herself that she had actually done nothing to provoke this student or to contribute to her anger, so that she did not have to allow herself to feel the stress of taking responsibility for this student’s anger. P4 explicitly noted that before she practiced yoga, she
would have likely internalized the anger directed by this student. P4 obviously feels that her counseling skills have improved and developed in a manner that is positive and productive not only for the benefit of her students but also for her well-being as a counselor.

**Risk Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

*Theme One: Job Stress*

In terms of risk factors, P4 explained that she felt a great sense of stress in her professional life because of a strained relationship with a coworker. In fact, her job stress was so significant that P4 contemplated leaving her job:

> I think that the biggest challenge that I have had at work is with a coworker. I have a counselor who I work with; I have a hard time with her, and we don’t mesh well together. I would say that by the end of my first year I was like, I don’t know if I can work here anymore because I was like I cannot work with someone I don’t mesh well with.

*Theme Two: Burnout*

When asked if she had ever experienced professional burnout P4 said,

> Yes, I have and it did not deal with counseling; it did not deal with my students; it dealt with testing, and with fear I was pretty much at the end of my rope. I was like “I can’t deal with this.” We were also down two administrators, and we had no administrators so it was just like a big hot mess. I was like at the end of last year, “I can’t do this anymore. I’m done.”

Interestingly, P4 identified this stress as caused by a lack of administrative support and/or direction. Another source of stress, she indicated, was coordinating testing. These data support the idea that there is an increased risk of professional burnout when counselors are tasked with non-counseling related duties and do not feel that they have administrative support.
Theme Three: Workload

The workload theme in this interview presented itself when P4 talked about her professional burnout and a lack of support. She stated, “We were also down two administrators and we had no administrators so it was just like a big hot mess.” Unfortunately, counselors are often pushed into administrative roles when there is an absence of administrators. The terminology P4 used here, “a big hot mess,” indicates that she was overwhelmed by her workload and that more responsibility was placed on her because of the lack of other employees.

Theme Four: Lack of Self Care

When asked about her previous self-care plan P4 provided the following response:

Before yoga, there was not one. Literally, I would read sometimes. I had some self-destructive behavior some years ago. I won’t say that I am an alcoholic, but I do love wine and beer, and so I would do that; but like in grad school there was nothing. There were multiple times when I had anxiety attacks and didn’t have any resources; I didn’t have the coping resources. I got myself through it and that kind of stuff, but it was a struggle.

P4 identified several potential risks here. She acknowledged that she did not have an active self-care plan before she started doing yoga and mentioned that she had self-destructive behaviors at one point in her life. She also mentioned that she likes to drink and would use that as a coping mechanism while she was in graduate school. She openly expressed that did not have the proper coping skills to deal with her anxiety, which eventually resulted in anxiety attacks. She stated that although she was able to deal with her stress, it was in a non-intentional and unhealthy manner, which was very difficult for her.
Lived Existentials

Lived time

The lived existential of time surfaced in this interview when P4 stated, “I feel that my thoughts kind of hone into what are we doing at this moment rather than what am I going to be doing in an hour or what am I going to be doing tomorrow.” P4 thus described an ability to be attentive in her thoughts to the present moment, rather than allowing herself to become consumed by her future responsibilities. This ability to be present is often emphasized in mindfulness practices.

Lived body

P4 alluded to the fact that her mind was able to calm down when she is focused on what her body is doing. “I feel that my mind calms down naturally because my mind is only paying attention to what my body is doing.” Interestingly, in this statement P4 seemed to indicate that the movements of her body are the driving force that encourages her mind to calm down.

Lived relation

P4 presented a very strong illustration of lived relation in describing her yoga practice. “Yoga, to me, is the union of my mind, my body, and my spirit.” With this statement, P4 expressed that yoga has been a culmination for the efforts of her mind, body, and spirit. Her use of the word “union” is intriguing; it implies that she feels the three entities mentioned are working together in a harmonious and fluid manner. P4 provided more detail about this union: “It is helpful to me to move and to breathe and to calm my mind down and also to bring me more in tune with my spirituality and God. It really combines all the things that are really important to me.” It is clear that P4 feels that yoga provides her with an opportunity to acknowledge and attend to her values.
Lived space

In this interview, P4 also very clearly indicated that she feels a sense of space that she feels during her yoga practice. The following statement illuminates her perceived sense of space: “I am able to give myself space better, space to what am I trying to see, to give myself space between stimulus and reaction.” P4 seemed to feel that she has developed a coping skill which allows her to react better to situations because she is able to think through situations more thoroughly before having a reaction. As evidence, P4 explained her ability to guide her escalated student calmly through expressing her anger versus internalizing it or having an instictual reaction.

Ecological Factors

Thus far in this study, participants have consistently indicated that they have implemented yoga-related techniques and/or strategies with students in their professional roles as school counselors. P4 described how she has implemented deep breathing techniques in her counseling sessions:

There are a lot of times now when I have a session with a child, we start deep breathing. I truly believe that the foundation of their anger and all that stuff is that they are literally not breathing. Like they’re holding their breath and their heart rate has increased and they don’t know how to deep breathe reset. [In] almost 75% of my individual counseling sessions, we do deep breathing from the very beginning.

P4 also offered insight into how she has taken the values and principles of yoga and infused them into her work as a school counselor:

Yoga has really helped and it also changed the way I counseled my kids. The yoga philosophies and the yoga sutras, and all those kinds of things, are all woven into my
work as a school counselor. I do not talk specifically about the seven spiritual laws but there are themes, which I have related to specific lessons.

In addition, P4 talked about assisting a teacher who was struggling with classroom management. She and a classroom teacher required the students to do yoga poses as a calming strategy:

   At the end of last year, I helped a teacher with afternoon dismissal for her class; the students would not sit down and listen. We told them that if they wanted to get out of their seats during dismissal they had to be doing yoga. We taught them how to do crow, and all these different poses, and it was really fun.

P4 spoke of planning a yoga club at her school: “my friend, who is also a teacher at my school, we want to start a yoga club.”

P4 also mentioned that while she is at work her yoga practice has provided her with a tool to deal more effectively with people that she may not agree or get along with. “In the counseling department there are only two of us. Socially at least, we don’t mesh well. Yoga has helped me to not own her stuff, not take responsibility for the things she does or doesn’t do.”

Also, P4 said that through her yoga practice, she has learned not to take things personally; and she explains that this has benefitted her in her work environment.

   I think the biggest thing has probably been not taking things personally because if you work in a middle school everything is personal. The child who is looking at you is probably wanting to kill you, like that kind of thing, so we talk a lot about why we can’t take on what the other person is doing personally because it’s not about you; it’s about them.
P4 also talked about not being attached to things. She explained that this was stressed in her yoga teacher training and that she has integrated it into her professional toolbox as a school counselor:

In my yoga teacher training, we talk about not getting too attached to “stuff.” A student came to my office, and he was crying because he lost his cell phone. And so we had this full-on discussion about not getting too attached to things because he was upset that he lost his cell phone. It is a silly conversation to have, but it something honestly I would not have thought to do that if I hadn’t been through yoga teacher training.

Table 5

*Individual Interview 4 Phrases of Significance*

1. Protective Factors

- **Centeredness and Calming**
  
  Yoga is a way to get all of my nervous, anxious energy out and to put it into something that is actually coherent and makes me move.

  I can tell in my body, because I just feel better, I can tell my thoughts are more coherent instead of segmented and rushing.

- **Self-Care**
  
  I know that if I don’t take care of myself by doing yoga I won’t be as good of a school counselor as I think I can be.

  But yoga is definitely the proactive aspect, and I get everything I need from yoga as far as self-care goes.

  I can tell in my body, I can tell in my mind when I need it (self-care). I am proactive about it in that I do practice yoga like two or three times a week to help with that.

- **Spirituality**
  
  It brings me more in tune with my spirituality and God. It really combines all the things that are really important to me.
2. Risk Factors

- Job Stress

I have a hard time with a co-worker, and we don’t mesh well together.

I don’t know if I can work here anymore because I was like I cannot work with someone I don’t mesh well with.

- Burnout

It dealt with testing, and with fear I was pretty much at the end of my rope. “I was like I can’t deal with this.”

We were also down two administrators and we had no administrators, so it was just like a big hot mess. I was like at the end of last year, I can’t do this anymore. I’m done.

- Workload

I had some self-destructive behavior some years ago. I won’t say that I am an alcoholic but I do love wine and beer, and so I would do that, but like in grad school there was nothing.
There were multiple times when I had anxiety attacks and didn’t have any resources, I didn’t have the coping resources. I got myself through it and that kind of stuff but it was a struggle.

3. Four lived existentials
   - Lived time
     I feel that my thoughts kind of hone into what are we doing at this moment rather than what am I going to be doing in an hour, or what am I going to be doing tomorrow.
   - Lived body
     Yoga to me is the union of my mind, my body, and my spirit.
   - Lived relation
     It is helpful to me to move and to breathe and to calm my mind down and also to bring me more in tune with my spirituality and God. It really combines all the things that are really important to me.
   - Lived space
     I am able to give myself space better, space to what am I trying to see, to give myself space between stimulus and reaction.

4. Bio-ecological aspects of school counselors participating in yoga
   - There are a lot of times now when I have a session with a child we start deep breathing.
     [In] almost 75% of my individual counseling sessions, we do deep breathing from the very beginning.
   - Yoga has really helped, and it also changed the way I counseled my kids. The yoga philosophies and the yoga sutras, and all those kinds of things, are all woven into my work as a school counselor.
     I do not talk specifically about the seven spiritual laws but there are themes; I have related them to specific lessons.
I think the biggest thing has probably been not taking things personally. We talk a lot about why we can’t take on what the other person is doing because it’s not about you; it’s about them.

We had a discussion about not getting too attached to things. I would not have thought to do that if I hadn’t been through yoga teacher training.

**Interview Five**

The fifth interview for this research study took place on August 23, 2016, at 7:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. The fifth school counselor participating in this study was a 61-year-old female who reported having practiced yoga for approximately 7 years. She also reported having a master’s degree and working as a school counselor for the last 31 years. Participant 5 (P5) reported that she currently practices yoga twice per month, but at times throughout her career, it has been more often.

I began by asking the participant to describe her experiences with yoga. During this interview, P5 seemed to reflect at length on how much she benefited from her regular yoga practice. She observed that yoga provided her with an opportunity to relax, which she explained carried over into her professional career as a school counselor.

**Protective Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

*Theme One: Centeredness and Calming*

The concept of a feeling of calmness and centered surfaced in this interview when P5 was asked about how she feels when she practices yoga. She indicated that she often feels energized but also relaxed: “I feel excited; I also feel pretty relaxed, but I remember feeling fired up.” P5 goes on to provide further explanation of her feelings when practicing yoga: “I don’t always get
that feeling, because sometimes when I finish, I’m like you know, that was great and go on about my day.”

Several times throughout the interview P5 spoke of a morning practice that at one time she was doing regularly before her work day. She explained that this regular morning practice allowed her to feel as though she was centered and ready to start her day:

When I was doing my morning routine, that was the best. I felt it was so energizing, when I started my day, I would just wake up and then just go right to that 20-minute routine. That was just a great start to the day. It was like it was a sense of centering; it was a wonderful thing.

P5 further explained the feeling of “centering” that she recalled. “It would get me set for the day. You know ordering, centering, I find that it is just being one with myself.” Again, in this research study it has been suggested by a school counselor that yoga provides an opportunity to be with oneself. Although this concept of being with oneself has not been a focus of this study, the fact that it has been mentioned often by school counselors is interesting. Perhaps, as school counselors serve others consistently throughout their professional careers, they find that being alone affords them an opportunity to serve themselves as well. In this particular narrative, P5 suggests that being alone and having some time to be one with herself allow her to feel more balanced and able to start her day in a calm and energized manner.

When asked if yoga has affected her professional abilities, P5 responded, “Well, of course, if I am more balanced and centered, then when I get to this middle school with 600 kids, then I am not as likely to blow up or be inappropriate. I can be the best me that is possible.” This particular response relates to several themes within this research study. However, it is clear that
P5 feels that yoga provides her with a sense of balance and centeredness that allows her to be the best school counselor that she can be despite overwhelming job circumstances.

**Theme Two: Self Care**

The theme of self-care surfaced during this interview when P5 was asked about her experience with yoga. “When I am doing yoga on a regular basis, it is phenomenal. It is probably really the right exercise for me. While I love to go for walks and I have run a marathon every year, I usually feel pretty energized once I’m finished with a yoga session.” It is clear from this excerpt that P5 has come to the realization that yoga is “the right exercise for me.” She explained that it is a phenomenal experience for her and that she exercises in other ways, but yoga allows her to feel energized. P5 observed that she feels “excited and fired up” after practicing yoga. Based upon these statements, it is clear that yoga is serving to rejuvenate P5. This feeling of being reset or rejuvenated is consistent with the goals of self-care. It is clear that P5 has realized that yoga is an effective method of self-care for her as a school counselor.

P5 also explained that seeing the solicitation for this research study served as a reminder for how much she valued her yoga practice and the fact that she needed to be doing it more regularly for her own self-care. She explained her initial reaction to seeing the request for research participants on the ASCA website: “I thought you know, P5, you loved this, why aren’t you doing it more often?” Throughout the interview, P5 expressed that yoga was a successful form of self-care for her and that she felt she needs to make improvements to her own self-care plan. P5 stated that some of her own motivation for joining this study came from a desire to improve her self-care plan, as well as to examine her own thoughts surrounding yoga as a method of self-care.
In addition, P5 explained that she had an interest in using self-care as professional development focus for herself and the counselors that she supervises for the upcoming school year: “In reviewing my professional development for this year, self-care is an option, and I am also the coordinator for the counselors in my district, and I am wondering how I can not only self-care myself but how self-care can help the rest of these men and women.”

**Theme Three: Spirituality**

P5 referred to spirituality when she explained that she felt a sense of “inner peace” when she practices yoga. When asked about what yoga means to her, P5 stated the following: “It provides a sense of inner peace and stretching. It is focusing on the inner being, on the inner self.” This idea of focusing on the inner being indicated that P5 feels a sense of identification with her own beliefs, thoughts, and emotions as a result of her yoga practice. This identification and use of the words “inner peace, inner being, and inner self” demonstrate that P5 feels in touch with a sense of spirituality when she practices yoga.

Again, P5 points out that to her, yoga is a singular practice, which provides a platform for self-identification: “Yoga is about ourselves, and it doesn’t matter what anybody else does.” In saying that “yoga is about ourselves,” P5 was suggesting that yoga can be a non-competitive activity, in which a person can free him- or herself from competition with others. Clearly, P5 felt that her yoga practice allows for a spiritual component, which includes a reflection of herself.

**Theme Four: Increased Professional Integrity**

The theme of an increased sense of professional integrity surfaced in this interview when P5 talked about how yoga allowed her to feel calm when she is at work. She mentioned that she noticed herself feeling calm and relaxed in tense work environments, and she made the following statement about her demeanor at work when she is practicing yoga regularly: “I can be the best
me that is possible.” P5 indicated that she feels she is the best version of herself at work when she is practicing yoga regularly, which demonstrates an increased sense of professional integrity. In addition, if counselors feel that they are the best version of themselves, one might conclude that the services that they are providing to students are improved.

P5 spoke again of a change in herself that she noticed during her work day when she was practicing yoga regularly in the mornings before school. When asked about her professional perspective on her yoga practice and its effects on her, she said, “I would have to say yes, I feel that yoga impacted my professional abilities in a positive way, particularly when I was doing the morning practice every day, because I felt so good.” Again, this statement suggests that P5 is feeling her best at work and is able to provide the best services possible to her students. We might also assume that school counselors might feel more job satisfaction if they are also satisfied with the quality of services they are providing.

P5 spoke of a desire to enhance her own self-care plan. In addition, she talked about providing professional development activities for the counselors that she supervises to improve their own self-care plans. “In looking at my professional development for this year, self-care is an option, and I am also the coordinator for the counselors in my district, and I am wondering how I can not only self-care me, but help self-care the rest of these men and women.” P5 thus demonstrated that she feels inspired to improve not only her quality of life through self-care, but also the lives of those around her. This desire to help colleagues through educating them on self-care can be beneficial on many levels to the profession and to the specific school community. This desire to teach and restore the professional capabilities of others serves to illustrate that P5 is professionally moving in a direction away from burnout and complacency, and toward an increased sense of professional integrity.
Theme Five: Sense of Accomplishment

The participant presented the idea of a sense of accomplishment when she talked about her observed feelings while doing yoga. It should be noted that P5 explained these feeling with a sense of pride and confidence in her voice that was not consistently noticed throughout the interview:

It is just a good feeling. Maybe it is that my body does what I want it to do. I finally learned with yoga that it doesn’t matter if my pose does not look like the teacher’s. I learned that that my pose is my pose. That I will get there when I get there. It is very freeing not to have to be just like the picture, or the instructor, or the whatever.

It is evident here that P5 felt a strong sense of accomplishment with relation to her yoga practice. This sense of accomplishment is particularly evident in her statement about her body doing what she wants it to do, resulting in a good feeling for her. The above narrative also suggests that P5 has adopted a sense of self-compassion for herself as a result of her yoga practice. She stated that she “finally learned” in yoga that she does not have to do the poses as perfectly as they may be done by an instructor or in a picture. She noted that this sense of self-compassion has been “freeing,” a word she used with a tone of excitement and conviction.

P5 went on to describe other observations of her yoga experience:

I have accepted that yoga is really an individual activity. If you are in a class, a good instructor is going to say to you, this is your practice. This is your time to do this, so you do what you can do and everything will be okay. That is a very calming and relaxing thing for me. That I don’t have to compete, there are so many other things that I don’t do as well. I love to walk and I do participate in a half-marathon every year, but it takes me forever to finish it. In the back of my mind, I am thinking things like “I’m not as good as
my sister, and I’m not as good as my brother.” Whereas with yoga I have somehow been okay with “this is what I do and it’s okay.” It doesn’t matter if I can’t do a pose. It’s just all about what I can do, and be good with that.

Here, P5 expressed that she feels she has benefitted from the non-competitive environment of her yoga practice. She has learned to appreciate the fact that she does not have to be perfect in yoga and that she does not have to compete in yoga. P5 explained that she has participated in other physical activities in which she has not experienced the same benefit. She talked about her experiences in running and how they made her feel as though she was inferior, which she contrasted with yoga practice by noting that she no longer felt this way. She sounded proud when talking about what she has accomplished in her yoga experience.

Risk Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga

Theme One: Job Stress

P5 identified her job stress level as moderate. Throughout the interview, P5 spoke of her unique responsibilities as the head school counselor in her school district. She said that she had interest in planning professional development activities on self-care for the school counselors that she supervises, because she thought it was very much needed. However, P5 plans to be proactive in managing her job stress, which she indicated is higher because of her additional responsibilities as a school district supervisor.

Theme Two: Burnout

P5 has a wealth of experience as a school counselor; she has been working for 31 years. She was able to point out several times throughout her career when she felt professional burnout. The first occasion she explained as follows: “This is my 17th year at this particular school. I think that it was about 3 or 4 years ago that I just really kind of hit a block and was not at all very
effective. I just know that I was really burned out. I just didn’t care.” When asked to describe what she recognized in herself as burnout she said, “I did not care. I did not want to go to school and it was not only that I did not care. I also found myself feeling very angry. I don’t know that I snapped at people, but more a matter of not caring and being angry.” It was evident in her response that P5 has experienced professional burnout as she described classic symptoms: not being effective, not caring, and being angry while she was at work.

*Theme Three: Workload*

The theme of workload was not addressed at length in this interview. However, P5 referred to the idea of having an overwhelming workload, thus demonstrating her awareness of the idea: “If I am more balanced and centered, then when I get to this middle school with 600 kids, then I am not as likely to blow up or be inappropriate. I can be the best me that is possible.” As discussed earlier in this work, the responsibility of working with 600 students constitutes serious overload and would be a daunting task. We might infer that P5 has been overwhelmed by the needs of her 600 middle school students in the past. It also appears that her feelings of being overwhelming had resulted in her losing her composure and becoming inappropriate, which is concerning.

*Theme Four: Lack of Self Care*

When asked about a previous self-care plan before practicing yoga, P5 provided the following response, “Oh good grief! I don’t think I had one. Before yoga, I really don’t think that I had one. I think I was kind of cruising along. You know, I would have to look at some spirituality and prayer. But no, yeah no!” P5’s response matched that of another school counselor from the interviews who denied having a fully functioning self-care plan before starting yoga practice. This lack of appropriate and consistent self-care for school counselors is concerning.
Four Lived Existentials

Lived time

P5 presented a very strong awareness of time in explaining her yoga practice. “I think for me, it’s more a matter of having that daily practice. I have learned that yoga doesn’t have to be an hour long. When I accepted that it doesn’t have to be an hour, doing yoga for 20 minutes in the morning was great.” P5 explained that she came to this realization about time within her yoga practice. She expressed that she could manage her yoga practice by making it convenient and possible for her. This adjustment of time for P5 has allowed her to implement her yoga practice in the morning before her work days which she has described as being very beneficial for her. “When I was doing my morning routine, that was the best. I felt it was so energizing, when I started my day, I would just wake up and then just go right to that 20-minute routine. That was just a great start to the day.” Clearly, the timing of P5’s yoga practice was of value to her.

Lived body

P5 did not talk in detail about the perception of her body as it relates to yoga; however, she did offer one reflective statement: “It is just a good feeling. Maybe it is that my body does what I want it to do.” Throughout the interview, P5 referred to different occasions when she did not feel she was physically performing well or to the standard of others. However, through this statement, she indicated that yoga provides her with a sense of her body cooperating with her.

Lived relation

The existential of lived-relation was addressed in this interview when P5 described what yoga was to her: “It provides a sense of inner peace and stretching. It is focusing on the inner being, on the inner self.” P5 noted what she has learned through becoming in touch with her
inner self: “with yoga I have somehow been okay with ‘this is what I do and it’s okay.’ It doesn’t matter if I can’t do a pose. It’s just all about what I can do, and be good with that.”

Lived space

P5 expressed a sense of lived-space when she talked about the feeling that she often noticed when leaving the yoga studio. “Sometimes I would walk out of the studio and say, ‘Oh my gosh that was wonderful and I feel great!’” Interestingly, P5 noted these feelings as she was leaving the physical location where she had been practicing yoga. This identification of the place or “yoga studio” implies that she has a noticed a change in herself, one that had not been present when she entered the yoga studio.

Ecological Factors

From a bioecological standpoint, we can connect P5’s personal practice and her desire to implement it in work-related activities. As previously pointed out in this study, P5 expressed a desire to improve her own self-care as well as that of her colleagues: “In looking at my professional development for this year, self-care is an option, and I am also the coordinator for the counselor in my district, and I am wondering how I can not only self-care me, but help self-care the rest of these men and women.” P5 has clearly made the connection and seen the benefit of personal practice, which has led to a desire to implement work-related activities that address well-being.

P5 also indicated that practicing yoga allows her to be the best version of herself that she can be. This statement clearly indicates that her yoga practice has the potential to benefit other systems in her life. This idea serves as an illustration of the interconnectedness of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.
Table 6

*Individual Interview 5 Phrases of Significance*

1. Protective Factors

- **Centeredness and Calming**
  - I feel pretty relaxed.
  - I felt it was so energizing.
  - It was like it was a sense of centering; it was a wonderful thing.

- **Self-Care**
  - When I am doing yoga on a regular basis, it is phenomenal. It is probably really the right exercise for me.
  - I usually feel pretty energized once I’m finished a yoga session.

- **Spirituality**
  - It provides a sense of inner peace and stretching. It is focusing on the inner being, on the inner self.
  - Yoga is about ourselves, and it doesn’t matter what anybody else does.

- **Sense of Accomplishment**
  - I can be the best me that is possible.
  - I learned that that my pose is my pose. That I will get there when I get there.
  - It is very freeing not to have to be just like the picture, or the instructor.
  - This is your time to do this, so you do what you can do and everything will be okay.
  - It doesn’t matter if I can’t do a pose. It’s just all about what I can do, and be good with that.
• Increased Professional Integrity

I feel that yoga impacted my professional abilities in a positive way, particularly, when I was doing the morning practice every day, because I felt so good.

2. Risk Factors

• Job Stress

I am the coordinator for the counselors in my district, and I am wondering how I can not only self-care me, but help self-care the rest of these men and women.

• Burnout

I just know that I was really burned out. I just didn’t care.

I did not care. I did not want to go to school and it was not only that I did not care. I also found myself feeling very angry.

• Workload

When I get to this middle school with 600 kids, then I am not as likely to blow up or be inappropriate.

• Lack of Self-Care

I don’t think I had one (self-care plan). Before yoga, I really don’t think that I had one. I think I was kind of cruising along.

3. Four lived existentials

• Lived time

I think for me it’s more a matter of having that daily practice.

I have learned that yoga doesn’t have to be an hour long. When I accepted that it doesn’t have to be an hour, doing yoga for 20 minutes in the morning was great.
• Lived body
  It is just a good feeling. Maybe it is that my body does what I want it to do.

• Lived relation
  It provides a sense of inner peace and stretching. It is focusing on the inner being, on the inner self.

• Lived space
  Sometimes I would walk out of the studio and say, that was wonderful and I feel great.

4. Bio-ecological aspects of school counselors participating in yoga

In looking at my professional development for this year, self-care is an option, and I am also the coordinator for the counselors in my district, and I am wondering how I can not only self-care me, but help self-care the rest of these men and women.

**Interview Six**

The final interview for this study took place at a branch location of the Carnegie public library in Pittsburgh. I was able to secure a private conference room for the interview, which was at 4:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on October 20, 2016. The sixth participant in this study works in a public urban high school as high school counselor. Participant 6 (P6) is 32 years old and reported having worked as a school counselor for 4 years. She said that she has practiced yoga for 5 years, at least twice per month but sometimes more frequently.

I began this interview by asking P6 to describe her experiences with yoga. Throughout the interview, P6 expressed that she faces a great amount of job-related stress. She expressed that yoga has allowed her to find “mental release” from the stress related to her job. She also explained during this interview that by practicing yoga she has been inspired to implement other methods of self-care.
Theme One: Centeredness and Calming

P6 stated that yoga has provided her with an opportunity to disconnect from work when she is not at work. When initially asked about how she feels when she does yoga, she said, “I feel relaxed.” She provided more detail about her ability to relax as a result of practicing yoga:

It has been helpful in reducing my stress levels in terms of work. Specifically, it helps me when I have not been able to … quiet my mind. So if I can’t—when I go home sometimes I am not able to relax because I’m thinking about something that happened at work or something that I need to be doing in the future, and I can’t quite turn it off. So yoga for me has been like something that has been able to relax my mind and that’s what I typically use it for.

P6 explained her use of yoga as something to help her “relax.” She explained that she often has a difficult time not thinking or worrying about her work when she is away from it. Her use of the word “relax” in this case clearly implied that she is able to gain a sense of calmness or centering as a result of practicing yoga.

Theme Two: Self Care

P6 presented the theme of self-care when she mentioned the benefits of yoga that she has experienced:

It’s a space in a place for me to be by myself even though I am with other people, but it’s … for me ready to go and it’s about an hour and a half of just my own time to relax and clear my head. Also, I get physical benefits from it. Specifically … strength, but for me it is not really about the physical; it is more about it has been … a helpful mental release and the physical aspects are just like an added benefit, but yes it is more about a space to go and have time for myself and to take a break from work and all the stressors.
P6 mentioned several benefits of yoga that align with self-care. First, P6 clearly values that yoga provides her with an opportunity to be by herself, to allow her to feel alone. This concept of being alone while practicing yoga was consistent across the findings of this research. P6 briefly mentioned strength as a benefit but focused more on yoga as a mental release for her. She also stressed that yoga allows her to feel that she is taking a break from her work, which clearly indicates that she has found yoga to be a form of self-care.

In addition to the previously mentioned benefits, P6 talked about an overall improvement in her effort to maintain her health and well-being that she notices when she is practicing yoga:

It has made me stay hydrated, which is always a problem for me. I was just not very good with that. I was not very mindful of my water intake, but I knew if I was going to be going to go to yoga, I would make an effort to be extremely hydrated. So now I always carry water bottles with me. I think in general I am more of a conscientious person, and I am healthier in general if I am going to do yoga more. So I think practicing puts me in a better space … to eat better and I find myself, I sleep better, I eat better, I am more energized, I stay hydrated I am … more focused and aware.

In the previously listed narrative, P6 describes how doing yoga has motivated her to stay dedicated to habits that she feels have improved her overall health and well-being. She points out that she eats and sleeps better and also makes an effort to drink more water. Interestingly, P6 states that she feels more “focused and aware” when she is taking care of herself. As a follow-up question, I asked P6 to explain how her quality of sleep has improved as a result of doing yoga. She responded as follows:

So because I am not thinking about work so much, it then helps me sleep because I have been able to … transition into a clear space where I am not thinking about work. Also, it
is physically challenging, so it’s taxing on your body. So after an hour and a half of yoga, I mentally feel better and I’m also physically exhausted, and so I just get home and take a shower and then go to bed; and it is just … a nice process to help me be able to sleep better.

Furthermore, P6 said that she often struggles with her own anxiety and observed that yoga has been a coping mechanism to provide her with relief.

So I have personally a lot of trouble. I perseverate a lot on things, and I sometimes have a hard time taking a break from my own thoughts, and so that space and practicing yoga has been really helpful in getting me into to stop perseverating or thinking…thinking about something other than work …, getting work off my mind, and then it’s easier for me to relax and … sleep and do all of the other things important for self-care, like just taking a break from work. So it releases me from whatever thoughts I’m having and perseverating on, which are 95% about work.

P6 here indicated that her work causes her a great amount of stress and that yoga has provided her with an opportunity to step away from it. She also went on to say, “So it’s like, take a break. It just helps me to stop thinking about work, essentially.”

P6 also went on to say that she has an emergency self-care plan that includes yoga if her anxiety worsens: “I think if I get to the point where I need medication, then I probably am doing something wrong, so that’s why I will double up my yoga practice [rather] than to see a therapist.” When asked if yoga was part of her self-care plan P6 provided the following response:

Yes, it is part of my plan. I don’t do it daily but it’s definitely something that if I am feeling overwhelmed or anxious with work it’s … one of my… fall backs; you know, I
am going to try to get it. If I am feeling bad, I always think, oh I need to do some yoga this week and get back into that practice; so it is definitely something that helps me.

Theme Four: Sense of Accomplishment

P6 presented a very strong sense of accomplishment when she talked about her experience with yoga: “I feel proud and good about what I have been able to accomplish especially if something becomes easier for me; the more I go, the easier I suppose it gets. So I feel like a personal satisfaction of being able to feel stronger.” P6 provided more detail about her sense of accomplishment:

It’s physically taxing. So the more I go, the longer I can hold up a pose, or the more flexible in a pose, or the more balanced I am. It’s progress that I can see myself making, so you know that you are actually getting, in addition to the mental benefits that I can see, the physical benefits and how my body is responding to it physically as well. I feel proud of being able to do a pose one day that I couldn’t do the next day or holding it for longer, so…..I feel strong.

In this narrative, P6 described her progress over time through participating in yoga practice. This observed progress has provided P6 with a noticeable sense of accomplishment.

Theme Five: Increased Professional Integrity

The theme of increased professional integrity presented itself when P6 talked about her motivation to see a therapist for her anxiety.

I would say doing yoga definitely persuaded me to go to see a therapist and being able to recognize some things about how I was, how my perspective on things was impacting my mood and my ability to do my job. I feel like it very well could have been it. I went to yoga, and then I started to do all these other things that made me feel better.
In the above narrative P6 indicated that her yoga practice encouraged her to seek the help of a therapist. As stated throughout this research, it is the ethical responsibility of school counselors to ensure their own well-being in order to serve their students best. Clearly, P6 demonstrated a commitment to the profession in abiding by the ethical standards set forth for counselors. In this way, the narrative exemplifies a sense of increased professional integrity.

**Risk Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

*Theme One: Job Stress*

P6 indicated that she has a great amount of work-related stress, much of which centers on her professional work and her innate desire to see her students achieve. During the interview, she described that she has a hard time not thinking about her work when she is away from it: “I have not been able to … quiet my mind; so if I can’t—when I go home, sometimes I am not able to relax because I’m thinking about something that happened at work or something that I need to be doing in the future, and I can’t quite turn it off.” When asked about her work, P6 observed, “I think I have high levels of stress constantly.” I asked P6 to describe this stress, and she provided the following response:

I can feel it; I feel very anxious. I am not really … in the moment at work. I am thinking about all the other tasks I have to do. Yeah, last year was pretty rough for me. Last year was probably the hardest year I had with counseling, and that’s when I started to see the therapist because I was just … so anxious. My anxiety was through the roof, and I didn’t really understand why, so [I] got into therapy.

P6 described how she felt her anxiety manifesting in her work environment and how she felt it prevented her from truly being “present.” P6 described in greater detail as well how she decided to address this work-related stress:
Last year really helped me understand and even recognize that I perseverate so much and that I swear to have perfectionist tendencies which impact my work environment because… I mean it’s… there’s not that many rules when you are working with students. There is a million in one things that can happen, and one way is to handle something, and how you handle this one person who could be different than how you handle with—I am someone who likes rules and structure but thrives off of … interaction and that’s really where my strength is, interacting with people so… so I think last year when I … was thinking about … maybe I am so interested and maybe … I need medication—that’s when you realize: no, I think I … need to talk to someone, another person, and it is not really like a rule book.

Here, when P6 described her need for a “rule book,” this need for more specificity may imply that P6 is struggling with role ambiguity, which has been recognized in the research literature to contribute to stress among school counselors.

**Theme Two: Burnout**

When P6 was initially asked if she had experience with professional burnout she said, “Yes.” However, she continued that she does not feel currently feel burned out because she has a sense of “hope” for her job. She explained that she attended a professional counseling conference in which she was able to participate in a session on burnout. She described what she learned about burnout: “I learned in that session of what I thought was burnout, and I don’t think I’ve actually experienced burnout, but I have experienced just … high levels of stress.” Thus, even though P6 initially indicated that she had experienced burnout “yes,” she realized, after learning more about burnout, that is probably not what she has experienced. She indicated that learning that she has a sense of “hope” in her job means that she does not qualify as being burned out.
**Theme Three: Workload**

P6 indicated that her workload is high and causes stress. In terms of handling student issues, she noted that “when you are working with students there is a million and one things that can happen.” In addition, P6 talked about checking her email at night. She expressed that she was doing this because she wanted to know what she was going to be “walking into the next day.” It is clear from these statements that P6 has a significant workload as a professional school counselor.

**Theme Four: Lack of Self Care**

P6 described her self-care as having a sense of cohesiveness. She explained that if she is taking care of herself in one aspect, she is more likely to focus on other aspects of self-care that are of value to her as well. She explained that this aspect can be problematic if she is not taking care of herself: “If I am not doing it (self-care), you know, if there is … a space where I am not doing it, I am less likely to sort of, like all that other stuff, it kind of falls off... falls away and I am not inclined to … eat as well.”

When asked about her previous self-care plan P6 talked about her first job as a long-term substitute counselor:

It was not a very good…when I first started my job I don’t think I even was thinking about self-care. I think I was thinking about I need to do a really good job I need to because my first year I was on long-term sub. I think definitely there was no self-care happening then or if it was, it was something that wasn’t actually helpful, but I thought you know ..I was drinking wine or… you know … going out with my friends or … eating … greasy food—something … [that] was immediately comforting, but in the long run it wasn’t actually helpful at all.
This illustrated lack of self-care causes concern because P6 was speaking about her first work experience immediately following graduate school. Precisely at this time, she indicated that her self-care plan was non-existent. This narrative again raises the issue of the need for self-care concepts to be taught in counselor education programs.

**Four Lived Existentials**

*Lived time*

P6 introduced the lived existential of time in this interview when she explained that yoga provides her with her “own time.” When asked about how she defines yoga, she said, “Yoga is for me, where I can go; and it’s about an hour and a half of just my own time.” Clearly, P6 values the idea of yoga, as time for herself.

*Lived body*

The existential of lived body was presented in this interview when P6 explained that she notices her body responding to yoga as a stimulus: “I can see the physical benefits and how my body is responding to it (yoga).” In addition, P6 expressed that yoga challenges her physically: “it is physically challenging, so it’s taxing on your body.” As previously mentioned in this interview, P6 discussed the benefits of yoga’s being physically challenging, and how it has served as a mechanism to combat her anxiety and improve her sleep habits.

*Lived relation*

During this interview P6 expressed that yoga provided her with a relationship to improve her overall efforts in preserving her health and well-being. “If I am not doing it, you know, if there is … a space where I am not doing it, … all that other stuff kind of falls off of the … falls away, and I am not inclined to … eat as well.” P6 seemed to be saying that her lived relationship with yoga is one with an effort to improve her own health and well-being.
Furthermore, P6 expressed that yoga allows her to “feel strong.” It is clear that by practicing yoga, P6 feels strength as one result. This strength is an illustration of the lived-relationship that she describes within her experience with yoga and the impact that it has had on her life.

**Lived space**

P6 used the lived existential of space to describe yoga as a mental release for her. She expressed that yoga provides her with a “clear space,” which leads to mental release:

I have been able to transition into a clear space where I am not thinking about work.

It’s a space in a place for me to be by myself, even though I am with other people; but it’s … for me ready to go, and it’s about an hour and a half of just my own time to relax and clear my head. I also get physical benefits from it. Specifically, … strength, but for me it is not really about the physical; it is more about … a helpful mental release and the physical aspects are just … an added benefit; but yes, it is more about a space to go and have time for myself and to take a break from work and all the stressors.

Clearly, P6 sees yoga as being a space for her to gain a mental release from her job-related stress. The presence of space indicates that being in the “space” in which she can do yoga provides her with a mental release, which is a benefit to her.

**Ecological Factors**

P6 described techniques that she learned in yoga and how she used them outside of yoga classes:

I think breathing is a big thing that I didn’t do, and that I think that I do now. I take deep breaths; to be more mindful of that [breathing] I think that … has helped. I think in terms
of professional abilities maybe just having an awareness… I am more energized, I stay hydrated; I am just … more focused and aware.

In addition, P6 expressed that she feels yoga has been beneficial for her, and she often encourages others, including her co-workers, to try it. “I know it has helped me a lot, so I always just encourage other people to do it.” She talked about attending yoga classes with the other counselors that she works with, as well as suggesting it to the other counselors in her school.

Table 7

*Individual Interview 6 Phrases of Significance*

1. Protective Factors

- **Centeredness and Calming**

  It (yoga) has been helpful in reducing my stress levels in terms of work.

  It helps me when I have not been able to like quiet my mind.

  Yoga for me has been … something that has been able to relax my mind, and that’s what I typically use it for.

- **Self-Care**

  It’s a space in a place for me to be by myself.

  An hour and a half of just my own time to relax and clear my head.

  It has been .. a helpful mental release, and the physical aspects are just … an added benefit.

  It is more about a space to go and have time for myself and to take a break from work and all the stressors.

  I think in general I am more of a conscientious person, and I am healthier in general if I am going to do yoga more.

  Yoga has been really helpful in getting me into to stop perseverating or thinking.
• Sense of Accomplishment
  I feel proud of being able to do a pose one day that I couldn’t do the next day or holding it for a longer so… I feel strong. I have not been able to … quiet my mind.

• Increased Professional Integrity
  I would say doing yoga definitely persuaded me to go to see a therapist. Being able to recognize some things about how I was how my perspective on things was impacting my mood, and my ability to do my job.

  I feel like it very well could have been it. I went to yoga and then I started to do all these other things that made me feel better.

2. Risk Factors

• Job Stress
  So if I can’t, when I go home sometimes I am not able to relax because I’m thinking about something that happened at work or something that I need to be doing in the future, and I can’t quite turn it off.

• Burnout
  I can feel it, I feel very anxious. I am not really like in the moment at work. I am thinking about all the other tasks I have to do.

  My anxiety was through the roof, and I didn’t really understand why so got into therapy.

  I don’t think I’ve actually experienced burnout but I have experienced just like high levels of stress.

• Workload
  When you are working with students, there is a million and one things that can happen.

• Lack of Self-Care
  When I first started my job I don’t think I even was thinking about self-care.

  I think definitely there was no self-care happening then.

3. Four lived existentials
• Lived time

   Yoga is for me, where I can go, and it’s about an hour and a half of just my own time.

• Lived body

   I can see the physical benefits and how my body is responding to it (yoga).

• Lived relation

   If I am not doing it, you know, if there is … a space where I am not doing it. I am less likely to sort of … all that other stuff kind of falls off.

• Lived space

   I have been able to transition into a clear space where I am not thinking about work.

   It’s a space in a place for me to be by myself.

4. Bio-ecological aspects of school counselors participating in yoga

   Breathing is a big thing that I didn’t do and that I think that I do now. I take deep breaths; to be more mindful of that [breathing] I think that [is] something that has helped.

   Having awareness, I am more energized; I stay hydrated, I am more focused and aware.

After I had completed the individual interview with P5, I reviewed all five individual interviews, as well as my personal notes during the interviews, my reflexive journal, and the notes I took during the data analysis process. Although I felt that data saturation had occurred after the fifth interview, I conducted one more individual interview to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. It appeared that no new data points were emerging and that themes were consistent across all interviews. I then felt even more confident that the data had reach saturation point, which had become evident from the redundancy of the data emerging from the interviews. Consequently, the data collection was terminated. Table 8 provides a cross comparison of the protective factors shared in all of the interviews. Indicating an increased sense of professional
integrity was shared by all participants as a benefit gained from their experiences with yoga as a method of self-care. They commented that becoming more calm and centered was a positive aspect of participating in yoga. Moreover, the entire sample agreed that yoga as a method of self-care had a positive influence on their functioning and development as professional school counselors. In addition, five participants indicated that they felt yoga allowed them to gain a spiritual connection which was individually developed, and ultimately, beneficial to their well-being. Four participants indicated that their yoga practice encouraged them to gain a sense of self-compassion which has been beneficial within their professional lives. Mindfulness and inner peace were also explained by four participants, while three participants described that yoga allows them to have time alone, which is advantageous to them. Two participants expressed that yoga provided them with a sense of inner peace and increased job satisfaction. One participant mentioned feeling energized and reset as a result of practicing yoga.

Table 8

Cross Comparison of Protective Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System Levels</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Individual 1</th>
<th>Indiv. 2</th>
<th>Indiv. 3</th>
<th>Indiv. 4</th>
<th>Indiv. 5</th>
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<tr>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being alone</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Inner peace</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Inner self</td>
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</table>
Table 9

Cross Comparison of Risk Factors

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<th>Variables</th>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>Lack of investment</td>
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<td>Considered leaving the profession</td>
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</table>

Table 10

Theoretical Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Van Manen’s four lived existentials</th>
<th>Individual 1</th>
<th>Individual 2</th>
<th>Individual 3</th>
<th>Individual 4</th>
<th>Individual 5</th>
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<td>Lived time</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>Lived space</td>
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<td>x</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 shows a cross comparison of the risk factors that were mentioned by all the participants as barriers or challenges that affected their development during their careers as professional school counselors. All participants presented job stress and a lack of self-care as the main challenges that impeded their well-being and consequently affected their functioning and development. Within the entire sample, professional burnout was mentioned as a risk factor that school counselors in this study have faced, which interfered with their professional development and well-being. All participants also reported challenges with workload. Negative emotions of anger, anxiety, and depression were mentioned by five out of six participants as having negatively affected their development and professional functioning. Three participants reported drinking alcohol as a coping mechanism. Two participants expressed a lack of professional investment and said that they had also considered leaving the profession. Finally, one participant expressed challenges with caseload and conflict with others as risk factors.

As indicated in Table 10, every participant made statements that could be identified with van Manen’s four lived existentials: lived body, lived time, lived relation, and lived space. The nature of this study, as well, aligned directly with van Manen’s four lived existentials.

**Similarities and Differences among Participants**

**Similarities**

The most obvious finding in this research study is that all school counselors interviewed felt that they had either a moderate or great amount of job stress; despite these significant levels of stress, before they started practicing yoga, they did not have an effective self-care plan allowed them to deal with their job stress properly. All participants indicated that at some time throughout their careers they considered themselves to be feeling symptoms of burnout. In addition, all the participants felt that practicing yoga is an effective method of self-care.
Moreover, all participants in this study agreed that yoga has provided them with a sense of relaxation which has ultimately allowed them to feel more centered and balanced in all aspects of their lives. The majority of participants in this study also explained that they felt yoga provided them with a sense of spirituality, which is within their own right. Finally, all participants were able to explain instances in which yoga had helped them to feel more committed and/or engaged in their professional work as school counselors.

Differences

When talking about noticeable symptoms of burnout, the school counselors in this study varied in their descriptions. The statements made about burnout ranged from feeling anger, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, disengagement, and lack of interest/motivation, to considering leaving the profession. In addition, the participants explained difference sources that contributed to their work-related stress, and these varied. Some of the contributing factors that were alleged to cause stress were caseload, workload, working with escalated students, and anxiety about the best way to handle specific student situations. Finally, the benefits of yoga as identified in this study by the participants also varied. Some participants felt that yoga provided time alone, while others felt that a benefit was being surrounded by like-minded people.

Summary

Six individual interviews with professional school counselors were completed in this study. The participants provided rich information about their experiences in school counselors practicing yoga. All individual interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. I analyzed the data by carefully reading and examining it, and marked text in the data using a color code that categorized the material thematically. During this process, I reviewed my personal notes taken during the interviews and my reflective journal before drawing conclusions. This chapter has
provided a case-by-case analysis of the data collection. After all interviews were complete, a cross-case analysis of the entire sample was conducted to highlight the identified themes.
Chapter V: Discussion

Self-care is any activity of an individual or group with the intention of increasing or restoring health, or treating or preventing disease (American Heritage Medical Dictionary, 2007). The main purpose of self-care is to provide anyone within a helping profession an outlet for stress-relief and a method for restoring health and wellness. Self-care is a basic necessity for all effective school counselors because counselor wellness is essential for being in a successful helping relationship. Self-care allows the counselor to have empathic understanding and positions the counselor to be a healthy model of behavior and emotional expression (Cavanagh & Levitov, 2002). The research literature suggests that school counselors face job-related stress, which if left unaddressed can lead to burnout and potential harmful effects for students (Butcke, & Mclann, 1984; Freeman & Coll, 1997; Kendrick, et.al., 1994; Lieberman, 2004; Morrissette, 2000; NCES, 2007; Rayle, 2006; Sears & Navin, 1983; Vail, 2005; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

The professional counseling associations, including the ACA and ASCA, have emphasized the necessity of counselor wellness and self-care; however, the means by which a school counselor should adequately monitor or implement self-care is rarely discussed. In addition, school counselor education training programs often mention self-care, but the CACREP requirements lack recommendations for a specific method of self-care training. School counselors are clearly struggling to manage job related stress owing to a lack of education surrounding the importance of self-care and effective methods.

The research literature presents very little discussion on either effective methods of self-care or its importance for protecting against burnout and compassion fatigue in the counseling profession. However, a review of the relevant literature has yielded a wealth of research findings that indicate school counselors are likely face burnout and compassion fatigue owing to job-
related stress. Because school counselors face unique job-related stress and challenges, they are in need of specific methods for accomplishing self-care.

The purpose of this phenomenologically-oriented study was to examine the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. Specifically, this study focused on examining the effectiveness of yoga as a method of self-care for school counselors. In addition, the study has identified the unique job-related stresses that school counselors face.

Participants in this study shared the challenges of being a school counselor that contribute to job-related stress. Along with job-related stress, they identified workload and lack of self-care as factors that contribute to feelings and/or recognized symptoms of burnout. The findings here are supported by the literature that relates to burnout in school counselors. The research literature recognizes that school counselors have become stressed, emotionally overextended, and drained. This exhaustion leads to burnout and affects counselors’ effectiveness (Butcke, & McLann, 1984; Freeman & Coll, 1997; Kendrick, et.al., 1994; Lieberman, 2004; Morrissette, 2000; NCES, 2007; Rayle, 2006; Sears & Navin, 1983; Vail, 2005; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Thus, school counselors are most effective in their jobs when they are properly taking care of themselves. The encouragement and maintenance of school counselors’ well-being is critical to their abilities to be attentive and sensitive to student needs. Additionally, well-being is critical because it can protect school counselors against feelings of burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

Both the previous literature and the findings of this study suggest that yoga is an effective method of self-care for school counselors. Practicing yoga is said to cultivate physical and emotional self-discipline in a way that encourages the mind and body to work in perfect synergy (Lazaridou, Philbrook, & Tzika, 2013). Yoga has been considered an individual treatment for stress reduction and the overall improvement of well-being. Additionally, regular practice of
yoga has been said to support traits of friendliness, compassion, and better self-control, while developing a sense of calmness and well-being. Continued practice also leads to such outcomes as changes in life perspective, self-awareness, and an improved sense of energy, all of which lead to an improved quality of life (Woodyard, 2011).

School counselors need specific training about the importance of self-care and the measures of self-care that have been proven effective. Furthermore, school counselor education programs consider the identified factors that contribute to school counselor burnout and attempt to educate their students about the reality of the profession to prepare them better for the field. Training in self-care, especially for new counselors, is important preparation for confronting the risks of counseling, including stress leading to burnout or impairment (Sommer, 2008). The CACREP standards include information about counselor well-being. For example, Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice Standard II G.1.d. states that “counselors should receive training in…self-care strategies appropriate to the counselor role” (p. 10). Nonetheless, even though self-care is emphasized within the curriculum of CACREP accredited programs and included in the ACA Code of Ethics (2005), little empirical evidence exists concerning training provided to counselors about self-care or regarding which strategies are being used by counselors, or which strategies are perceived to be the most effective when implemented (Culver, 2011). Skovholt, Grier, and Hanson (2001) have described traditional counselor education as “other-focused,” pointing out that instruction on how counselors develop a focus on their own well-being is minimal.

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of school counselors’ perspectives on their experiences with yoga in relation to their job stress, based on their professional experiences as school counselors, to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon
of yoga as a method of self-care for school counselors. Examining these issues required giving current school counselors an opportunity to share their experiences directly and in depth. In addition, this study may shed light on the level of stress that school counselors are currently facing and may enhance understanding among counselor educators about the best way to prepare school counseling students. This study has clearly revealed some of the benefits of yoga and challenges that school counselors encounter within their professional careers. It also offers valuable recommendations for developing self-care education for school counseling students and for educating current school counselors on effective self-care to preserve their health and well-being. Finally, this study seeks to improve counselor education programs.

In qualitative research, interpretations require the researcher to go beyond simply describing the data (Patton, 2002). Thus, this chapter provides an interpretation and discussion of the findings of this study. I will present conclusions using the relevant literature and the data collected from the individual interviews, based on the theoretical framework of this study. Furthermore, the relevant themes that have emerged as protective and risk factors for the development of school counselors participating in yoga will be reviewed. In addition, I will discuss implications and recommendations for addressing self-care for school counselors. Finally, I will address the study’s limitations, questions generated, and recommendations for future research.

For data collection purposes in this study, I conducted six individual semi-structured interviews, each 45 minutes to 1 hour long, which provided individuals with an opportunity to share their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences. Participants were asked to discuss their thoughts, perspectives, insights, and feelings relating to their experiences as school counselors.
participating in yoga. Data saturation occurred after the fifth individual interview, but one more individual interview was conducted to ensure dependability of the data.

This research may provide the field of school counseling with substantial knowledge in understanding the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga as a method of self-care. A review of the relevant literature showed a lack of research that directly addresses the lived experiences of school counselors who are participating in any method of self-care. One purpose of this study was to fill the gap in the literature in examining the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga as a method of self-care and understanding the benefits of yoga as a method of self-care and the job-related stress that school counselors’ face.

Summary of Findings and Implications for School Counselors and Self-Care

Two theories have been integrated to provide a useful tool in analyzing the data collected in the individual interviews of this study. Interrelating occurs between the theories to provide a comprehensive tool for interpreting and understanding the data. Van Manen’s (1997) theory of lived existentials facilitated analysis of the data in relation to bodily, relational, and spatial/environmental experiences, as well as the effect of time in relation to all of the previous experiences. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bio-ecological model provided a lens with which to understand how an individual functions within the multitude of interfacing systems. The data from this study indicated that school counselors have a need for regular self-care and have found that yoga is an effective method of self-care.

The selected models are considered, for the purposes of this study, to provide a clear understanding of the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga, and of the factors that have influenced their development during their professional careers. School counseling as a profession cannot truly be understood without considering the personal and
professional environment of the counselors. In order to understand human development, it is essential to consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). The themes that emerged from the collected data, which were categorized into protective factors and risk factors for school counselors’ development, are discussed through the lenses of the selected theories in the following section.

**Protective Factors for School Counselors Participating in Yoga**

Protective factors serve as defenses against risk factors that protect people from difficulties, and promote resiliency. Five themes were categorized as benefits or protective factors in the development and functioning of school counselors who participated in this study. The five themes considered as protective factors are the following: centeredness and calming, self-care, spirituality, sense of accomplishment, and increased professional integrity.

**Centeredness and Calming**

This theme encompasses both the physical and mental state that school counselors observed and described of themselves throughout this study as a result of practicing yoga. All of the participants indicated that they noticed a change in their physical and mental demeanor, which they consistently described as a feeling or sense of being “centered.” For purposes of clarification, this research study has defined being or feeling “centered” as a state of physical and mental balance.

The school counselors interviewed also expressed a sense of physical and mental calm as a prolonged result of their yoga experiences. This described feeling of calm also included descriptions of relaxation and the feeling of being “reset and energized,” as some participants described it. These descriptions suggested that the personality of the school counselor has developed in a beneficial manner.
The combined senses of being centered and calm, the participants in this study agreed, meant that they felt able to think, feel, and operate in a more productive, holistic, and organized manner. As previously mentioned, this sense of being centered and calm was not present only when the participants were practicing yoga. Rather, they indicated that the centeredness and calm took shape through their altered perceptions, interactions, and view of their surroundings.

A sample of participants’ comments included the following: “Yoga helps me calm my mind, it helps me get centered.” “So by practicing yoga every day, I find that I am able to better address the everyday stressors of my life.” “I think making the connection between how much this (yoga) has impacted me and how I look at life.” “It was like it was a sense of centering, it was a wonderful thing.” “I felt like I was doing something active with my body; [I] would walk away from it and just feel more grounded, feel more centred.” These findings support the previously published research regarding the benefits of yoga. Continued yoga practice also leads to such outcomes as changes in life perspective, self-awareness, and an improved sense of energy, which leads to an improved quality of life (Woodyard, 2011). Research concentrating specifically on the breath component of yoga has suggested that symptoms of anxiety can be reduced (Descilo et al., 2010; Khalsa et al., 2009; Kozasa et al., 2008; Telles et al., 2010).

**Yoga as a Method of Self-care**

The second theme identified as a protective factor for school counselors participating in yoga is *self-care*. The findings in this study regarding self-care are supported in the research literature. Throughout their professional careers, counselors should be encouraged to make choices to create and maintain balance and to prioritize health of mind, body, and spirit (Venart et al., 2007, p. 50).
The idea that yoga serves as an effective method of self-care was a consistent and repetitive theme throughout this study. The school counselors interviewed indicated that they felt that by doing yoga they were adequately taking care of themselves and implementing healthy and appropriate self-care strategies. In the findings of this study, the conclusion from the participants that yoga is an effective method of self-care was consistent across all interviews.

The theme of self-care in this study encompasses other variables mentioned as beneficial by the participants in this study. These other variables are being able to be alone and developing a sense of self-compassion. The school counselors interviewed in this study often stated that yoga provided them with an opportunity to be alone, and they felt that this was desirable. For busy school counselors, the entire day often consists of answering questions, deescalating various crises, and completing tasks in order to assist others. The job of the school counselor revolves entirely around meeting the needs of the students, parents, and the community. Though many school counselors thrive on and enjoy human interaction, it can often cause a school counselor to feel physically and mentally drained. Therefore, time alone is desirable and beneficial according to the school counselors interviewed in this study.

The participants also made consistent statements pertaining to a learned sense of self-compassion throughout this research. Although these school counselors did not directly use the term “self-compassion,” they often indicated having learned a sense of self-compassion. The participants in this study explained that they had learned, through practicing and being exposed to yoga, to be compassionate with themselves, as the following statements show: “I think even as a school counselor, it was just having yoga and having that way of thinking to give myself permission to be like, you can’t do it and you can’t control everything, and especially in a school
system there's so much that you can’t control.” “So control what you can and then let go of the things you can’t and give yourself permission to feel upset about those things, but then let it go.”

**Spirituality**

The third theme identified as a protective factor in this study is *spirituality*. The findings in this study support those in the research literature: that spiritual practice is recognized as beneficial to school counselors. The idea of spirituality often includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, and it typically involves a search for meaning in life. It is also often thought of as a human experience that touches all individuals. For purposes of this study the term “spirituality” identifies with a modern perspective that asks, Where do I find meaning? How do I feel connected? How should I live?

Spirituality has been identified as a protective factor in the research literature as it relates to preventing burnout in school counselors. School counselors who have some level of spiritual identification are less likely to report signs of burnout (Graham et al., 2001).

Throughout the interviews in this study, school counselors made statements that align with a perceived sense of spirituality, though they used different terminology to describe this sense: “inner peace,” “inner being,” and “inner self.” Participants in this study described yoga as providing an opportunity for becoming aware of their “inner self.” In addition, participants in this study expressed that yoga provided them with a sense of “inner peace” and “peacefulness.” One participant specifically stated that she felt yoga provided her with a platform for becoming more in touch with her own values, one of which includes God. Another participant in this study specifically explained that yoga provides an opportunity to practice spirituality “if you want to invite that in.” It should be noted that yoga in no way promotes the worship of any specific entity. As described by one of the counselors in this study, yoga creates an atmosphere for
spiritual consideration at one’s own free will. Another participant mentioned that “there is a spiritual aspect that I think you get to also, depending on what you believe.” In addition, one counselor in this study expressed that yoga has inspired her to gain her own spiritual perspective, “the more that I learn about the arms of yoga or the limbs rather of yoga, the more I understand that I need to find my higher power.”

School counselors are greatly outnumbered by teachers in their school communities and are often placed in a position of opposition because they serve as advocates for students. Additionally, school counselors face challenges because of their unique position in the public school system as they are trained to meet with students, parents, and teachers for counseling (Summerlin & Littrell, 2011). The unique role of school counselor can often be isolating within the school community. One of the counselors in this study explained that yoga allowed her to feel that she was surrounded by “like-minded people,” going on to say that she felt very “validated” by this. The idea of being surrounded by people with similar beliefs and values relates directly to a perceived sense of spirituality.

The research literature has previously indicated that a spiritual practice can serve as a protective factor for school counselors in order to prevent burnout. The research literature has suggested that school counselors take measures to examine their own spiritual and religious identities in order to better assist their students in determining their individual identities (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). It has been noted also that school counselors tend to be spiritual people. Allowing for the combination of spirituality in the professional lives of school counselors may provide the opportunity for counselors to feel a sense of true connectedness to their work (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011).
Sense of Accomplishment

The fourth theme in this qualitative research study is a sense of accomplishment. Throughout the qualitative interviews in this study, school counselors explained that through practicing yoga they felt they were doing something meaningful that provided a sense of purpose and allowed them to feel proud of their accomplishment. Clearly, this theme, sense of accomplishment, aligns with an increased sense of self-esteem, which protects against counselor burnout. Several of the counselors in this study talked about their yoga practice with a sense of pride and stated that they were “proud” of the progress that they have made in yoga, whether in terms of physical strength, mental coordination, and improved mood.

This sense of accomplishment as a protective factor serves as a mechanism for counselors to replenish themselves. It is commonly known that school counselors as a group have a strong desire to help others. They often enter the profession with high hopes of making an impact in the lives of their students. School counselors will find that the rewards of the profession are not often easily identifiable. Although school counselors have the means to measure many outcomes, measuring whether or not they are really making a difference in the lives of their students can be difficult. In addition, school counselors may work very hard to help students or clients who simply do not succeed. Because counselors may internalize the failures of their students, it is imperative that they have a mechanism in place to replenish themselves whenever they are not successful with their students.

This finding regarding a sense of accomplishment supports statements in the research literature indicating that the sense of both accomplishment and positive self-esteem is valuable in remaining passionate as a school counselor (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). A sampling of counselor statements indicating this sense of accomplishment is as follows: “It is impactful in my
emotional state, my physical state.” “Yoga, I truly believe has made me a difference in my life.” “It provides a sense of accomplishment, that there is something I can go out and do physically, and that I feel I do a rather good job of it.”

**Increased Professional Integrity**

An observed sense of increased professional integrity is the fifth theme and protective factor in this research study. The theme of increased professional integrity serves to explain a greater sense of engagement, investment, interest, and innovation in the workplace as explained by the participants this study. The school counselors in this study expressed that as a result of practicing and being exposed to yoga, they have felt more passionate about their work as school counselors.

An increased sense of professional integrity is a culmination of the effects of the recognized protective factors previously explained in this study. When school counselors feel calm and centered, are implementing self-care appropriately, have spiritual awareness, and feel a sense of accomplishment, they will then have an increased sense of professional integrity. Therefore, the theme of increased professional integrity falls within the Macrosystem as interpreted through Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model. In addition, an increased sense of professional integrity encompasses a recognized interest in mindfulness, as well as engagement in mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness is a theory often into woven into yoga practices. Mindfulness can be described as a self-regulation practice that emphasizes developing attention and awareness in order to exhibit a mental process that reinforces mental health, well-being, and mental stability (Lazaridou, Philbrook, & Tzika, 2013). Several counselors in this study indicated that they have practiced mindfulness in their work. As explained in Chapter 4 of this study, several of the
participants have expressed that they have learned how to take a more mindful approach in their professional and personal lives as a result of practicing yoga. Several of the school counselors interviewed also discussed implementing services for their students that originate from a mindfulness perspective or theory. This integration of mindfulness theory serves to illuminate an increased sense of professional integrity.

The school counselors in this study noted this sense of increased professional integrity as a change or new interest they have noticed within themselves as it pertains to their professional lives. Various participant statements conveyed this sense: “I feel that yoga impacted my professional abilities in a positive way.” “I know that if I don’t take care of myself by doing yoga, I won’t be as good of a school counselor as I think can.” “I have gotten into the mindfulness movement. I am very interested in the brain and how it works and practicing mindfulness.” “Making the connection between how much this has impacted me and how I look at life and how my overall wellness and resilience and how can I take that and apply that to the students that I work with.” “I have done a lot more research in using yoga as a therapeutic intervention for students with stress and anxiety and depression, … which led me to the mindfulness research.”

Risk Factors for School Counselors’ Development

Risk factors can be described as conditions associated with a higher likelihood of negative or undesirable outcomes (Jessor et al., 1995). The school counselors who participated in the interviews for this study shared similar risk factors. These identified risk factors have potential to harm the development and well-being of school counselors. The themes consistently identified as risk factors throughout this research study are the following: job stress, professional burnout, workload, and lack of self-care.
Job Stress

The first theme identified here as a risk factor is *job stress*. In this study, all of the participants interviewed were asked to rate their stress level by selecting one of the three following choices; *great, moderate, or little*. Each participant in this study indicated either *great* or *moderate*. Not one school counselor expressed that they felt they had *little* stress on the job. This finding is concerning because it indicates the reality of the stress that school counselors will face throughout their careers. In addition, this expression of job stress by school counselors is consistent with previous research findings and requires further investigation. Increased levels of job-related stress and burnout have been reported by school counselors, causing concern and leading to research inquiries into how school counselors can be better supported in their environments (Rayle, 2006).

A sampling of the descriptions of job stress from the school counselors in this study is as follows: “I would rate the amount of stress with my job as ‘great.’” “We sometimes have put in anywhere from 10 to 14 hour days. I just get both physically tired and mentally tired because in the beginning it’s like can’t see straight. I just want to run out the door.” “It is a profession where sometimes there is no equality between the work load and the time you are given to do it in, and so that can be a huge stressor right there.” “I have experienced just … high levels of stress.”

Burnout

The second theme identified in this research study as a risk factor is *burnout*. The findings of this study support previously published research, which indicates that job stress can put school counselors at risk for developing professional burnout. Considering the combination of organizational stressors and professional role demands, the risk for burnout may be high for school counselors (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Maslach (1996) defined burnout as a collective
stress reaction that occurs from three identifiable and interrelated factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

All of the counselors in this study indicated that at some point in their school counselor careers, they had felt symptoms of professional burnout. The fact that every counselor in this study could identify with symptoms of burnout is extremely concerning, for many reasons. The first concern is the mental health and well-being of the school counselor, as it would seem that this career could cause counselors to become mentally unhealthy if they are not handling the stress in a conscientious manner. The second concern is the quality of services being delivered to students assigned to a burned-out counselor. Clearly, the quality of services will not be comparable to that from a school counselor who is passionately engaged in the profession. Higher levels of job dissatisfaction have been found to have a negative effect on not only the school counselor but also the individuals to whom the counselor is providing service, including students, parents, and teachers (Rayle, 2006).

Some of the statements that indicate burnout from the participants in this study are as follows: “I think it’s probably what people feel when they feel depressed or they feel anxious, and so that's kind of the two things I had; but I do believe it had to do with being professionally burnout.” “For me, burnout came as I put more on myself and I felt like was incompetent in my job.” “I was so uncomfortable in my own skin. I didn’t feel like I could do anything right, and I was just overwhelmed.” These statements are all consistent with the three interrelated factors that constitute burnout.

**Workload**

*Workload* is the fourth identified theme in this study. School counselors often feel job stress owing to a very high workload. The ASCA national model sets a general framework for
the job responsibilities of the school counselor, but this model is not always followed, resulting in job stress for school counselors. For example, ASCA recommends that high school counselors carry a caseload of 250 students. One participant in this study said, “I was pretty close to burnout when I retired because my caseload had over 500 students.” This counselor, in particular, felt that one factor contributing to her symptoms of burnout was her caseload, which clearly relates to her designated workload.

School counselors are often called on by administrators to help with tasks that may be outside of their curriculum and/or plans for the year. As helpers by choice and trade, school counselors often struggle with this idea of saying “no” when called on. One counselor specifically explained her difficulty in managing her workload: “I was wearing a lot of hats, and it was too much really. My problem is knowing when to say no.”

Another counselor expressed that her workload caused her stress owing to a lack of direction or support when she was facing difficult issues: “When you are working with students, there are million and one things that can happen.” Often, school counselors do not have the time or resources to seek proper supervision when they enter the field. This counselor felt overwhelmed by her workload, specifically because she was working with a very high need/risk population. The counselor mentioned did not feel that she had time or resources to reassure herself that she was handling student situations properly.

Lack of Self-care

The fifth and final theme designated as a risk factor in this study is a recognized lack of self-care. Every counselor in this study indicated that they were not taking care of themselves properly at one point throughout their professional careers. The participants expressed that they did not have the knowledge of mechanisms for providing appropriate self-care. The counselors in
this study indicated that they did not feel that they were taking care of themselves before they started doing yoga regularly. This lack of self-care or neglect of well-being is recognized in the research literature as a risk factor. The encouragement and maintenance of school counselors’ well-being is critical to their abilities to be attentive and sensitive to student needs, and well-being is critical because it can protect against feelings of burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

By nature, school counselors are helping individuals; it is often a large part of their personality. Therefore, as school counselors center their professional lives around helping others, they also often neglect to care for themselves, putting themselves last to take care of others first. As an example, one participant explained that “getting married and having kids and working full time and taking on lots of different responsibilities kind of caused me to put care for myself last, especially physical care for myself last.”

School counselors need specific and comprehensive training on the importance of self-care and specific methods of self-care that have been proven effective. Clearly, this consistent inability to take care of themselves (before they began yoga) indicates that school counselors are not receiving the education that they need in training programs on self-care. This lack of self-care, especially after graduate school, is illustrated in the following statement: “[When] I first started my job, I don’t think I even was thinking about self-care.”

Implications for this Study

Job stress is the primary risk factor in this study that can lead to very negative effects in school counselor development. The literature has suggested that throughout the last several years, the responsibilities of the school counselor have increased extensively. School counselors face numerous challenges on the job, including the testing constraints from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, increased use of drugs and alcohol by students, and a lack of
parental availability/support because of two-parent working households or divorce. The demands and expectations challenge even the most passionate school counselors (Summerlin & Littrell, 2011).

The identified concerns and/or risk factors in this study are exceptionally interrelated when considered through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development. In this study, job stress lies in the mesosystem; and, if left unaddressed, the effects can transfer throughout other systems that may influence human development, specifically the development of the school counselor. Therefore, lack of self-care occupies the exosystem, while professional burnout is placed the macrosystem. Finally, this study purports that if job stress is left unaddressed, without intentional self-care, professional burnout will eventually result. The relevant literature also supports this assertion. Coping is a reaction to stress; however, self-care is an ongoing proactive practice in terms of preventing impairment. Overall, it is the practice of self-care that is most valuable in diffusing distress and preventing counselor impairment (Smith & Moss, 2009). Therefore, school counselors need to implement ongoing self-care to combat the potential long term negative effects of job stress.

As this study revealed, moderate to great amounts of job stress are likely to be associated with the school counseling profession. In addition, this study has pointed out that school counselors often demonstrate a lack of self-care and has revealed, as well, that school counselors did not feel that they had learned the importance of self-care until they faced job stress, which in every case, led to professional burnout. The findings of this study indicate that there is a clear disconnect between the training requirements and the amount of self-care education in counselor education programs.
This lack of instruction in self-care is concerning, and it raises several questions about the implementation of self-care training that is recommended through CACREP programs. Especially for new counselors, training in self-care is important preparation for the risks of counseling, including the stress leading to burnout or impairment (Sommer, 2008). The CACREP Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice Standard, II G.1.d., states that “counselors should receive training in self-care strategies appropriate to the counselor role” (p. 10). In addition, the literature suggests that there has been a lack of accountability and attention to implementing this training recommendation. Although self-care is emphasized within the curriculum of CACREP accredited programs and included in the ACA Code of Ethics (2005), there is little empirical evidence regarding training provided to counselors about self-care, which strategies counselors are using, or which strategies are perceived as most effective when implemented (Culver, 2011).

The primary protective factor found among the interrelated protective factors in this study is that school counselors have identified that yoga is an effective method of self-care. This finding is supported by the literature, which states that yoga has been considered an individual treatment for stress reduction and the overall improvement of well-being (Woodyard, 2011).

Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model for human development shows us that yoga as a method of self-care is the mesosystem. The microsystem includes the feelings that occur when one practices yoga, which are relaxation, calmness, centering, and a sense of physical and mental balance. In order for school counselors to feel that they are taking care of themselves, they must notice these feelings when they occur as a result of yoga practice. When school counselors can identify these feelings, they then enter into the mesosystem, and yoga begins serving a method of self-care. When school counselors feel as though they are effectively implementing self-care,
other areas of their lives begin to improve. The continued practice of yoga also leads to such outcomes as changes in life perspective, self-awareness, and an improved sense of energy, which in turn leads to improved quality of life (Woodyard, 2011). The observed changes in life perspective and enhanced energy, as mentioned in the literature, related also to the identification of spirituality and increased professional integrity as protective factors in this study. As a result of practicing yoga as a method of self-care, the counselors in this study explained, they were also able to gain a sense of spirituality, which they found to be beneficial. The research literature has agreed that this sense of spirituality is particularly beneficial to school counselors. A 2011 study indicated that school counselors avoid burnout and remain passionate by having spiritual practice. Some of the counselors indicated that religion was part of this spiritual practice; however, other school counselors in the study specifically described practicing meditation as a means of spirituality and self-care (Summerlin & Litterell, 2011). This sense of spirituality serves to represent the exosystem within Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model.

The research literature has stated that practicing yoga can lead to an increased sense of energy and improved quality of life (Woodyard, 2011), which are observed in this study as the protective factor called increased professional integrity. This protective factor, in turn, serves to explain a sense of new inspiration and passion for the school counseling profession that the participants in this study expressed. A recognized sense of increased professional integrity represents the macrosystem within the theoretical framework for this study. The interrelationship between the protective factors in this study can be explained as the school counselors’ feeling of calm and centeredness achieved by practicing yoga (microsystem). This recognized feeling, in turn, indicates the presence of self-care (mesosystem). When school counselors feel balanced, they are then able to recognize a spiritual presence within their yoga practice or life (exosystem).
Finally, as a result of calm, centeredness, and self-care implementation, the school counselor will gain an increased sense of professional integrity (macrosystem).

**Lived Existentials**

The participants in this study agreed that yoga is a “time” that allows them to feel that they are implementing self-care. The concept of lived time was used to explain self-care and the benefits of yoga, and references to time were used consistently throughout this study, most commonly in relation to yoga as a “time” in which the participants felt relaxed, a sense of “mental release,” and destressed. One counselor in this study made a statement that encompasses many of the benefits of yoga: “it is a good time to find a center, feel calm and focus just on the challenge of the movement.”

Furthermore, the participants in this study saw yoga as a “time” for themselves. As one of them said, “Yoga is for me, about an hour and a half of just my own time.” School counselors in this study expressed that they valued the sense of being alone that yoga provided them, and this sense of aloneness was often identified through the context of time in this study: “This is my time just to do the exercise and be with myself.” The findings of this study suggest that school counselors should provide themselves with opportunities to be alone, through intentional and strategic self-care methods.

In addition, the school counselors in this study observed how they felt at the “end” of their yoga practice. “I find myself extremely calm at the end. I am usually happy; if I went in not happy, I am happy at the end.” This consistent recognition of how school counselors felt at the end of yoga serves to provide an indicator for a possible opportunity to measure the effects of yoga for school counselors.
Finally, the participants commonly spoke of a sense of “mindful” attention and a newly formed ability to be present in the moment. This ability to be present aligns with mindfulness theory, which is supported in the research literature as beneficial in improving the overall quality of life. The goal of mindfulness differs from the traditional goal of meditation, which is relaxation, isolation, or higher consciousness, as mindfulness emphasizes awareness in the present moment. Mindfulness encourages one not to become more relaxed but more aware and accepting of the current state of mind and body (Hooker & Foder, 2008). “I feel that my thoughts hone into what are doing at this moment rather than, what am I going to be doing in an hour, or what am I going to be doing tomorrow.” Another school counselor in this study stated, “If I am worrying about this project at work, or something at home, or a family member, I allow it to be there and then let go and say okay, this isn’t the time for that, to worry about that.” This particular counselor also explained that yoga has encouraged her to take a mindful perspective throughout her life. “Focusing on right now what’s going on and what you can control in the moment, or if you are going to plan and you have to do that but just kind of controlling the things you can control.”

The second lived existential is “lived body” or corporeality. The concept of lived body promotes perspectives that illustrate the involvement of the human body as described in an experience (van Manen, 1990). The study participants constantly used this concept to explain their sense of benefitting from yoga, as they often agreed that yoga provides them with physical benefits. However, the statements to follow point out several observed benefits of yoga, as described within the context of lived body. “There are those pieces that just make you a better person; the way you carry your body.” This school counselor then went on to observe that yoga provided her with an overall sense of strength: “Your outlook and physically the way you carry
your body, you have strength; it’s not like muscle kind of strength, but that feeling that not only can you stand up, but your body is working for you. It is like your yoga is a piece of you that you carry with you all the time, and it holds you.” This narrative in particular suggests that the benefits as described in the context of lived body are noticeable in other environments outside of physical yoga practice. It is suggested that yoga changes the way one carries one’s own body and mind throughout life.

In addition, the school counselors in this study noted that they felt a mind-body reaction during yoga. “I feel that my mind calms down naturally because my mind is only paying attention to what my body is doing.” This mind-body reaction, which was presented consistently throughout this research, also supports the bioecological model of human development. This mind-body reaction was seen as beneficial to school counselors as this positive change can be observed in other environments throughout the life of the school counselor. Furthermore, the participants agreed that they had gained a sense of awareness of their body through practicing yoga: “yoga makes me very aware … when I am sitting at my desk, my posture and even when walking, just how I hold myself, and just releasing tension in my shoulders.” This finding of an increased awareness is also supported in the literature as a mechanism for promoting counselor wellness and self-care. Counseling students are encouraged to practice self-care and to foster self-awareness in an effort to prevent impairment and promote counselor wellness (Munsey, 2006).

*Spaciality* or lived space can be described as the ways in which people experience places and environments (van Manen, 1990). The concept of lived space was recognized as the school counselors agreed that yoga allows them to have a space that is beneficial for them in several ways. “I am able to give myself space better, space to what am I trying to see, to give myself
space between stimulus and reaction.” This participant statement suggests the development of a new coping skill. Lived space through this perspective allowed the participant the ability to think through situations more thoroughly before having a reaction. The finding of this coping skill relates to self-regulation and is supported in the literature through many suggestions about self-care as well as mindfulness theory. Mindfulness is described as a self-regulatory practice that emphasizes developing attention and awareness in order to exhibit a mental process that reinforces mental health, well-being, and mental stability (Lazaridou, Philbrook, & Tzika, 2013).

The school counselors in this study also often used the existential of lived space to describe how they felt while practicing yoga. Some of them referred to “being on my mat.” “I feel very present on what I’m doing on the mat and so just focused on what is specifically happening there, and I try not to be distracted; I kind of like that it is my space to not worry about anything else. So usually I feel grounded and focused in what I am doing.” Another counselor used the mat/lived space reference as a way of stating that in order to practice yoga, one must attempt to become present: “If you haul your baggage with you, there is not going to be room for both of you on the mat.” Being on the yoga mat illuminates a state of mind or a feeling that occurs when one is physically in the space on the yoga mat.

Van Manen’s fourth lived existential is “lived others,” or relationality. This fourth lived existential refers to the lived relationships or connections that humans maintain (van Manen, 1990). The study participants agreed that yoga often establishes a relationship between the mind and body that promotes mental and physical well-being, “Yoga to me is the union of my mind, my body, and my spirit.” One of the counselors in this study felt that yoga served as a catalyst to her overall health and well-being habits: “If I am not doing it [yoga], I am less likely to take care of myself in other ways.”
The counselors indicated that yoga helped to change their life perspective: “I think a philosophy of how I approach life and approach what I do and so just how I talk to people or how I talk to myself.” In addition, a sense of mindful attention was also presented through the context of lived relationship. “It is more of just an overall like philosophy of how I look at things, slowing down and being present and paying attention to all of the different things going on around me.” The participants agreed that their experiences with yoga have altered their life perspectives.

**Implications for this Study**

As the participants narrated their stories, they recalled events that shaped their life experiences of time, body, relationship, and space. The concept of lived time illuminated the desire that school counselors have to be alone. As the participants described in this study, yoga affords them an opportunity to be by themselves. Although they are not actually alone during their yoga practice, they perceived themselves as being alone, which they expressed provides a reciprocal benefit. This recognized desire for aloneness is interesting because it suggests that school counselors should implement self-care plans that afford them the opportunity be alone.

School counselors often have to answer questions, listen, and provide direction to those in need. Although it is not often noticed or recognized, this expectation of always having to know the answers can create a sense of pressure. School counselors are expected to assist their students in making major life choices and to be experts in many areas. It is possible that because they are surrounded by teachers, students, and other members of the school community, school counselors feel an unconscious sense of pressure as well, which translates into a desire to be alone or finding alone time as beneficial to their well-being.
The school counselors also used the context of lived time as a way to identify with this new ability to maintain mindful attention. They stated that they feel yoga as if provides them with an opportunity to direct their attention in a mindful and singular manner. This perceived benefit serves to suggest that school counselors are in need of mindfulness-based self-care. This value placed on mindfulness and the concept of slowing down and directing attention toward one thing at a time challenges the traditional notion that school counselors should be masters of multitasking.

Furthermore, the participants felt that yoga provided them with a sense of space in which they could learn to be more thoughtful and conscious of their reactions to stressful situations. As previously stated, school counselors are expected to be readily available experts within the school setting; they are always expected to respond verbally with a knowledgeable answer. The contrast could not be greater with the setting in a yoga classroom, where everyone who attends the class is expected to participate silently throughout the entire class. Thus, yoga provides school counselors with a space in which to be more quiet and thoughtful in their reactions. Perhaps job stress would be reduced for school counselors if they were able to gain more space to react to the stimuli that are presented through the course of their professional lives.

Clearly, the school counselors in this study felt that the yoga provided them with a mind-body interaction when considered through the lens of the lived relationship. They agreed that they benefitted from this perceived mind-body union, and many felt that yoga had illuminated a spiritual identity them. These findings suggest that school counselors should implement intentional self-care activities that serve to stimulate the mind, body, and spirit. The suggestion that school counselors should implement self-care activities that include a spiritual component has also been supported in the research literature. Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke (2001)
reported that the ACA conducted a research study indicating that counselors view spirituality as a significant factor in mental health. Additional research was conducted that examined the relationship between spirituality and coping with stress and found a positive correlation between spiritual health and immunity to stressful situations (Graham et al., 2001).

**Ecological Factors**

Human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio-psychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The risk and protective factors in this study have served to illustrate the mechanisms by which a school counselor observes certain senses, feelings, or characteristics. The ecological factors in this study, however, serve to represent the perceived fluctuations within the many systems of the life of the school counselor.

A perceived challenge consistently expressed in this study is the everyday stress that school counselors’ jobs entail. The results of this study also revealed that if stress is not managed appropriately, it can penetrate the other systems within the school counselor’s life. For example, the participants agreed that they exhibited feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, and conflict with others when they felt overly stressed. If these feelings were not handled through intentional self-care, they became present in other aspects of life. The literature supports the notion that job stress negatively affects other areas of one’s life over time. The bioecological model suggests that human development is a reciprocal interaction between the environment and an actively evolving, biopsychosocial human, organism, or person. In order for the interaction to have effective impact, it must occur regularly (Gauvain & Cole, 2004).
A statement from one of the counselors illuminated the results of unmanaged stress: “I did not care. I did not want to go to school, and it was not only that I did not care. I also found myself feeling very angry.” Clearly, this participant was struggling with a lack of investment in her job and potentially other areas of her life.

Ultimately, this study promotes the idea that unmanaged job-related stress will transfer into other areas of a school counselor’s life. This statement is supported by further statements from the participants in this research. Several of them explained that they often have a hard time not thinking about work when they are at work. This clearly is an example of the systems effect of unmanaged job related stress. One of the counselors in this study stated, “When I go home, sometimes I am not able to relax because I am thinking about something that happened at work or something that I need to be doing in the future, and I can’t quite turn it off.” In the case of this school counselor her quality of life while she is at home has decreased owing to job-related stress.

In terms of a positive or healthy human development as it relates to school counselors participating in yoga, an increased sense of professional integrity has been observed throughout this study. This increased sense of professional integrity has also been observed as a protective factor within this study. A sense of increased professional integrity serves to illustrate the influence of yoga as a method of self-care which has affected the counselor in a positive manner throughout other systems within their lives. The school counselors in this study explained that as a result of their yoga practice, they felt a greater sense of commitment and dedication to their professional work. This increased professional integrity was illustrated when the counselors explained the new ideas and plans that they have developed and implemented through their professional work. As one of the participants in this study stated, “I have infused a lot of the
yoga practices into my lessons; the breathing, the movement, and the poses are some of the things that I do in my classroom lessons.”

Another systemic interaction of yoga described in this study as a method of self-care was an improvement in breath regulation. The participants explained that the quality of their breathing has improved as a result of doing yoga, which is something that they have observed in other environments within their lives. “Breathing is a big thing that I didn’t do and that I think that I do now. I take deep breaths; to be more mindful of that [breathing], I think that’s something that has helped.” In addition, the counselors expressed that they have a greater sense of well-being in their lives. One of the school counselors interviewed in this study stated, “I have an awareness, I am more energized, I stay hydrated; I am more focused and aware.” This statement suggests that through regular and consistent yoga practice, this school counselor feels a perceived sense of improved well-being throughout all aspects of her life. These systemic interactions are positive examples of the effects of yoga implemented as an intentional method of self-care by school counselors. In this study, yoga serves to operationalize self-care for school counselors. The bioecological theory of human development exposes the understanding of the concept of operationalization of environmental forces and personal traits that influence the human development (Sontag, 1996).

**Implications for this Study**

One of the major implications of this study is the potential differences in human development that can occur in a school counselor who is actively implementing self-care versus a school counselor who is not. As pointed out throughout this study, school counselors who implement self-care have expressed that they possess a greater sense of professional integrity as a result of doing yoga. Therefore, it can be assumed that a school counselor who is not practicing
any self-care will be more likely to be negatively affected by job-related stress as described by the school counselors here. In addition, a school counselor who is not practicing yoga as a method of self-care will be less likely to engage in the mindful thinking, listening, and attentiveness habits that the school counselors in this study have described. In addition, when an absence of self-care and stress management is found in school counselors, one can assume that there may be a greater expression of professional burnout and decreased sense of professional integrity.

In addition, the school counselors in this study generally expressed a greater sense of commitment to their work in general as a result of practicing yoga. If school counselors are not implementing self-care, it is possible that they will not have the same level of investment in their professional work. Therefore, it can be argued that school counselors who are participating in regular self-care can be considered as possibly more effective, engaged, interested, and innovative in their professional roles.

Furthermore, this study asserts that school counselors who practice yoga as a method of self-care may have a greater sense of overall health and well-being in comparison to school counselors who are not taking active measures to preserve their well-being. In addition, school counselors who are modeling appropriate methods of self-care, including those which promote healthy behaviors, serve to set a more positive example for the students that they are serving. This idea of modeling healthy behaviors in the counseling field is supported in the research literature. Counselor wellness is essential if counselors are to be successful role models in the helping relationship because it allows counselors to be empathetic and positions them to be healthy models of behavior and emotional expression (Cavanagh & Levitov, 2002). Consistent
with the concepts of self-care and wellness used with clients, counselors should maintain positive mental and physical health (O'Donnell, 1988).

**School Counselors using Yoga with Students**

Although not the direct focus of this study, it should be noted that four out of six of the school counselors in this study felt inspired to incorporate yoga-based practices into their work with students in their professional capacities. One of the counselors in this study made the following statement: “I’m a trained mindfulness educator for teens.” Another counselor in this study explained that she often starts her counseling sessions by using yoga-like breathing techniques and that she had started a yoga club at her school. In addition, this counselor talked about “weaving yoga themes” into her discussions with students. Two of the counselors in this study explained that they have actually taught yoga in the schools in which they are employed.
Figure 1 represents the risk factors identified in this study as they are placed within Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development. This study has shown that job stress lies in the microsystem, and if job stress is left unmanaged, the effects can transfer throughout other systems that may influence human development, specifically the development of the school counselor. Therefore, the theme of a lack of self-care occupies the exosystem, whereas professional burnout is placed the macrosystem. Finally, this study purports that if job stress is left unaddressed, without intentional self-care, it will eventually result in professional
burnout. The relevant literature also supports this assertion through the following statements. Coping is a reaction to stress; however, self-care is an ongoing proactive practice in terms of preventing impairment. Overall, it is the practice of self-care that is most valuable in diffusing distress and preventing counselor impairment (Smith & Moss, 2009). Therefore, the ongoing practice of self-care should be implemented by school counselors to combat the potential long-term negative effects of job stress.

Figure 2. Protective Factors for School Counselors Practicing Yoga and Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model for Human Development
Figure 2 illustrates the identified protective factors as they are also placed on Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model for human development. The protective factor that is primary to this interrelationship of protective factors in this study is that school counselors have identified that yoga is an effective method of self-care. This finding is supported by the literature which has indicated that yoga may be considered an individual treatment for stress-reduction and the overall improvement of well-being (Woodyard, 2011).

The protective factors in this study are also intricately related to one another. As previously stated, the idea of yoga providing a sense of self-care to school counselors is the primary protective factor in this study. Yoga as a method of self-care is the mesosystem for this phenomena when examined in terms of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model for human development. The microsystem is occupied by the feelings that occur when one practices yoga, which are relaxation, calmness, centering, and a sense of physical and mental balance. In order for school counselors to feel that they are taking care of themselves, they must notice these feelings when they occur as a result of their yoga practice. When school counselors can identify these feelings, they then enter into the mesosystem, and yoga begins serving as a method of self-care. When school counselors feel as though they are effectively implementing self-care, other areas of their lives begin to improve. The observed changes in life perspective and enhanced energy as mentioned in the literature refer to the identification of spirituality and increased professional integrity as protective factors in this study. As a result of practicing yoga as a method of self-care, the study participants explained that they were also able to gain a sense of accomplishment and spirituality, which they found to be beneficial and which serves to represent the exosystem within Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model.
Woodyard (2011) stated that practicing yoga can lead to an increased sense of energy and improved quality of life. This increased energy and improved quality of life were observed in this study as the protective factor called *increased professional integrity*. This factor serves to explain the sense of new inspiration and passion for the counseling profession that the participants in this study expressed. A recognized sense of increased professional integrity represents the macrosystem within the theoretical framework. The interrelationship between the protective factors can be explained in terms of the school counselor’s feeling of calm and centeredness, achieved through practicing yoga (microsystem). This recognized feeling of calm and centeredness promotes an acknowledgment of the self-care process that is occurring (mesosystem). When the school counselors feel balanced, they are then able to recognize a spiritual presence within their yoga practice or life (exosystem). Finally, as a result of feeling calm and centered and of implementing self-care, counselors will gain an increased sense of professional integrity (macrosystem).
Figure 3. Van Manen’s Four Lived Existentials

Figure 3 illustrates van Manen’s four lived existentials. This figure suggests that the four lived existentials which include lived time, body, space, and relation are dynamic, recursive, and iterative forces. The experiences that have been categorized into the framework of the four lived-existentials in this study are dynamic and interrelated. Therefore, experiences that occur within each identified existential have the potential to move through one another in a recursive and iterative manner. The figure above is a circle which contains the four lived existentials in segmented areas. The circle represents the idea that the four lived existentials are on a continuum and that movement throughout the existentials is recursive, fluid, and iterative.
Figure 4. Higher Processing Illustration

Figure 4 illustrates the culmination of Figures 1, 2, and 3. Figure 4 suggests the outcome of the interrelationship of van Manen’s four lived existentials and Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems model of human development. The suggested outcome of the combination of these two models includes a higher level of processing and intellectual consciousness. As previously suggested in this study, human development is influenced through the interactions of dynamic forces. This study employed van Manen’s four lived existentials as a contextual lens for data interpretation. Themes emerged through the isolation of experiences as explained through the context of lived time, body, space, and relation. In addition, this study used Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model for human development as a framework for identifying risk and protective factors for school counselors participating in yoga. The result of the interactions of protective factors in this study is an increased sense of professional integrity for school counselors. In this section, we will examine the culminating interaction between the two methods of data interpretation.
The identified risk and protective factors in this study were originally extracted from the contextual framework of the four lived existentials including lived time, body, space, and relation. As these contexts are interrelated in nature they are dynamic, recursive, and iterative. Therefore, this study suggests that risk and protective factors exert influence “back” into the existential environments from which they originated. This suggestion illustrates the influence of risk and protective factors over time in the original existential contexts of lived time, body, space, and relation.

The results of this study attempt to demonstrate an interaction between protective factors and the four lived existentials, which is a higher level of processing. This perceived higher level of processing is the result of an individual’s being attentive to the needs of the mind, body, and spirit through intentional and effective self-care. Ultimately, as one lives a life of balance, a greater sense of effectiveness penetrates many other aspects in one’s life.

**General Recommendations for School Counselors and Self-Care**

This study has attempted to address the importance of self-care for school counselors. As stated in the research literature, school counselors face many unique risks for developing professional burnout. More specifically, this study provides suggestions for counselor education programs, school counseling professional associations, school counselor employers, and school counselors.

The study provides rich knowledge about the experience of school counselors participating in yoga as a method of self-care. This study also highlights risk and protective factors for the development of school counselors who practice yoga as a method of self-care. The present findings provide rich knowledge and implications for school counselors, counselor education programs, professional counseling organizations, and school counselor employers. The
The following section presents recommendations specific to training, educating, and supporting school counselors.

The participants in this study clearly indicated a lack of self-care at one time throughout their professional careers. This described lack of self-care suggests that school counselors have not had the proper training and or education surrounding self-care during their graduate training programs. The school counselors in this study indicated that a better education on the importance of self-care through their graduate programs would have been helpful to them. Table 11 provides a list of recommendations specific to counselor education programs.

Table 11

*Recommendations for Counselor Education Programs*

- Provide a course specifically designed to teach counseling students the importance of self-care.
- Educate students on the factors that contribute to job stress.
- Provide students with opportunities to learn about proven effective methods of self-care.
- Incorporate mindfulness and self-compassion theory into counseling curriculum.
- Implement and provide opportunities for activities that serve to promote and evaluate self-care.
- Require students to develop personalized self-care plans throughout the counseling curriculum.
- Hire and retain faculty that model health, wellness, and appropriate self-care strategies.
- Encourage counseling students to monitor their own well-being on a regular basis.
• Create a caring, kind, and non-judgmental, and non-competitive environment when possible.

The findings of this study indicate that school counselors face a great or moderate amount of stress. This job-related stress and self-care is rarely addressed by the school counselor professional organizations. The school counselor professional associations give very little attention to promoting counselor well-being and the importance of self-care in their literature.

The school counseling professional associations are in a unique position to spearhead efforts to address counselor wellness. The focus on promoting counselor self-care and wellness serves to benefit current school counselors, which will also promote overall effectiveness in their programs. Table 12 provides a list of recommendations for school counseling professional associations to engage in efforts to promote self-care and counselor wellness.

Table 12

Recommendations for School Counseling Professional Associations

• Implement large scale studies on school counselor wellness, job related stress, and effective methods of self-care.

• Publish studies on school counselor wellness, job related stress, and effective methods of self-care.

• Promote counselor wellness and self-care strategies for school counselors through publications, and professional development opportunities.

• Design a self-care evaluation tool for school counselors.
Develop a way of recognizing counselors who are models for practicing effective self-care.

Incorporate mindfulness and self-compassion theories into professional publications and professional development opportunities.

Provide a model for school counselor wellness and self-care.

Advocate for school counselor evaluations that promote counselor wellness.

Additionally, this study has attempted to show that school counselors play a unique role in the school system and that they should be treated according to this role by the organizations that employ them. School counselors are often included in professional development training sessions for teachers, but these do not address counselors’ unique needs for self-care. School counselors might benefit from professional development activities that are designed to address the large amount of job stress that they are facing. In order to promote effectiveness and wellness among school counselors, employers should offer programs to support the development of appropriate self-care techniques. Table 13 includes suggestions for school organizations that employ school counselors.

Table 13

Recommendations for School Counselor Employers

- Encourage school counselors to develop self-care plans through professional development plans.
- Establish a framework for school counselors to communicate their levels of job stress with their employers.
• Provide school counselors with relevant professional development opportunities that address their unique need for self-care.

• Recognize the ASCA model and recommendations for caseload.

Finally, school counselors play the most important role in promoting and preserving their own well-being. This study has indicated that school counselors are not always taking an active role in preventing counselor burnout. School counselors should take the initiative to implement intentional self-care activities in order to prevent burnout. Recommendations for school counselors are listed in Table 14.

Table 14

Recommendations for School Counselors

• Create a yearly self-care plan that serves to address job-related stress. Plans should include daily, monthly, yearly, and emergency self-care strategies.

• Implement self-care in a method that has been proven to promote health and wellness in professional counselors.

• Monitor and evaluate counselor wellness on a regular basis.

• Participate in professional development activities that are relevant to school counseling.

• Participate in school counseling professional associations when possible.

• Communicate stress levels to employers and colleagues when needed.

• Seek supervision when needed.

• Attempt to maintain strategies of self-compassion and mindfulness.
**Limitations of the Study**

This qualitative inquiry employed six school counselors who practice yoga to participate in semi-structured individual interviews. In qualitative design inquiry, a large sample size is not necessary to prove the reliability of the data (Berg, 2009; Patton, 2000; van Manen, 1990). Data saturation was reached at the end of the fifth individual interview; however, one more individual interview was conducted to ensure dependability of the data. Although every attempt was made to develop a reliable research study, as highlighted in Chapter 3, this study has some unavoidable limitations. The first limitation is the lack of generalizability of these findings for the following reasons: first, the participants were all female, which limits the generalizability of the findings to all school counselors.

Another limitation of this study could be the potential that the researcher’s personal biases have influenced the data (Patton, 2002). As a school counselor with an interest in the process and the phenomena, my own involvement could affect the data collection and the data analysis (Patton, 2002). Because I am fully aware of my influence on the finding of the data, I remained reflexive throughout the entire process to prevent any unconscious bias.

**Questions Generated**

Owing to the qualitative nature of this study, a number of topics were brought to light during this interview process. Although this study did not allow for an in-depth discussion of every topic, further inquiries in this area should be considered. Therefore, several additional questions are presented as a result of the findings of this research inquiry, as follows:

1. What are universities and counselor education programs doing to educate students on the importance of self-care?
2. What are professional organizations doing to address the importance of self-care?
3. What are school counselor employers doing to ensure that school counselors are receiving appropriate training on self-care?

4. Is it possible to develop a self-care evaluative tool for school counselors?

5. Is it possible for school counseling professional organizations to develop supportive models for supervision and self-care encouragement?

6. How are school counselor professional organizations able to provide more resources for school counselors to implement effective self-care?

7. What will allow employers to take a more active role in addressing school counselor impairment?

8. Should new school counselors be provided with a mentor who stresses the importance of self-care?

9. What is preventing school counselors from implementing self-care?

10. What are additional methods of effective self-care?

The above questions can lead to both quantitative and qualitative investigations that have the potential to enhance the well-being of school counselors.

**Implications for Future Research**

As learned through this study, school counselors have demonstrated a recognized lack of self-care at times throughout their professional careers. The new finding suggests an inquiry into the personality type of the school counselor. A study of the personality type of school counselors might be helpful in identifying more concrete assertions about the tendency to neglect self-care within certain personality types.

In addition, this study has attempted to demonstrate that yoga is an effective method of self-care for school counselors. However, this inquiry presents a new question: What are
additional methods of self-care for school counselors? Yoga may not be applicable to all school counselors; therefore additional methods will need to be studied. Further inquiry into effective methods of self-care for school counselors could lead to more options for sustaining counselor wellness. If school counselors are provided with more options for maintaining their own health and well-being, it is to be hoped that over time counselors will become healthier and more effective counselors.

Furthermore, this study identified risk factors that contribute to job stress. A further inquiry of risk factors that create job-related stress over time could be beneficial to the counselor education field. In addition, the identification of job-related stress causing factors could serve to assist ASCA as they advocate for school counselors and attempt to provide services that will preserve their well-being.

Finally, as the school counselors in the study demonstrated a lack of self-care, one begins to wonder what graduate training programs are actually doing to education their students on self-care and counselor wellness. Many counselor education program make the suggestion that their students participate in their own counseling services to maintain wellness. However the effectiveness of self-care education as implemented in counselor education programs has not been studied. A follow up study to this one could be a qualitative inquiry of counselor education programs and their efforts to educate students on self-care.

**Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of school counselors participating in yoga. Specifically, this study focused on examining effectiveness of yoga method of self-care for school counselors. This study provided school counselors with an opportunity to share their experiences of participating in yoga and explain how it has influenced their
development as human beings. The thick descriptions provided by six school counselors who practice yoga offered a deep understanding of the phenomenon.

The findings in this study indicated that school counselors have recognized yoga as an effective method of self-care. All of the counselors in this study agreed that they have integrated yoga as method to promote their own health and well-being. The implementation of yoga provided school counselors with a sense of caring for themselves, and allowing for a spiritual practice, which has been found to promote counselor wellness. Ultimately, this study found that school counselors who practice yoga are able to prevent professional burnout and also become more effective school counselors, through a demonstrated increased sense of professional integrity.

However, this study also produced some concerning findings about school counselor wellness. The school counselors in this study all identified as having large amount of stress associated with their jobs and a recognized lack of self-care at times throughout their professional careers. In addition, all school counselors this study identified with symptoms of professional burnout. This study serves to illustrate the reaction of professional burnout that will occur if job stress is not appropriately addressed through intentional self-care over time.

The findings in this study have highlighted a need for attention around the importance of self-care for school counselors. The emphasis of the importance of self-care can occur through improvements in counselor education training programs, professional counseling associations, education for employers of school counselors, and through school counselors themselves.

This study serves to promote a sense of universality in the challenges that school counselors face, as well as to provide an effective strategy for self-care. The risk and protective factors presented in this study serve to better inform for school counselors, counselor education
training programs, school counselor employers, and professional school counseling associations, about the reality of the life of the school counselor. Ultimately, this study seeks to improve the overall health and well-being of school counselors through presenting a proven effective method of self-care, which is yoga.
References


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Appendix A

Key Informant Individual Interview Protocol
Appendix A

Key Informant Interview Protocol

I. Introduction

A. Introduction of Researcher

B. Purpose of the Study

C. Ground Rules

D. The following will be read to Key Informant Interview members:

“This research will be confidential. No information will be used to identify your involvement in any way. You are being asked to answer a few demographic questions (Appendix B) and to participate in a key-informant interview (below); the interview will be audio recorded. All audio taped material will be destroyed immediately after they are transcribed. All written data, including all consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home. All electronic data will be password secured and I will be the only person who has access to the cabinet and the computer password. Three years after the completion of the research, all materials will be deleted; this includes interview transcripts and field notes. Your participation is voluntary and, you are free to withdraw from this study with no repercussions. You have the right to remove yourself from the study at any time during the interview or after the interview is completed. You will not be compensated for your participation in this study. However, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

There are no risks associated with this study beyond any normal emotional discomfort that is experienced in everyday life. While there are no direct benefits to you, participating in the study may lead to results that are of benefit to the school counseling profession. Are there any questions or concerns?”

E. All participants will read and sign the informed consent form.
II. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What has it been like for you to practice yoga?
2. How do you define yoga?
3. How do you feel when you are practicing yoga?
4. Has practicing yoga impacted your daily life?
5. Have you ever felt professional burnout?
6. Do you feel that yoga is part of your self-care plan?
7. What was your previous self-care plan?
8. Has yoga impacted your professional abilities?
9. Has your professional life changed as a result of doing yoga?

III. Closure

A. Feedback

B. Questions
Demographic Information

1. Age: ______

2. Education: _____ BA _____ Master’s _____ Ed.S. _____ Ed.D. _____ Ph.D.

3. Gender: ______

4. Number of years that you have worked as a school counselor: ______

5. Degree of job stress (please check one):
   ______ great ______ moderate ______ little

6. Number of years that you have practiced yoga: ______

7. How often do you practice? Please indicate times per:
   ______ day ______ week or ______ month

8. Type of yoga practiced:____________________________________________________

9. Other self-care methods that you use:
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
Appendix B

Recruitment Letter
Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear School Counselor,

My name is Susie Giovengo-Gurrera and I am a doctoral candidate from the School of Education/Dept. of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education at Duquesne University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study about “The Lived Experiences of School Counselors Participating in Yoga.”

As a school counselor who is currently employed in a school setting you are being asked to participate, because your experience is of value to this study. To be selected in this study, you need to identify yourself as a school counselor who regularly participates in yoga. You will be asked to participate in one individual face-to-face interview, and this interview will be audio taped. The duration of the interview will not exceed 90 minutes. Participants will not be required to travel for interviews. The researcher will make arrangements to conduct the interviews at the convenience of the participant. The location of the interview will be a neutral academic setting that is agreed upon by both the interviewer and the researcher. If a convenient location cannot be determined by both parties, the interview will be conducted via technology using either Skype or Facetime.

All interviews will be transcribed. All written data, including all consent forms, will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home. All electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer, and the researcher is the only person who has access to the cabinet and the computer password. Three years after the completion of the research, all written and electronic materials will be deleted or destroyed. Prior to the start of the interview process, you will be asked to read the attached informed consent form, and if you agree to the conditions, you will be asked to sign it.

Remember, your participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at giovengos@duq.edu or by phone at (412) 491-xxxx. Thank you for your time and consideration. This study has been approved by Duquesne University Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Susie Giovengo-Gurrera, M.Ed
School of Education/Dept. of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
giovengos@duq.edu
Appendix C

Consent to Participant in a Research Study
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: The Lived Experiences of School Counselors Participating in Yoga.

INVESTIGATOR: Susie Giovengo-Guerra, M. Ed. School of Education/Dept. of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
giovengos@duq.edu

ADVISOR: Lisa Lopez Levers, Ph.D., PCC-S, LPC, CRC, NCC School of Education/Dept. of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education 412-396-1871 levers@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the job stressors that school counselors are facing as well as the importance of self-care.

In order to qualify for participation, you must be: a counselor who is currently employed in a school setting and a counselor who regularly practices yoga.

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES: To participate in this study, you will be asked to communicate your experiences about participating in yoga as it relates to your life in a professional and personal perspective.

In addition, you will be asked to allow me to interview you. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. The length of the interview should not exceed 90 minutes. The location of the interview will be determined through the
collaboration of the researcher and participant. The two parties will agree upon a neutral location that is academic in nature and provides the opportunity to ensure confidentiality. If an agreeable convenient location cannot be secured the interview will take place using technology including Skype or Facetime.

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:
There are minimal risks associated with this participation but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. As a school counselor who is currently employed in a school setting you are being asked to participate, because your experience is of value to this study. This study may serve to better understand the job stressors that school counselors are facing as well as the importance of self-care. This study has potential to benefit the field of counselor education, as well as current school counselors.

COMPENSATION:
There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Your participation in this study and any personal information that you provide will be kept confidential at all times and to every extent possible.

Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. Any study materials with personal identifying information will be maintained for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed. Audiotapes will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

Your name will be kept confidential and changed in all interview transcripts and in my final dissertation. All personal identifiers will be removed. All written data, including all consent and demographic forms, will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home. All electronic
data will be password secured, and the researcher is the only person who has access to the cabinet and the computer password. All written and electronic materials will be destroyed three years following the completion of the research.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time by contacting Susie Giovengo-Guerra at giovengos@duq.edu or by phone at [redacted]; Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers, Duquesne University Advisor, at levers@duq.edu or by phone at (412)396-1871 and stating that you wish to withdraw from the study. Upon providing notice of withdrawal from the study all corresponding participant documentation will be destroyed immediately.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A summary of the results of this research by email, will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Susie Giovengo-Guerra at giovengos@duq.edu or by phone at [redacted]; Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers, Duquesne University Advisor, at levers@duq.edu or by phone at (412)396-1871. Should I have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, I may call Dr. Linda Goodfellow, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at 412.396.1886.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date