A correlational study of school counselor rapport and student connection to school

by

Lyndsey Ann Brown

B.S., Kansas State University, 2011
M.S., Kansas State University, 2015

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Counseling and Student Development
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2021

Abstract

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The results of the study indicate having rapport with the school counselor correlates positively with a connection to the school and the sense of the school climate. The number of visits a student has with the school counselor increases the opportunity for stronger rapport and enhanced relationships resulting in positive social-emotional, academic, and career outcomes.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Judith Hughey

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Table of Contents

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to our two sweet babies that we have lost this past year. Oliver

Thomas and our little Baby Brown, you are so loved and will be missed forever.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

There are many crucial benefits to establishing a positive school climate and helping students feel connected to school. When students feel a sense of connectedness to their school, they are more likely to be successful both academically and socially (Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993). Attendance, long term mental health, graduation rates, and social well-being all improve drastically when students feel they belong and adults at school are invested in their lives (Klem, 2004). Factors such as adult support and a positive school environment contribute to increasing feelings of school connectedness. Research points to a positive adult relationship being an indicator of school success (Niehaus, Rakes, & Rudasill, 2012). A positive school climate also indicates higher student achievement and social-emotional wellness. Happiness at school is a key contributor to students feeling their school has a positive climate. When students feel optimistic and see a meaning and purpose in their school communities, they are also more likely to experience a positive school climate (Cleveland & Sink, 2018). School counselors act as change agents to help students and staff promote a positive school climate and engage them in activities that increase school climate (Thapa, 2013).

School counselors are in a unique position to serve all students in the school setting (ASCA, 2019). School counselors can, and must, engage in comprehensive programs that are preventative in nature as well as encourage feelings of belonging (Lindwall & Coleman, 2008). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) defines the role of the school counselor as "School counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students through a school counseling program addressing the academic, career and social-emotional development of all students" (ASCA Role Statement, p. 1, 2019). In their work within the

constructs of meeting the needs of all students, school counselors must build rapport with their students; it is a vital part of the success of counseling and a deciding factor on if the counseling will be beneficial or not. A key strategy for establishing rapport is making the student feel as though he/she truly matters to the counselor. Validation of, and showing interest in, the students' lives play an imperative role in helping students feel as if they matter. A sense of mattering relates directly to school connectedness as one of the positive predictors of connectedness is a positive adult relationship where the student feels the adult is invested in them (Rayle, 2006). A trusting relationship and students perceiving that their school counselor believes in them, are attributes that students identify in effective school counselors (Solomonson, et al., 2014). Furthermore, school counselors serve as protective factors for students as they reduce the impact of trauma in students' lives and encourage life-long healthy choices (CDC, 2020). The helping relationship between school counselors and students is vital to the academic and social-emotional wellbeing of students. School counselors serving as a protective factor and contributing to a positive helping relationship suggests a correlation once again with a feeling of connectedness to school. Data suggest that students having positive rapport with a school counselor correlates to students feeling more connected to their school (Dimmett and Wilkerson, 2012).

 Definitions and Terms

At Risk- A student or group of students who have a higher probability of failing classes, chronic absenteeism, behavior referrals, and/or dropping out of school or may be from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Protective Factor- Environmental conditions, characteristics, or behaviors that help youth cope with stressful life events and trauma, avoid hazards, and learn the emotional and social

competence needed to thrive both in the present and in the future (Lapan, Wells, Peterson, and McCann, 2014, p. 304)

Rapport- The connection that is built between the school counselor and student (client) in which there is an understanding of one another's feelings and goals.

School Climate- A multidimensional construct encompassing interpersonal, organizational, and instructional dimensions and the quality and frequency of interpersonal interactions (Loukas, Suzuki, Horton, 2006, p. 491).

School Connectedness- Belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals (CDC, 2009, p. 3)

Therapeutic Alliance- An umbrella term for a variety of therapist-client interactional and relational factors operating in the delivery of treatment (Green, 2006, p. 426).

Rationale

Rapport between counselors and their clients has long been researched and its importance in the success of counseling is well known (Castonguay et al., 2006). However, what was limited in the research is a conceptualization of how the rapport between the school counselor and the student correlates with how connected the student feels to their school. School counselors are in a unique position to be able to support and enhance the learning environment of all students. A counselor in the educational setting supports the student academically, social-emotionally and with career counseling. School counselors also have a role in facilitating a safe learning environment for all students (ASCA, 2019). To establish a safe environment, students need to feel they have an adult in the building they can trust and with whom they have a positive relationship. Students who feel they are "connected" to their school are less likely to be absent

3

from school, less likely to engage in risky behaviors, and more likely to achieve academic success (Niehaus, Rakes, & Rudasill, 2012).

Statement of Purpose

Connection is the driving force behind powerful counseling interventions and successful students. "Children and adolescents are more likely to be engaged in school and learning if they have supportive and caring adults in their lives" (Preece, p. 27, 2009). This drives the hypothesis that if students feel like they have positive rapport with their school counselor, they will report a positive connection to their school and acknowledge a positive school climate exists. The purpose of the study was to examine the correlation between positive counseling rapport and student connectedness to school as well as student reports of positive school climate. The following research questions were explored using a correlation study design.

1. Does rapport with the school counselor relate to feelings of connectedness to school?
2. Does rapport with the school counselor relate to the school climate?
3. Does the number of visits with the school counselor relate to rapport with the school counselor?

Significance of the Study

Literature is limited regarding the correlation between a feeling of positive school connectedness and climate and positive rapport with a school counselor. This study sought to add to the literature by examining the relationship and if there is a correlation between these variables. The findings of the study are beneficial to support the hiring of more school counselors as positive school connectedness implies more successful students.

In school counseling, students are always the focus of our work. Advocating for them to ensure their academic and social emotional success is imperative to our success as school

counselors. Students will benefit from this research because as school counselors shift to more rapport building and connections with students, students will feel more connected to their school and see themselves greatly improving their academic skills and social-emotional wellness. This research studied into the importance that should be placed on building these connections and hopefully support the hiring of more school counselors, which directly positively impacts our students.

The hiring of more school counselors would increase the ability of schools to adhere to the recommended ASCA ratio of 1:250 for school counselors, as establishing rapport, and students feeling as if they matter, is enhanced when school counselors have the means to provide comprehensive programs to all students. The study could also be beneficial to policy makers as they seek to mandate a 1:250 ratio in their states. Adhering to the recommended ratio results in higher graduation rates, less disciplinary incidents, and increased school attendance (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanly & Pierce, 2019). This ratio has also been shown to provide a more positive school climate (Lapan, Gysbers, Petroski, 2001). If this ratio was mandated, school counselors would have the time and resources to work directly with all students and help them to feel more connected to their school community.

Due to financial reasons schools are beginning to hire personnel who are not licensed professional school counselors to serve in school counseling roles. It is concerning because the personnel being hired are not qualified to deliver a comprehensive school counseling program that supports achievement for all students (ASCA, 2018). While they may be valuable members of a school community, they do not possess the educational preparation to implement comprehensive school counseling programs and should never replace a school counselor. Personnel without the correct knowledge might inadvertently provide inappropriate interventions

that could be harmful to the students' achievement (ASCA, 2018). School counselors are required to possess a Master's Degree in School Counseling and are uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, social-emotional, and career development. School counselors are unique from other school personnel because they provide services to all students which is different than social workers or school psychologists. Social workers are funded to work with students who have an IEP or 504 Plan and school psychologists, who evaluate students for individual special services.

The study will also benefit counselor educators in their work with teaching rapport building skills to their future school counselors. While rapport is always discussed as a therapeutic condition, it is not always explicitly taught. Students in the school counseling programs will be able to learn the tasks necessary for establishing positive rapport and will benefit from understanding what students value when it comes to establishing connections with their students.

School counselors will benefit from data gained as the information will assist them in advocating for their roles in schools to be consistent with the ASCA national model. The ASCA national model was designed to be a framework for school counseling programs that outlines the components of a school counseling program that have a positive impact on student achievement and overall wellness (ASCA, 2020). Programs that are rooted in the concepts of the national model are data based, delivered to all students, teach the mindsets and behaviors, close achievement gaps, and improve overall student achievement (ASCA, 2020). According to ASCA (2019) eighty percent of a school counselor's time should be spent in direct service to students, while only twenty percent should be focused on programming and planning. Finally, and most importantly, the study will positively benefit students and school stakeholders as school

counselors may focus emphasis on the counseling relationship and building rapport with students

in order to support school connectedness. As school counselors successfully advocate for their

role, students will benefit from having more direct contact with their school counselor.

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

School counselors serve a vital role in the wellness of high school students and school connectedness has been linked to positive overall wellness of adolescents (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). However, what was missing in the research is a conceptualization of how the positive rapport that school counselors create with students correlates to a student feeling connected to the school and identifying a positive school climate. Can the positive impact of one adult in the school setting serve as a catalyst for students feeling they matter in their schools? The purpose of the literature review was to introduce the concepts of connectedness and school climate and the need for further research and understanding of high school students feeling connected to school through their rapport with their school counselor. To understand the concept of school connectedness and counselor rapport in the school setting, this study focused the review of literature on the importance of school connectedness, strategies for increasing school connectedness, the importance of school climate, the role of the school counselor according to the ASCA national model, the role of the counselor in the helping process, strategies for establishing rapport, time with school counselor, and finally the role of a school counselor as a protective factor. For the purpose of the review of literature, the term "client" is referring to a student in the school setting.

Review of the Literature

Importance of Student Connectedness

Feeling connected to school is a large predictor of mental health and academic success of high school students (Millings et al., 2012). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has defined school connectedness as, "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals" (CDC, 2020, p.

4). Students in their adolescent years who felt very connected have a lower risk for mental health concerns and emotional distress, are less likely to participate in violent or aggressive behavior, and have better grades and attendance than their peers who identify as not connected to school. These teens also have a higher self-esteem and feel that they matter to others (Watson, 2017). Depression in teens has significant negative implications for life-long mental health wellness. Adolescent students who feel more connected to their school are less likely to suffer from depression and feel a greater attachment to their peers (Millings et al., 2012). When students feel connected to school, it mitigates a student having a poor relationship with their family or having no familial support. School connectedness also mitigates depression and symptoms of depression and has been found to have more of an impact on lessening depression than family support (Zhu, 2018). Students who feel connected are also less likely to have suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, and emotional issues (Rosenfield, Richmond, & Bowen, 1998). Feeling connected to school increases positive school attachment and overall bonding and attachment which fosters healthy life-long relationships (Liu, Kim, Carney, Chung & Hazler, 2018). The importance of school connectedness informs the present study because it illustrates the benefits of students identifying that they feel connected to school.

Strategies that Increase School Connectedness

School connectedness is vital to the overall mental and academic wellness of students, and there are several factors that contribute to a feeling of connectedness for students. School connectedness has been identified as the one attribute that is protective for every risk outcome for adolescents (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). The CDC (2020) details research that was conducted to understand what factors positively impact school connectedness. While there are many factors that are important, the CDC narrowed it down to four factors which include

9

adult support, belonging to a positive peer group, commitment to education and the school environment (CDC, 2020). Adult support means that students feel the adults in their school give them attention, take an interest in them, and provide emotional support when they need it (Blum, McNeely, Rinehart, 2002). It is important students feel as though the adults in their building care about them as individuals, not just about their academic success. School counselors act as the positive adult support that students need to feel connected to school, school counselors play a more vital role in the school environment, positive school group, and commitment to education. School counselors assist students in finding activities and clubs where they feel a sense of belonging and feel a sense of belonging to a positive peer group as well as work in small counseling groups where they might learn skills about friendship and other peer relationship skills. Students' self-concept and their belief in their own mattering is often influenced by their peer group (Furlong, Whipple, & Jean, 2003). Students must feel like they have a connection with their peers in order to feel connected to school. Next, an understanding of the importance of education positively impacts connectedness (Libbey, 2004). When students are invested in their schooling, and feel like it serves a purpose, they are more likely to engage in the educational process. Lastly, the school environment impacts how safe and supported the students feel (Wilson, 2004). Students who have high attendance, passing grades, and participate in clubs and activities, are also more likely to feel connected to their school (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002).

School counselors also contribute to the student belief that education is important through their work with individual plans of study and helping them see the contextual importance of their academic success. Individual plans of study are mandated in some states with the goal of helping students to set a four-year plan that support their post-secondary goals. School counselors work

collaboratively with all key stakeholders including students, parents, educational staff, and communities to discover and nurture a students' strengths to find experiences and courses that support the students' plans (ASCA, 2017). School counselors work with students to create and maintain these plans throughout their academic career. Through this work, students see the value of the course work, which leads to being more engaged in their school success. School connectedness is greatly improved by work within this future planning. School counselors work directly with this portion of a student's academic career and facilitate conversations about the students plan of study which in turn engages students in their academics. School counselors connect students to their academic plan of study by helping students develop and understand their career goals and interests, ensuring their schedules incorporate these interests and serve their future goals, and engaging them in relevant learning experiences (Lapan, Wells, Peterson, & McCann, 2014). School counselors contribute to the school environment by fostering a climate of empathy, support, and safety (ASCA, 2019). This informs the present study as it is expected that because school counselors serve students in a manner of being a protective factor, this will contribute to the student feeling more connected with their school.

Importance of School Climate

School climate is defined by the National School Climate Center (2017) as:

> The quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students, parents, and school personnel's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society (n.p.).

A positive school climate increases student achievement by supporting school connectedness, decreasing school dropout rates, prevents violence and bullying and increases teacher retention (NSCC, 2013). Students who identify that their school has a positive climate are less likely to become anxious or withdrawn, are more autonomous, value their education more, are more intrinsically motivated, and are generally more satisfied with their school experience (Cemalcilar, 2010). School climate serves as a protective factor for adolescents by mitigating poor self-esteem and poor self-esteem (Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006). There are five categories associated with a positive school climate. These categories are safety, relationships, teaching and learning, environment, and school improvement process (Cohen, 2014). A positive school climate is preventative in nature and promotes the motivation of students to learn. This positive climate also serves as a protective factor against past trauma students might have encountered (Cohen, 2014). A school with a positive climate is student centered because it supports healthy self-concepts, increases self-esteem, and reinforces positive attachments (Cleveland and Sink, 2018). Positive school climates are perceived to be cohesive, have low amounts of friction, have healthy competition between students, and have high satisfaction with their academic classes (Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006). These schools foster an inclusive, diverse, and safe learning environments for all teachers and students (McNeely, 2002). School counselors and schools should assess school climate in order to understand the social health of the building (Gage, Kaplan, Ellis, & Kramer, 2019).

At-Risk Populations and School Climate and Connectedness

At risk populations in schools traditionally have low school connectedness and climate scores. Poverty, English Language Learners, minority students, and other risk factors have been found to have a negative impact on students in high school experiencing connectedness to their

school and adults within it (Lapan, Wells, Peterson, McCann, 2014). African-American students report feeling less connected to school than Caucasian peers (Zhu, 2018). The source of the disconnect is often that students who are considered at-risk do not have the social or cultural capital to access and navigate the resources (Holland, 2015). School based health centers where there is a caring adult and meaningful connections are made have been found to foster high connectedness scores for students with low SES (Bersamin, Coulter, & Gaarde et. al., 2019). Low income and potential first generation college students often must rely on their school counselors for support, but also often experience trust issues with adults in their building. This can be mitigated by responsive counseling services when the school counselor has the opportunity to provide direct services to explain and scaffold the processes of post-secondary experiences (Liu, Kim, & Carney et. al., 2020).

Role of the School Counselor

The role of the school counselor is defined by the American School Counselor Association in their book, "ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs 4th Edition (ASCA, 2019). The ASCA National model serves as a guide to help school counselors develop a comprehensive program that is data based, delivered to all students, is developmentally appropriate, closes achievement gaps, and results in higher achievement, and less discipline and attendance issues (ASCA, 2019). A school counselor wears a plethora of hats in their comprehensive role and serves as an integral member of the education community. ASCA's role statement outlines the role and tasks that school counselors include when implementing a comprehensive counseling program, such as delivering core counseling curriculum through classroom lessons, small counseling groups, and collaborating with key

stakeholders to ensure the success of all students (ASCA, 2019). School counselors also have a role in facilitating a safe learning environment for all students (ASCA, 2019).

School counselors play an imperative role in fostering positive school climate and school connectedness. School personnel acknowledge the importance of safe and caring schools in the achievement of academic and social-emotional development and recognize that school counselors collaborate to play a role in building positive climate and connectedness in schools (ASCA, 2016). One of the key factors of fostering these communities is helping students feel a sense of belonging (Lindwall & Coleman, 2008). Because school counselors deliver direct services to all students based on a curriculum, ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors, they are in a prime position to be change agents within their school's climate and can foster school connectedness through this core curriculum. School counselors also are data driven and through this data collection, help their schools design interventions where there are needs within their school's climate. Through consultation, school counselors can assist building leadership in developing services that benefit all students (Cleveland & Sink, 2018). School counselors support and maintain positive school climates through the integration of comprehensive school counseling programs. It is also true that when school counselors are able to connect with their students, they become "empowering agents" within the building (Holland, 2015). When programs are fully implemented and school counselors are allowed the time and resources to work directly with students, students earn higher grades, are more prepared for post-secondary success, and create more positive climates in their schools than those who do not have comprehensive programs (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2019).

Self-esteem is a predictor of school connectedness. Because of this, school counselors work to build competencies surrounding self-esteem by using a strengths approach to help

students recognize the attributes within themselves that are assets to the environment at school and help them navigate how to capitalize on these skills (Liu, Kim, Carney, et. al., 2020). School counselors assist students in identifying equity and acceptance in their schools and to see avenues of support for them within their buildings. They use data to identify barriers to student success related to connectedness and climate and find new ways to mitigate these barriers (Liu, Kim, Carney, et. al., 2020).

The Helping Process

It has been illustrated that rapport is vital to the success of the counseling relationship, however, what characteristics do counselors exude who successfully build a successful alliance and what is the counselor's role in creating the coalition? Because the strongest literature in relation to the helping process came from clinical counseling, this section used the term "client" in place of "students." ASCA identifies professional standards and dispositions for school counselors, which contribute to a counselor being successful in their role. The first of these is working collaboratively with clients to establish goals of therapy and to work collectively on the tasks that will serve these goals (Bachelor, 1995). Client perceptions of the relationship with their counselor are an important measure of the effectiveness of rapport. It has been reported that the counselor's perceptions of the rapport and that of the clients are not always congruent, which makes the client perspective the imperative predictor (Bachelor, 1995).

Client's perceptions of the role of the counselor in establishing a successful helping relationship are more positive when the counselor demonstrates the ability to validate client feelings, has knowledge and education on issues, and uses effective nonverbal gestures. These foundations and skills are found to be the most important during the early stages of counseling (Bedi, 2006). "The challenge of developing the relational competencies of therapists touches on

all of the fundamental issues related to the nature of psychological help and the role of the therapist in the healing process" (Horvath, 2001, p.170). Rogers is considered the father of rapport with his discussion of the "necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic growth" being held as the most imperative part of the healing process (Rogers, 1957, p.37). The therapist's most important task is creating an environment of acceptance, genuineness, and empathy for the client (Rogers, 1957).

Qualities found to deter rapport building were the counselor being rigid in the structure of therapy, not allowing client's autonomy in the direction of counseling, inappropriate self-disclosure by the counselor, and poor use of silence. Finally, it is found that the quality of rapport early on in the counseling relationship is most important. If the rapport is poor in the first two sessions, it is correlated to poor rapport later on (Hersoug et al., 2009).

Importance of the Helping Relationship

Student perceptions of their high school counselor provide significant insight into the importance of rapport in the school setting by allowing us to understand what counselors are doing that is creating rapport with them or breaking the helping relationship with them. Solomonson (2014) outlined the essential characteristics students felt were necessary to have rapport with their school counselor. The therapeutic skills that students felt made the greatest difference in establishing the counseling relationship were trust and the counselor belief that the students could succeed. These two skills were what the students perceived to be held by effective school counselors. Those skills are an integral part of rapport and speak to the importance of rapport in the school counseling relationship (Solmonson et al, 2014). These skills that Solomonson described establish a great foundation for the therapeutic skills that create rapport in the helping relationship of school counselors and students.

There is a positive correlation between the quality of the helping relationship to positive therapy outcomes (Horvath & Symonds, 1991). The unique feature of rapport is that it positively impacts counseling when applied in any type of therapy and for any issue. Castonguay stated, "An important finding that has emerged from a considerable number of studies is that the alliance correlates positively with therapeutic change across a variety of treatment modalities and clinical issues" (Castonguay et al., 2006, p. 272). These data support the construct that the helping relationship is the quintessential element that predicts the success of the counseling sessions. The quality of rapport is integral in the counseling relationship because of its unique ability to be applied across any problem and regardless of the theory based techniques being employed. Maintaining positive rapport and collaboration can and should be applied in every mode of therapy. Lastly, the effect of a lack of rapport is that clients are more likely to discontinue the counseling relationship (Castonguay et al, 2006).

Strategies for Establishing Rapport

Research suggests that rapport is a more powerful predictor of treatment change than even treatment type (Green, 2006). Several pieces are critical components of rapport. The client and the counselor both take part in the personal alliance and the task related alliance. Personal alliance refers to the interpersonal relationship, while task related alliance refers to a shared agenda or goals. These alliances, empathy, and warmth have been found to be strong indicators of rapport (Green, 2006). The trusting relationship and agreed upon expectations facilitates students engaging with and seeking out their school counselor (Holland, 2015). Significant research has been conducted which suggests humans have an inherent need to feel significant. Because of the fundamental need, making clients feel like they "matter" is a key strategy in establishing rapport (Rayle, 2006). Rayle also suggested that initiating ways in counseling to

17

make the client feel important is the fundamental idea of mattering. Mattering is the idea that we matter to others if they recognize us and acknowledge us. If someone is able to demonstrate they are interested in our lives, we feel like we matter to them. For counselors, this can be demonstrated by getting to know our students in their personal lives as well as their academic lives. Clients who feel as though their counselor is invested in their life were more invested themselves in the counseling process and are more likely to have positive outcomes as a result of counseling (Lapan, Wells, Peterson, & McCann, 2014). "When clients and counselors perceive they matter in the counseling relationship, the shared relationship can act as a powerful force of change" (Rayle, 2006). Data illustrate the significance of both counselor and client feeling they matter. Counselors feel this way by knowing they are helping clients, and clients feel this way when counselors are interested in their life as a whole. Counselors help clients feel they matter early on in counseling sessions by verbally saying that the client plays a crucial role in their own counseling and by validating their feelings. Giving the client full attention, showing mutual reliance, and facilitating interest in the client's lives can assist in strengthening of rapport (Rayle, 2006). In a school setting, this is created by showing an interest when students share about an important test or sporting event and remembering to use the students' names during interactions outside of the counseling office.

Another strategy for establishing rapport is through mirroring our clients' affect (Helm, 1991). By mirroring our client, counselors assist the client in feeling a likeness with their counselor which helps to create a more empathetic feeling between the counselor and client. Ways to mirror include mirroring the clients' posture, head positioning, gestures, pacing of the conversation, and vocal expressions. Communication is critical in creating a safe counseling environment where clients feel they can be honest and come to the counselor for help (Helm,

1991). Building rapport is nurtured by students feeling that educators are invested in their personal learning. When students feel valued, they are more likely to come to the educator when they need help. Change occurs when there is significant rapport and a strong counseling relationship (Rayle, 2006).

Frequency of Visits with the School Counselor

School counselors have many important roles in the school community and often have many more students on their caseload than the recommended ASCA ratio that was previously discussed of 1:250. The ratio matters and when it is adhered to, has been found to decrease incidences of discipline, and increase test scores and attendance (ASCA, 2020). Ratio is also important because data suggest that students in smaller schools feel more connected to their school than those who attend larger schools. This is because in large populations, it is more difficult for the adults in the building to establish and maintain positive relationships with students (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). No more than twenty percent of a school counselors time should be spent on planning and support of their program. Eighty percent of their time should be spent on direct student services such as instruction, appraisal, and counseling as well as indirect services like consultation, collaboration and referrals. These direct services are delivered through the core curriculum, individual student planning, individual and group counseling and responsive services (Kaffenberger & Trigiani, 2017). Between seventy and eighty percent of adolescents with a mental health disorder are not receiving treatment, therefore, school counselors are often the first line of defense. Students who receive counseling services at school are much more likely to follow through with these services compared to only receiving community services (Kaffenberger & Trigiani, 2017).

However, there are three barriers to a school counselor's ability to serve students: an increasing number of students who need direct services for mental health, decreased access to community based services, and perhaps most importantly, high school counselor caseloads and availability to students (Kaffenberger & Trigiani, 2017). Often times school counselors are faced with being asked to take on responsibilities that ASCA outlines as "non-school counselor activities." These include things like building the master schedule, test coordination, and student discipline (ASCA, 2020). All of these activities take away from time that the school counselor could be spending directly working with students and can actually be destructive to the relationships school counselors want to build with students. When the role of school counselors is inconsistent or contradictory, it can create a barrier to the trusting relationship. Holland, 2015, stated:

> School counselors experience multiple and conflicting roles – they are tasked with college counseling; course planning; scheduling; facilitating communication between students, teachers, and parents; and acting as mental health counselors…providing all these services to all students is virtually impossible, especially when counselors have high caseloads. (p. 247)

All of these factors impact how much of a school counselor's time can be spent directly with students and if the students can trust that a school counselor will be a consistent adult in their school. Students who receive responsive comprehensive school counseling services have better academic outcomes, find better postsecondary success and feelings of safety within their building increase (Lapan, Wells, Peterson, & McCann, 2014).

School Counselor as a Protective Factor

Protective factors are those factors that reduce the impact of stressful or traumatic life events. They are the characteristics that promote social-emotional well-being and increase the ability of an individual to make healthy life choices (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002).

School counselors are the professionals within the school who are best equipped to deal with the mental health concerns of students and particularly the protective factors affecting those concerns. They are the school professionals with the specific skills necessary to implement vital prevention programs, develop individual and student interventions, and identify and refer those students who need additional support (Carney, Kim, Hazler, & Guo, 2018, p. 1).

As discussed regarding the role of the school counselor, the American School Counseling Association outlines the role of the counselor in providing comprehensive services to meet the needs of all students. Research has shown that school counselors can work as a catalyst to reduce the risk factors and serve as a protective factor for students when the school counselors are practicing effective programs (Lapan, Wells, Petersen, & McCann, 2014). School counselors work with students to assist them in having high self-esteem. High self-esteem is a protective factor and ensures that students will be connected to their peers, teachers, and the school itself (King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002).

Summary

There is significant research on the benefits of school connectedness as well as the importance of counselor and client rapport and how both of these are established. Studies report that comprehensive school counseling programs are tied to positive school outcomes including school connectedness (Dimmitt, C., & Wilkerson, B., 2012). However, knowledge needs to be

constructed to show if there is a correlation between the specific construct of effective school counseling rapport and students feeling connected to their school. The knowledge is beneficial in advocating for the role of school counselors and their importance in schools as well as for assisting schools in gaining connectedness from their students.

Conceptual Framework

Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Theory informed this research as his core conditions for therapeutic change of unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathetic understanding are the basis for the variable of school counselor rapport that was being studied (Rogers, 1995). These core conditions provide for rapport to be built between the counselor and client. The present study fit this framework because it sought to inform on these skills that impact rapport in the school setting.

Congruence refers to the counselor being genuine in counseling sessions. Unconditional positive regard is fostered by helping the client to feel as though they matter and are valued by the counselor. Empathetic understanding can be developed by showing understanding of the client's experiences and accurately understanding their feelings. (McLeod, 2019). Rogers discusses his approach as, "It is that the individual has within himself or herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes and self-directed behavior and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided" (Rogers, 1980, p. 115-117). Rogers advocates for an approach that values the clients' insights and focuses on fostering strong rapport between the counselor and client. Clients must be allowed to tell their own experiences and are experts who can discover answers to their own problems if the therapeutic environment is fostered (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2006).

Cognitive development theory also informed this research as this study relates to the social context of learning. School climate is a social educational experience and the pieces of school climate are directly related to the social context of a school. Vygotsky theorized that all learning takes place in a social context and that cognitions are related to these social experiences and norms. Students experiences within this social context inform how they perceive the climate and connections they have with their school. (Vygotsky, 1978).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs also informs this research (Maslow, 1943). Maslow discussed a hierarchy in which needs that are lower in the pyramid, such as physiological and safety needs must be achieved before one can move to the next level of belonging and esteem; only after those basic needs are met can one move on to the highest level of self-actualization. This informs the research because students cannot be socially and academically successful if they are not first feeling that they belong and matter (Maslow, 1943).

Finally, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) contributed to the conceptual framework. Bronfenbrenner's model describes the social contexts that influence one's development within their micro and meso system. School counselors are part of the integrated school system which is part of the community at large. In relation to this theory, they work in this complex system by influencing student overall development. In the student's microsystem, school counselors have direct contact with students and provide a multitude of activities in this context. School counselors also influence a students' mesosystem as they provide collaboration and consultation with important stake holders in a student's life such as parents and teachers (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Bronfenbrenner's systems theory (1989) believed that a person's development is affected by factors that are in their environment, and school makes up a large part of the student's environment in their formative years (1989).

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the present study's methodology. This quantitative study used a correlation design to determine if a predictive relationship existed between rapport with a school counselor and a student feeling like their school has a positive climate and feeling connected to their school. Correlation design fit the research because it was examining the correlation between the quantitative variables in the prediction of a relationship. Research was conducted by administering the Working Alliance Inventory- Bonds Subscale, which measured the rapport between the school counselor and the student; the Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness - School Connectedness Subscale, which measured how connected the student feels to school; and the School Climate Questionnaire which measured School Connectedness. These instruments supported the study because they measured the particular factors of school counselor rapport, school climate and overall school connectedness. The following research questions were addressed in this study.

1. Does rapport with the school counselor relate to feelings of connectedness to school?

2. Does rapport with the school counselor relate to the school climate?

3. Does the number of visits with the school counselor relate to rapport with the school counselor?

Participants

Participants in this study were high school seniors enrolled in three participating public high schools in the 2019-2020 school year. The three schools were located in the Midwest and were similar in the number of students enrolled. School A has a total enrollment of 1,661 students and 384 Seniors; 121 of which provided consent and participated in the study. Twenty-eight of these students were on a 504 plan or IEP. School A placed in the lower 50% of all schools in their state for state testing scores in the 2017 school year. Their enrollment is 38% white, 19% African American, 29% Hispanic, and 14% classified other ethnicities. A percentage of 69% of students are on free and reduced lunches, while 82% of their population is considered economically disadvantaged. Their ELL population is 14% and 19% of the students in their building are on an IEP or 504 plan. The daily attendance rate at School A is 89% and the dropout rate is 3.5%. The graduation rate is 72% at School A and the average ACT score is a 16.6 (KSDE, 2019).

High School B's total enrollment is 1,030. There were 221 Seniors at School B and 110 of these Seniors consented and were included in the study. Twelve of these participants from School B were on an IEP or 504 plan. School B is in the top half of all schools in their state for overall state testing scores. School B is 77% white, 3% African American, 11% Hispanic, and 9% other. They have 13% of students who are economically disadvantaged and their students eligible for free and reduced lunches is reported to be 7%. The ELL population is .97% and 8% of their student population are identified as having an IEP or 504 plan. Their graduation rate is 98% and their attendance rate is 94%. School B's dropout rate is .5%, and their average ACT score is 22.5 (KSDE, 2019).

The total enrollment at School C is 1,023. There were 218 Seniors at School C and 65 returned consent and participated in the study. Three of those participants were on an IEP or 504 plan. School C scores in the lower half of schools in the Midwest for overall state test scores. The school is 61% White, 29% Hispanic, 3% African American, and 6% other. Their economically disadvantaged population was 48%, and the percent of students eligible for free or reduced lunch is 49%. They have an ELL population of 2% and an attendance rate of 92% for all students. Schools C's graduation rate is 85%, and their dropout rate is 3.6%. Their average ACT score is 20.2 (KSDE, 2019).

The total number of participants in the study was 296 (n=296). The school counseling departments differ in their student to counselor ratio. School A's ratio is 1:438, School B's is 1:337, and School C's is 1:357.

Table 3.1 (KSDE, 2019)

Demographics	School A	School B	School C
Total Enrollment	1661	1030	1023
Senior Enrollment	384	221	218
White	38%	77%	61%
African-American	19%	3%	3%
Hispanic	29%	11%	29%
Other Ethnicities	14%	9%	6%
Free and Reduced Lunch	69%	7%	49%
Economically Disadvantaged	82%	13%	48%
ELL	14%	0.97%	2%
Students w/Disabilities	19%	8%	17%
Attendance Rate	89%	94%	92%
Dropout Rate	3.50%	0.50%	3.60%
Graduation Rate	72%	98%	85%
Average ACT Score	16.6	22.5	20.2
Test Scores	<50%	>50%	<50%
Study Participants	121	110	65
Participants on 504/IEP	28	12	3

Participants in Counseling Groups	5	14	5

Inclusion Criteria

Seniors enrolled in September of 2019 at the three schools were invited to participate in the study. Students who were excluded from the study were a part of the Functional Applied Academics Classroom, as traditionally they were assigned to the school social worker's case load rather than the school counselor who they worked with minimally. Students were included if they had parental informed consent to participate in the study. A paper permission form was used to obtain consent to participate. A list of seniors with their current age was obtained through the school counselor at each school. If students were 18 years old or older, they were allowed to provide consent for themselves to participate; if the student was under the age of 18 on the day consent was obtained, he/she took the paper consent form home to get a parent/guardian signature. Once the consent was received, names and birthdates were double checked to ensure for accuracy of the seniors who self-signed the consent form. The names of all students with signed informed consent was given to the counselors using an excel document and these students were asked to report to a designated area of the school where they participated in the study. Attendance was taken by a verbal role call using the excel sheet given to the counselors. If the students were absent on the day of the study, the researcher returned and administered the surveys on an alternate day. If a student was absent on the alternate day, the student was then excluded from the study.

Research Questions

1.   Does rapport with the school counselor relate to feelings of connectedness to school?

2.   Does rapport with the school counselor relate to the school climate?

3.   Does the number of visits with the school counselor relate to rapport with the school counselor?

Hypothesis and Null Hypothesis

The hypothesis was if a student identifies a positive rapport with their school counselor, he/she will report a positive connection to his/her school. It was hypothesized that a student who reports a positive rapport with their school counselor will report their school has a positive climate. The study indicated that a student who spend more time with their school counselor will report stronger rapport. The null hypothesis is a student who has a positive rapport with his/her school counselor will identify not having a feeling of connectedness to his/her school and a negative school climate.

Instruments

The instruments in the study were chosen based on the review of literature. Both School Counseling Rapport and School Connectedness were chosen to be studied for correlation.

Working Alliance Inventory Short Form - Bonds Subscale (Hovarth, 1984)

The WAI Inventory (see Appendix-A Instruments) was used to measure rapport between the school counselor and the student. The WAI Short Form has 12 items designed to understand the client's perception of the relationship between the counselor and themselves. This inventory was created based on Bordin's theory to measure the strength of the therapeutic alliance. The Bonds Subscale refers to the connection between the counselor and the student. The alliance between the student and the counselor is collaborative in nature and measures several constructs including mutual trust, agreed upon goals of treatment, and confidence in the counseling journey. Administration and student completion of the WAI short form is approximately five minutes to complete. There was a five-point Likert scale where 1=never, 3=sometimes, and 5=always. The

internal reliability of the subscale is .92 for bonds. The WAI has high internal consistency with the Cronbach's Alpha being .91. It also has high reliability with test-retest reliability being .93. The WAI correlates with other therapeutic alliance measures and has high construct validity. High scores on the inventory correlate with positive treatment outcomes. All study participants were administered the inventory. Following the inventory questions, participants were asked questions to reflect the role of school counselors. The questions were added to the sum of the scores. These questions were:

My school counselor recognizes me and knows who I am.

My school counselor has met with me in order to help me achieve my post-secondary goals.

My school counselor has time to work with me.

I matter to my school counselor.

I feel connected to my school counselor.

The Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness - School Connectedness Subscale (Karcher, 2011)

This measure (see Appendix-A Instruments), was used to determine how connected the student participants felt to his/her school. The Hemingway subscales measure positive connections within the student's world. Connectedness in different domains of the student's world, make a unique contribution to the student's behavior and can be explored separately to identify areas that impact a student's choices and behaviors(Karcher, 2011). The School Connectedness subscale measures the student's connections to both their school and the adults in their school. The scale is intended for ages 11-18. Each of the six items uses a five-point scale of not at all true, not really true, sort of true, true or very true. A higher score indicates that the

student feels highly connected to the school. The Hemingway is validated specifically for the use with adolescent populations. This measure has high validity ranging from .70-.90 for internal reliability. The reliability for the subscale is .72, which shows a high test-retest reliability. Two questions (3 and 4) were removed as they were based on academic success. Additional questions were asked of participants based on the CDC research regarding factors that increase school connectedness. The additional questions were:

I feel that I have an adult in the school building who dedicates their time and attention to me.

I feel that I belong to a positive peer group at school.

I have opportunities to get involved in school activities or clubs.

The school environment feels safe and supportive to me.

School Climate Questionnaire (Teaching Tolerance, 2019)

The purpose of the questionnaire (see Appendix-A Instruments) was to determine how the climate of the school is related to the rapport the school counselor has with the students. The questionnaire, a document of Teaching Tolerance, Southern Poverty Law Center Tolernace.org, was recommended for exploring differences in teacher and student perceptions related to school climate (Teaching Tolerance, 2019). The questionnaire provides report data of the school climate and are different than the climate the adults in the building identify. This questionnaire allows for the student's perceptions of the school climate to be examined. The first nine items were used and are on a Likert rating scale of 1-5 with one being agree strongly and five being disagree strongly. A raw score was attained with a lower score reflecting a positive school climate.

Student Data Sheet

A form to collect student data (see Appendix-A Instruments) was included with the measures. Students identified their school counselor, a yes or no question as to if the student has an IEP or 504, a yes or no question as to if they have participated in small counseling groups, and a scaling question regarding the frequency students had participated in school counseling program activities in their high school education in the participating school. The scaling question was number of visits with the school counselor in a school year. The responses were once a week, once a month, once a semester, and less than once a semester.

Data Collection

Following the proposal approval from the researchers' committee, the researcher submitted a proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for permission to conduct the study (see Appendix B for IRB Approval). Once the IRB approved the study, administration and school counselors at each building were contacted as potential study participants. The schools chosen were selected because they are similar in size of enrollment, however, have different demographics. Building administrators from each building consented to their building being used as a site for research to be conducted and their written consent was obtained (see Appendix C for administrator approval). The consent form explained information regarding the study including the purpose, the voluntary nature of the study and confidentiality of the data received (see appendix D for consent form). All seniors were gathered in the auditorium or lecture hall of their building. The consent forms and study were explained to the participants. Consent was obtained by giving paper copies to all seniors enrolled. Students over the age of 18 were able to self-consent that day, while students who are under the age of 18, minors, required parent consent. The seniors over the age of 18 were able to self-consent that day and those who were not took the paper form home and were instructed to bring the signed form back to their school counselor

who then gave them to the researcher. All forms were gathered from each participating school by the researcher. All paper copies of consent were then used to compile lists of participants for each school. The consent forms were held in a file in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's school.

The researcher then returned to the schools where the school counselors had gathered the participants to the same location where they gave consent. To account for changes from week to week, all instruments were administered in one sitting during their homeroom block of the day. This was because depending upon what had happened that day, the students might feel differently regarding the survey items; it was necessary to have all instruments completed in one sitting on the same day. Student data were collected on their instrument. The researcher administered these instruments to them by reading them the following script: "You are here today to participate in a research study. As part of the study you will be asked to first complete the student data questions. Please fill in the data now. Next, please follow the directions on each of the three inventories to the best of your ability. If you have questions, please raise your hand and I will assist you. The information will remain confidential and will not have your name connected to your measurement tools. Please begin the instruments now. You may leave when you have completed the instruments."

If students were absent on the data collection day, the researcher scheduled an alternate day for students to be administered the instruments. The setting and procedures for the alternate date were consistent with the original day. Following the closure of all data collection, data were inputted with a counselor in the school observing the input process to ensure errors were not made in data entry. The data were then exported into SPSS and the researcher began analyzing

the data. The data were kept in a password protected district server to ensure confidentiality throughout the process.

Data Analysis

The data set were processed in SPSS. For research questions one and two, the two dependent variables were connectedness (The Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness - School Connectedness Subscale total score (Karcher, 2011) and climate (School Climate Questionnaire total score (Teaching Tolerance, 2019). The independent variable was Counseling Rapport (Working Alliance Inventory Form C - Bonds Subscale total score (Hovarth, 1984)). For research question three, the Independent Variable was the number of visits with their school counselor. The number of visits was coded as once a week = 4, once a month = 3, once a semester =2, and less than once a semester=1.

SPSS was utilized for all data analysis. For research questions one and two, Pearson's r was applied. Climate and connectedness were the two dependent variables and rapport was identified as the predictor. A bivariate correlation of climate and connectedness was employed. They were then combined into one analysis due to a statistically significant relationship. For question three, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. Because of the result of the Levene's test, the assumption of homogeneity was violated and a more in depth f test was completed using a Welch test. Finally, a Games Howell post hoc test was run to complete the data analysis.

Chapter 4 - Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to identify the correlation between counseling rapport and student connectedness to school. It was hypothesized that if students felt a strong rapport with their school counselor, students would report feelings of connectedness to school and a more positive school climate. The following research questions were explored using a correlation study design.

1. Does rapport with the school counselor relate to feelings of connectedness to school?

2. Does rapport with the school counselor relate to the school climate?

3. Does the number of visits with the school counselor relate to rapport with the school counselor?

According to Stangor and Wallinga, a correlational study is used to measure the relationship between two or more variables (Stangor & Wallinga, 2012). A correlation design supported the research as it desired to find if one variable explains another variable and what relationships there are between variables. In this chapter the descriptive findings will be discussed, the data analysis procedures, and the results of the data analysis are discussed.

Descriptive Findings

For research questions one and two, the two dependent variables were connectedness (The Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness - School Connectedness Subscale total score (Karcher, 2011)) and climate (School Climate Questionnaire total score (Teaching Tolerance, 2019)). The independent variable was Counseling Rapport (Working Alliance Inventory Form C - Bonds Subscale total score (Hovarth, 1984)). For research question three, the independent variable was the number of visits with their school counselor. The number of visits

was coded as once a week = 4, once a month = 3, once a semester =2, and less than once a semester=1.

	Working Alliance Inventory Average Score	School Connectedness Subscale Average Score	School Climate Questionnaire Average Score
School A	45.78	23.36	29.45
School B	54.26	25.81	32.24
School C	47.66	24.81	30.68

	Once a Week	Once a Month	Once a Semester	Less than Once a Semester
School A	6	26	46	43
School B	7	33	59	11
School C	4	21	31	9

Results

For research questions one and two, Pearson's r was used in SPSS. The Pearson Correlation coefficient is used to measure the strength of the relationship between the variables (Stangor & Wallinga, 2012). The two dependent variables were climate and connectedness and rapport was used as the predictor. A bivariate correlation of climate and connectedness was run in order to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between climate and connectedness. Both dependent variables are significantly correlated *(p=.00021, r=.063),* which gave the indication to run a multivariate regression analysis on both climate and connectedness scores. These were combined into one analysis in order to control for the inflation of Type 1 error. Because the relationship of the variables was determined to be significant, one regression model was run for both questions.

Table 4.1 - Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Climate	28.85	7.094	296

Connectedness	30.9	5.829	296

Table 4.2 - Correlations

		Climate	Connectedness
Climate	Pearson Correlation	1	0.429
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	296	296
Connectedness	Pearson Correlation	0.429	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0	
	N	296	296

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

RQ1. Does rapport with your school counselor relate to feelings of connectedness to school?

RQ2. Does rapport with your school counselor relate to the school climate?

The entire multivariate model was significant at the p=.01 level. A post-hoc test was ran and rapport was a statistically significant predictor of the dependent variables of climate and connectedness combined, $F(2, 293) = 33.895$, $p < .001$; Wilks' $\lambda = .812$, $\eta^2 = .181$. Further examination of each individual outcome showed, for question one, rapport was a statistically significant predictor of School Connectedness, $F(1,294) = 64.94$, $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .181$. For question two, rapport was also a statistically significant predictor of School Climate, $F(1,294) = 20.918$, $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .066$. Rapport predicts connectedness at a more significant rate than it does climate.

Table 4.3 - Tests of Between Subject Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Rapport	Climate	1	986.193	20.981	.000	0.066
	Connectedness	1	1813.367	64.94	.000	0.181

RQ3. Does the number of visits with your school counselor relate to rapport with your school counselor?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated based on the result of Levene's test. Because of the assumption of homogeneity, a more

36

robust F test was completed. The Welch test was statistically significant *(Welch's F (3, 76.335)*

= 8.871, p<.001.) The results show the number of visits with the school counselor was a

statistically significant predictor of rapport.

Table 4.4 - ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3297.463	3	1099.154	10.483	.000
Within Groups	30616.375	292	104.851		
Total	33913.838	295			

A Games Howell post hoc test revealed that group four (number of visits=once a week)

had higher rapport scores *(mean=55.11,SD=7.133)* than groups one (number of visits=less than

once a semester)*(mean=43.74, SD=13.735),* two (number of visits=once a semester)

(mean=49.75, SD=9.537), and group three (number of visits=once a month) *(mean=52.59,*

SD=9.012).

Table 4.5 - Descriptives

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1 (Less than Once a Semester)	58	43.7	13.735
2 (Once a Semester)	137	49.8	9.537
3 (Once a Month)	82	52.6	9.012
4 (Once a Week)	19	55.1	7.133
Total	296	49.7	10.722

Limitations

Although the sample size was large from all high schools combined, it was not evenly

distributed among the three high schools that participated. The demographic makeup of each

school was significantly different, which might also have impacted the scores for school

connectedness and climate and could also have accounted for the difference in scores between

schools. Another limitation is that each of the three schools offer a different degree to which they

are implementing comprehensive school counseling programs. None of the three schools are recognized ASCA Model Programs (RAMP); therefore, the implications of providing comprehensive programs cannot be directly established. However, the schools all have components of comprehensive counseling programs, such as offering career education and postsecondary planning, and individual counseling sessions. The variable was not examined as part of the study, however, it might have implications for establishing rapport with the school counselor. Also, within each school there were several different school counselors with various degrees of education, experience, and practice in the field. This could account for the variance in rapport scores throughout buildings as the rapport building skills of each counselor might differ greatly. Another limitation is that the students might not have had the same school counselor all four years of their high school education, which could also impact the rapport that was built. Feelings of school connectedness might be negatively impacted by another factor such as other adults in the building, poor peer relationships, or school counselor availability due to caseloads bigger than the recommended 1:250 ratio. Lastly, other teachers, administrators, and staff members in the building influence the school climate and connectedness of students. A poor interaction with administrators or a teacher could lead a student to indicate a poor school climate, when they do indeed have a good relationship with their school counselor.

Assumptions

Because this is a self-report study, it was assumed that all students participating in the study are providing honest and accurate data on the instruments. It is also assumed that they understand the meaning of the questions and are able to comprehend the scales used within the instruments. Lastly, it is assumed that the data was properly correlated between each student's instruments.

Summary

In this chapter the methodology and analysis implemented to address the research questions were shared. The results of the data analysis supported the research questions because they supported validating the correlation between counselor rapport and school climate and connectedness. This chapter included the descriptive findings, results of the data collection and analysis, and the limitations and assumptions of the study. The current study examined the correlation of school counselor rapport with both school connectedness, school climate, and number of visits with the school counselor. Study findings indicated a statistically significant relationship between school counselor rapport and both school climate and school connectedness. There was also found to be a statistically significant correlation between the frequency of visits with their school counselor and ratings of rapport with the school counselor. Chapter five provides the implications of the data, summary of the findings and recommendations.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

Summary of Study

Counselor rapport is an essential component of counseling success. Carl Rogers' Person-Centered theory defines the three components of counselor rapport as unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathetic understanding (Rogers, 1995). The correlational design of the study supported the findings as it explained the correlation between the variables of school connectedness and school climate with counselor rapport. The purpose of the study was to relate the correlation between positive counseling rapport and student connectedness to school and student reports of positive school climate.

There is significant research on the benefits of school connectedness, students feeling that their school has a positive school climate, and the importance of positive counselor rapport (Millings et al., 2012). However, the research was limited in empirical data regarding understanding of the role positive school counselor rapport has in increasing school climate and increasing students' feelings of connectedness to school. This knowledge and understanding will be beneficial in advocating for the role of school counselors and the vital role they play in schools.

Included in chapter five are the findings and conclusions of the study and the significance of these findings. By using the research questions to guide the discussion, a greater understanding will be gained on the contribution of knowledge the study provides. Finally, the implication and future recommendations for research are provided.

Summary of Findings

The results of the study found that students who identified feeling strongly connected to their school also identified a positive school climate. The strong correlation indicated that

climate and connectedness are strongly correlated. Major implications from the current study for practice are shared.

1. **Does rapport with your school counselor relate to feelings of connectedness to school?**

Students identifying themselves as having a strong connection to school while in their adolescent years have a much lower risk for mental health and emotional issues. Those students who identify as being disconnected from school are more likely to participate in violence, aggression, and have less academic success than their more connected peers (Watson, 2017).

Having a positive rapport with your school counselor was established as a statistically significant predictor of a student identifying a positive connection to school. The Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness - School Connectedness Subscale was used to determine the connection of the students to their school. One of the questions specifically references adults in the building who the students trust. Research from the CDC has already established that having adult support is one of the factors that contribute to school connectedness. However, further research was needed in the area that the rapport with the school counselor and the impact of the school counselor provides a strong positive impact on the school community (CDC, 2020). School counselors not only play a vital role in building quality relationships with students, they also are integral in building a positive school community. When students are shown the therapeutic conditions necessary for rapport, such as unconditional positive regard, they are more likely to be connected to their school (Rogers, 1995).

Other factors explored on the subscale were work ethic at school and enjoying school, feeling like they belong to a positive peer group, and feeling the school environment is safe and supportive. School counselors contribute to students believing in the role of education in their

lives through assisting students in building Individual Plans of Study and helping them to see the path that leads to their future success starts with their current education. School counselors are dedicated to positively impact the school environment by fostering a climate of empathy, support, and safety (ASCA Role Statement, 2019). School counselors are in a unique position to be able to support and enhance the learning environment of all students. Vygotsky's research states that all learning takes place in a social context, and these experiences students have at school with the school counselor informs how the student perceives the connections they have in their building (Vygotsky, 1978). A licensed school counselor supports the student in the domains of academic, social-emotional, and career. In the domains, school counselors impact and facilitate a safe learning environment for all students (ASCA, 2019).

The Working Alliance Inventory - Bonds Subscale was used to determine the quality of rapport students held with their school counselor. Items on the scale discussed autonomy in creating goals for counseling, believing that their school counselor "likes" them, and feeling like they matter to their school counselor. The importance of the helping relationship is well defined (Solomonson et al., 2014). When a client feels strong rapport with their counselor, the interventions in therapy are much more likely to be successful. Data indictated a positive correlation between the quality of the helping relationship to positive therapy outcomes (Horvath and Symonds, 1991). The unique feature of rapport is it positively impacts counseling when applied in any type of therapy and for any issue. When students identified feeling a positive rapport existed with their school counselor, they identified feeling trust with their school counselor and they believed that their school counselor felt they mattered to them. This can be explained by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as students must feel a sense of belonging before they can move onto more in depth academic learning (Maslow, 1943). Because school counselor

rapport contributes directly to positive school connectedness, the data reported school counselors positively impact a direct and vital role in engaging students in academic success, deterring students from risky and dangerous behaviors, and positively impact the mental health and emotional state of students.

2.   **Does rapport with your school counselor relate to the school climate?**

The National School Climate Center defines School Climate as, "the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (National School Climate Center, 2019). A positive school climate benefits all students, teachers, and staff in the building. The School Climate Questionnaire (Teaching Tolerance, 2019) was utilized to examine the students' feelings regarding the climate of their school. The measure included questions referring to what they perceived to be the feelings of other students and staff in the building, rather than their own personal feelings of school like the School Connectedness Scale. The questionnaire included questions referring to if students get along in their building, if teachers make it safe and welcoming, if students feel they belong, and if all stakeholders listen to one another. Once again, students who felt they had a strong rapport with their school counselor, were more likely to identify a positive school climate. This means the relationship students have with their school counselor benefits the student directly, and the greater school community. Bronfenbrenner discusses integrated school system in the community at large and explains how the school counselor directly impacts the complex micro and meso systems that a student is part of. The current study indicated counselor rapport was a more of a significant predictor of school connectedness than of school climate. One reason for the difference could be

that school connectedness refers to the students' own feelings about their engagement in school and climate refers to how their school feels as a whole.

Protective factors are those factors that reduce the impact of stressful or traumatic life events. They are the characteristics that promote social-emotional well-being and increase the ability of the individual to make healthy life choices (CDC, 2020). It is known that protective factors positively impact the school climate. The American School Counseling Association outlines the role of the school counselor in providing comprehensive services to meet the needs of all students. Research has shown that school counselors can work as a catalyst to reduce the risk factors and serve as a protective factor for students when the school counselors are practicing effective programs (Lapan, Wells, Petersen, & McCann, 2014). The findings of the research conclude that school counselors not only serve as a protective factor for individual students, they serve as a catalyst for positive School Climate as a whole when strong rapport is built between them and students. The present study confirms having a positive rapport with one's school counselor directly correlates with a positive school climate in the building.

3.   Does the number of visits with your school counselor relate to rapport with your school counselor?

ASCA's recommendation for school counselor to student ratio is 1:250. ASCA's official role statement outlines the tasks that school counselors engage in including delivering core counseling curriculum through classroom guidance lessons, conducting small counseling groups, and collaborating with key stakeholders to ensure the success of all students (ASCA, 2019). A counselor in the educational setting supports the student academically, social-emotionally and with career counseling. School counselors require time to work with students on the tasks directly linked to a comprehensive program because these items ensure that their program is

meeting the needs of all students. The findings of the study indicate that number of visits with the school counselor was a statistically significant predictor of positive rapport (ASCA, 2019).

Students who reported the greater frequency of visits with their school counselor had the highest rapport scores. Students who reported visits of less than once a month saw significant drops in the rapport scores. School B reported the highest rapport scores of the three high schools. Their school counselor to student ratio was 1:337, the smallest ratio of the three groups. School A reported the lowest rapport scores and has the highest ratio at 1:438. The lower counselor to student ratio is, the more positive rapport was reported. When students reported participating in a small counseling group at school, their average rapport score was higher than that of those who did not participate in groups. This indicated that the number of visits with school counselors matters in rapport. School counselors who have higher ratios are unable to see students as often as those with lower ratios and directly negatively impacts the rapport they have with students.

It is known that humans have an inherent need to feel significant (Rayle, 2006). Clients feeling they matter is key in establishing rapport (Rayle, 2006). If a person is able to demonstrate he/she are interested in our lives, we feel like we matter to them. As counselors, a feeling of mattering can be achieved by developing relationships with our students in their personal lives as well as their academic lives. Clients who feel as though their counselor is invested in their life are more invested themselves in the counseling process. Counselors create an environment of acceptance, genuineness, and empathy (Rogers, 1957). Two items on the rapport scale were, "My school counselor recognizes me and knows who I am" and "I matter to my school counselor." Students can not feel like they matter if school counselors do not have ample time to spend with them doing activities that matter. School counselors are in a unique position to make

students feel heard and they matter as they are one of the individuals in the school building who spend one on one time with students throughout their academic career. When school counselors are given the time to work directly with students, this positively impacts the rapport that is established with their students.

The availability of a comprehensive school counseling program is critical in the rapport students felt with the school counselor and the school connectedness and climate scores. School A is beginning to have components of a comprehensive program. They do sometimes use assessment data to support and plan for their program. School A delivers core curriculum to students on an inconsistent basis. They provide programs on a limited number of the standards in the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors to students on an inconsistent basis. The counseling program has begun to focus their programs goals and beliefs statements based on student needs. School A counselors are responsible for some testing and master schedule creation which are both deemed by ASCA as non-counseling activities. School A had the middle score for school connectedness and for school climate. School A students' rapport average was the lowest of the three schools. All school counselors are licensed as school counselors as this is district policy.

School B has comprehensive counseling components in place, conducts small groups, individual counseling, and delivers core curriculum to all students. They also are responsible for limited non-counseling duties including master schedule and testing. School B uses a needs assessment to assess their program and guide their counseling program. They are working towards using more data collection to guide their comprehensive school counseling program. School B does not spend the recommended 80% of their time directly serving students, but is working towards being closer to this amount of time. School B uses the standards in the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors to guide their deliver their instruction to students and abides by all

ASCA Professional and Ethical standards. School B has begun to focus their program with developing their beliefs and mission, and is working towards setting up and advisory council to help with program planning. Their rapport score is the highest of the three schools as is the school climate and school connectedness scores. All counselors in this school are licensed school counselors.

School C does not deliver classroom lessons or offer small groups. Three of the four school counselors are licensed, while one is in graduate school currently. Their counselors help with master schedule and testing coordination. School C does not currently use a needs assessment or keep data to support and appraise their program. School C delivers programing to meet the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors standards to only a select number of students. The program is working towards developing program focus and planning, but does not have defined a beliefs and mission statement. The school had the middle score for rapport, but the lowest scores for school connectedness and school climate.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to determine the correlation between positive counseling rapport and student connectedness to school and student reports of positive school climate. Literature was limited that examined the relationship between these variables. It is now clear that having a positive rapport with the school counselor correlates with having a strong connection to school and a positive school climate. The greater the frequency of visits with the school counselor creates stronger rapport, and stronger rapport creates a better school climate with more connected students.

Recommendations

The new research benefits students and school stakeholders as school counselors and others in education should have the confirmation of the effectiveness of school counselors in the schools. The research provides additional evidence of the importance to place emphasis on building rapport and spending quality time with students to improve student success in domains of academic, social-emotional, and career.

The findings of the study confirm the benefits of a 1:250 school counselor to student ratio. They suggest that when school counselors are able to establish rapport with students, the school climate is more positive and the students feel more connected to their school. Data support the hiring of more licensed school counselors implementing comprehensive programs. Students who have strong rapport will be more successful both academically and social-emotionally. The number of visits with the school counselor strongly indicate more effective rapport. School counselors are unable to meet the needs of all students when their ratio is larger than the recommended ASCA ratio. The opportunity to establish positive rapport is enhanced when school counselors are allowed the time to provide direct services to students. When school counselors are allowed to provide comprehensive counseling programs to all students, a positive school climate increases and students feel more connected to their school. Policy makers should seek to mandate the ASCA recommended ratio in their states and mandate that all schools, K-12, have licensed school counselors in their buildings who can provide comprehensive school counseling programs to all students. Research indicates this will positively impact student success, decrease absenteeism, and provide meaningful support for students' mental health needs. Additionally, school counselors will have this new data to assist in advocating for their roles in schools to be consistent with the ASCA National Model. They can also use it to advocate

for lower counselor to student ratios within their building, district, and state. Because the number of visits with a school counselor so positively impacts rapport, the research can also be used to advocate for appropriate school counselor duties.

Counselor education programs should strengthen their focus on teaching rapport building skills to their counselors in training. Research suggests that school counselors who are able to build strong relationships with their students, are much more impactful in the school setting. By providing opportunities for counseling students to gain more in depth knowledge of rapport building skills such as empathy and unconditional positive regard, programs can increase the effectiveness of the school counselors that come out of their program.

School counselors who work with at-risk populations should work to mitigate the barriers of school connectedness and school climate. The two schools in the study who have higher economically disadvantages students had lower connectedness and school climate scores. This is consistent with previous research studies and supports how imperative scaffolding these students and creating innovative initiatives is in supporting at-risk populations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the conclusions from the current study, future research needs to be conducted on the impact of comprehensive school counseling programs on rapport building, school climate and student connectedness. Comprehensive school counseling programs are multi-faceted and give school counselors an integral role in the school itself. School counselors advocate for all students deliver comprehensive programs through classroom curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. The framework for school counseling programs is called the ASCA National Model which outlines activities that align with the role of

school counselors. When programs implement this model, they are referred to as comprehensive counseling programs. School counselors who follow the ASCA National Model are guided by three sets of standards that define their programs. These are the Student Standards (ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College and Career Readiness Standards for Every Student), and the Professional Standards (ASCA Ethical Standards and ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies.) A study by Jones, Ricks, and Warren (2019) indicated that students who go to schools that have Recognized ASCA Model Programs (RAMP), have significantly higher SAT and ACT scores and have a higher college enrollment. This indicates that students who are served by comprehensive programs are much more likely to be set up for post-secondary success (Jones, Ricks, Warren, et. al, 2019). Future research on the relationship of comprehensive programs and the variables of rapport, school climate and school connectedness would be beneficial to the efficacy of comprehensive programs. It would benefit the school counseling profession as it would support more specifically the benefits of comprehensive school counseling programs.

Future research should also be conducted on rapport between the school counselor and student; as most established research is specific to the rapport in clinical counseling settings. This would be beneficial as school counselors are unique as their opportunities to create professional relationships in settings other than a counseling office, including in the halls, during classroom lessons, and even at a sporting event. Further research would be beneficial to school counselors and counselor education programs. Furthermore, research should also be completed on rapport in schools with different demographics to study the variables based on demographics. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, it would also be helpful to do further research about the impact of virtual counseling on rapport, school connectedness, and school climate. Because the

virtual counseling setting is a different counseling environment and medium, it will be very helpful to see how this impacts the variables in this study. Another item for future research are the differences in school counselor rapport at different age and developmental levels. There could be significant differences in this study if it were conducted at the elementary or even the middle school level. Lastly, more research needs to be conducted on the impacts of teacher and staff rapport on school climate and student connectedness.

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Appendix A - Instruments

Demographic Data

School Counselor's Name:

Have you participated in small counseling groups? YES   NO

Do you have an IEP or 504 plan? YES   NO

How often have you seen your School Counselor?

Once a week   Once a month   Once a Semester   Less than once a semester

Working Alliance Inventory - Bonds Subscale

The following statements describe some of the different ways a student might think or feel about their School Counselor. As you read the statements, circle the number that is most fitting. Please respond to EVERY item and work fast (your first impressions are the ones we want to see.)

	Never	Sometimes			Always
1. My School Counselor and I agree about the things I need to do in order to be successful.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Working with my School Counselor gives me new ways of looking at my problems.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I believe my School Counselor likes me.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My School Counselor understands my goals.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am confident in my School Counselor's ability to help me.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel that my School Counselor appreciates me.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I trust my School Counselor.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My School Counselor recognizes me and knows who I am.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My School Counselor has met with me in order to help me achieve my post-secondary goals.	1	2	3	4	5
10. My School Counselor has time to work with me.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I matter to my School Counselor.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I feel connected to my School Counselor.	1	2	3	4	5

School Climate Questionnaire (Teaching Tolerance, 2019)

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree			Strongly Disagree	
a. Students in our school get along well.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Students choose to interact with primarily with those who are most like them.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Students in my school know how to report harassment or abuse to school officials.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Students in my school would feel comfortable reporting harassment or racial abuse to school officials.	1	2	3	4	5
e. Teachers in my school actively work to create a safe and welcoming environment to all students.	1	2	3	4	5
f. Every student in my school feels like they belong here.	1	2	3	4	5
g. My school creates opportunities for students to get to know each other.	1	2	3	4	5
h. At my school, teachers, administrators, staff, Students, and parents listen to each other.	1	2	3	4	5
i. I look forward to coming to this school in the morning.	1	2	3	4	5

Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness - School Connectedness Subscale

Read each statement. Circle the number that best describes how true that statement is for you or how much you agree with it.

	Not at all	Not really	Sort of	True	Very true
1. I work hard at school.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I enjoy being at school.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel good about myself when I am at school.	1	2	3	4	5

4. Doing well in school is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel that I have an adult in the school building who dedicates their time and attention to me.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel that I belong to a positive peer group at school.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I have opportunities to get involved in school activities or clubs.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The school environment feels safe and supportive to me.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B - Administrator Consent