An Occupation in Search of Identity—What Is School Counseling?

Einat Heled[1] & Nitza Davidovitch[2]

[1] Department of Education, Ariel University, Israel

[2] Head of the Ariel University Center's Unit of Academic Assessment and Development & Head of the Israeli Consortium of Faculty Development Centers, Department of Education, Ariel University, Israel

Correspondence: Nitza Davidovitch, Department of Education, Ariel University, Israel. E-mail: d.nitza@ariel.ac.il

Abstract

This study will focus on the professional identity of school counseling, which is a key function in Israeli schools. Forming a professional identity is part of the process of professional development that begins with academic training and continues throughout one's professional career. Professional identity distinguishes between different occupations and provides practitioners with a safe base that lets them better understand their work and form a team spirit within their field of occupation. The research literature indicates an association between one's professional identity and her professional functioning and success, sense of stability, confidence, and pride in practicing the occupation. The professional identity of school counseling is related to gender. This is a predominantly female occupation and most of its practitioners in Israel are women.

Few studies have been conducted on the professional identity of school counselors (Note 1) and its impact on the quality of their work. It appears that the definition of the school counselor's role is neither clear nor unambiguous, both in Israel and elsewhere, and this affects the professional identity of counselors and the quality of their work. The current study included semi-structured interviews with 15 school counselors, in which they spoke about the structure of their work, their professional vision, satisfaction, and sense of self-fulfillment as a result of their job, as well as their professional self-efficacy.

The research findings show that the structure of the counselor's work, her role definition and workload, are related to her professional identity, including how she perceives the counseling occupation, her satisfaction and sense of self-fulfillment. Based on the interviews, no differences were found between the narratives of counselors with different levels of seniority in the profession with regard to professional identity, satisfaction, and self-fulfillment. The research findings indicate the need to define the school counseling occupation and its place in the school in order to help school counselors establish a clearer professional identity, with the aim of adapting the role to the challenges of the school system in the 21st century, in the world in general and in Israel in particular.

Keywords: identity, school counseling, professional career, occupation, self-efficacy

1. Introduction

1.1 School Counseling in Israel—A Portrait

According to the definition provided by Israel's Ministry of Education, school counseling is a professional service located within the school and aimed at promoting the functioning and mental well-being of students and staff. The aim of the school counselor is to advance the mental, social, academic, and professional development of students and staff. Therefore, when the school counselor provides counseling and listens to students, she does this from a perspective of the entire system, and when she meets with the rest of the educational staff she sees before her the well-being of the student as an individual within a system. In addition, the school counselor must strive to lead courses directed at reducing the level of violence in the school and transforming it into a safe and protected environment (from the website of Israel's Educational Psychology Services).

Employing counselors in the schools: The role of the school counselor in Israel is complex, intricate, and not unambiguous. Therefore, the definition of the counselor's role and the extent of her position change according to the needs of the school in which she is employed. The employment terms and nature of the school counselor's

work are linked to the school principal and his consumption patterns of counseling services, which are given to annual change and negotiation (Erhard, 2014).

The counselor's practice areas: School counselors are employed in a variety of settings, but they share the common goal of helping students with various educational, career, and psychosocial issues (Bryant & Constantine, 2020). The counselor's work follows systemic principles, meaning that she is expected to promote the students' mental well-being within the educational organization while supporting all the other elements in the system (Deshevsky, 2009). School counselors are required to fulfill many functions in diverse areas of activity. Counselors' routine work involves wide target populations within the school (principals, coordinators, teaching staff, homeroom teachers) as well as relevant elements outside the school (psychologists, social workers, and other community workers) (Deshevsky, 2009). Counselors are responsible for assisting and integrating students with special needs, operating intervention programs, implementing placements and constructing classes, completing forms, as well as individual counseling for struggling students and topic-centered groups of students (Erhard, 2014; Erhard & Klingman, 2004; Tatar, 1997; Yosifon, 1998; Perlberg-Simcha & Erhard, 2007; Cobia & Henderson, 2003). Furthermore, the school counselor is also a teacher and she must teach a certain number of classes at the school according to the school's regulations. Due to the complexity of her role, the counselor must balance individual work and systemic activity and is required to combine the execution of planned tasks and providing prompt responses with unexpected demands (Deshevsky, 2009).

Changes in the status of school counseling as an occupation: Since 2000, the status of school counseling in Israel has changed, from a task assigned to teachers and other professionals at the school, who would devote several hours a week to providing students with professional counseling and direction to an occupation that requires a Master's degree (Erhard, 2014), where practical experience is a precondition for receiving a license to practice counseling. The immaturity of the profession, its complexities, unclear definition, and the terms offered to its practitioners, raise the question of the professional identity and satisfaction of school counselors in Israel. Therefore, despite the change in its status in recent years, various issues continue to challenge the formation of a clear professional identity within the occupation of school counseling and among its practitioners (Erhard, 2014).

1.2 What Is a Professional Identity?

The **professional identity** of an occupation is shaped by society's perception of the occupation in general and of the professional in particular, and by the professional's perception of herself. Similar to other components of the individual's identity, shaping professional identity depends on the social context (for instance, the social status of the individual and of the occupation), the professional's interaction with others (clients, colleagues, and other professionals), and her interpretation of her professional experiences (Gee, 2000).

In addition, we distinguish between the collective professional identity and the individual professional identity: **Collective professional identity** is a mix of characteristics such as knowledge, attitudes, and expectations by society and by the individual regarding the profession. Professional identity is a collection of expectations and characteristics attributed to the occupation both by those belonging to it and by those who do not practice it, which make it possible to distinguish between groups. Therefore, the clearer the conception of the occupation's unique features as perceived by practitioners and by the wide public, the more cohesive the profession's identity (Stout, 2004).

Individual professional identity is defined as part of one's self-identity and it is the answer to the question "Who am I, or what am I, as a professional?" This is the practitioner's sense of belonging to and identifying with an occupation (Tickle, 1999). Professional identity is dynamic, in a constant process of structuring and development, and shaped by a process of interaction in social and cultural environments (Rogers & Scott, 2008). Individual professional identity is affected by the collective identity and nurtured by the cultural values, expectations, perceptions, and attitudes at the core of the occupation's identity. All these are embraced by practitioners in a process of occupational socialization that is reinforced by interactions with same-profession colleagues, other professionals, and the public at large (Kozminsky & Klavir, 2008).

Collective and individual professional identity are interwoven and extremely significant both for the occupation in general and for those practicing it. Collective professional identity distinguishes between professions and grants practitioners a safe base that lets them better understand their job (Pistole & Roberts, 2002). There is an association between one's professional identity and professional functioning (Watson, 2006), and a strong sense of professional identity provides a sense of stability, confidence, and pride in one's occupation (LaFleur, 2007). Studies indicate that well-established individual professional identity affects one's work values, capabilities, and knowledge of the occupation, sense of unity among same-profession colleagues, accountability, ethical and moral conduct, and sense of pride in the occupation (Brott & Myers, 1999; Gale & Austin, 2003; Hiebert &

Uhlemann, 1993; VanZandt, 1990). Individual professional identity is also associated with personal work values, skills, and knowledge of the profession, growth as a person and as a professional, success and improvement at work, imagination, and innovativeness (Gazzola & Smith, 2007).

Establishing the professional identity of counseling is perceived as essential in order to win public recognition (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Pistole & Roberts, 2002). Formation of a clear professional identity helps counselors see themselves as belonging to a specific professional community, which gives them an advantage when representing the occupation to various professional elements and to the public at large (Lanman, 2011).

1.3 Professional Identity in School Counseling

Collective professional identity in the field of counseling: School counseling receives its collective professional identity from two different directions. On one hand, it is the youngest of the mental health professions (which also include, for example, psychiatry, psychology, and social work) (Pistole & Roberts, 2002), and on the other, it is an occupation within the school system that has a systemic orientation. Hence, it is hard to indicate fields of responsibility that are unique to this field (Erhard, 2014). A well-established and grounded professional identity is particularly important for the occupation of school counseling, as the professional definition of counseling is still in a process of establishment and the aspiration is to transform school counseling into a defined legitimate profession with a unique identity rather than an occupation that emulates other occupations in the fields of mental health and education (Pelling & Whetham, 2006). Nonetheless, to date this occupation is characterized by constant development and accelerated change that contribute to its vague definition and conception (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Erhard, 2014).

Beyond the occupation's vague definition, the individual, social, and systemic needs differ among schools and according to the composition of the school and management, and these dictate the components of the counselor's role. Splitting the role into a systemic and therapeutic role and the lack of uniformity in the definition of everyday and overall functioning make it hard for counselors to define their professional identity (Crosslin, 2006).

Therefore, the fact that the definition of the school counseling occupation in Israel is unclear and that the role definition changes between schools makes it possible for external factors (such as functionaries in municipalities and in the Ministry of Education, school principals and district directors, as well as supervisors) to define the role of school counselors and dictate what they should do at the school (Guillot-Miller, 2003). Counselors assume responsibility for various administrative and educational tasks and assignments unrelated to the counselor's work. In the long term, carrying out such tasks is detrimental to the discreteness of the school counselor's role, and on the personal level this creates a negative effect of frustration and lack of self-esteem among the counselors (Erhard, 2014).

Individual professional identity in counseling: The individual professional identity of the counselor is directly affected by the occupation's definition. Therefore, since the role definition of school counseling is very wide and unclear, the professional identity of practicing counselors is still unclear (Gazzola & Smith, 2007). Beyond the fact that the counselors are also subject teachers or homeroom teachers, school counselors have endless everyday responsibilities involving activities that they perceive as "unprofessional", such as planning student monitor duties, disciplinary problems, completing forms, etc. The multiple responsibilities contribute to the inability to define their professional identity (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006).

In addition, it appears that the assignments defined by Israel's Ministry of Education for school counselors are incompatible with the extent of their position and with their work hours. School counselors often complete their responsibilities outside work hours due to their sense of professional commitment. The employment terms of school counselors in the school system and the extent of their position do not enable them to complete their many responsibilities and to provide proper assistance to those in need of their services (State Comptroller Report, 2014).

Hence, it is evident that the individual professional identity is affected by the collective identity (Kozminsky & Klavir, 2008). The current study will explore how this affects the counseling occupation and how the fact that the school counseling occupation in Israel is not clearly defined and varies between schools, affects the professional identity of counselors in the field.

Implications of a non-cohesive individual professional identity: An unclear professional identity might have negative implications for the counselor's work: the counselor's efforts in her job and her confidence in the profession (Blocher, Tennyson, & Johnson, 1963), sense of pride and stability in the profession (Nelson & Jackson, 2003), ethics and rules on the job, the boundaries of the counselors on the job (Schoen, 1989),

awareness of services provided, and general sense of satisfaction with the profession (Remley & Herlihy, 2005). Therefore, a clear role definition of school counseling is critical for the definition of one's professional identity in counseling (Bruss & Kopala, 1993; Schoen, 1989; Van Riper, 1972). Moreover, the development of a professional identity is important not only for the personal growth of the counselor as a professional but rather also for the services provided to the people with whom the counselor is in touch (Brott & Myers, 1999).

Studies have found that the seniority of school counselors is significant for their professional identity and hence for their functioning in the field. When beginning work, counselors tend to be insecure, lack insight and control of their personal boundaries, and rely on others for guidance (a weaker sense of professional identity); in the intermediate stages of their career, studies have found that counselors tend to experience ambivalence or confusion with regard to their theoretical knowledge and how they would ideally like to function as counselors; towards the end of their career, when the counselors are very experienced, they are aware of themselves, flexible, and confident in their abilities, and capable of identifying areas for improvement (i.e., a stronger sense of professional identity is related to one's experience; Alves & Gazzola, 2011). In the current study we shall examine whether there is an association between the counselor's seniority and her feelings in the role, as well as its effects.

Professional identity—additional dimensions: According to Heled and Davidovitch (2019), professional identity also encompasses satisfaction with the profession, work commitment, and professional self-efficacy. The concept of **job satisfaction** is divided into several levels. First—does one like or dislike her job or parts of it, second—to what degree does that person realize her aspirations and desires, and third—to what degree is one satisfied with her job compared to other careers and jobs (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2011). **Work commitment** is an important source of confidence and continuity on the job (Fu, 2011) and it is a person's motivating force for working in a certain occupation (Blau, 1985). The degree to which one is committed to her career will be reflected in her persistence and pursuit of the career's goals and her self-realization (Fu, 2011), the amount of time and effort invested in acquiring relevant knowledge, and the degree to which the career is involved in and central to one's life (Blau, 1985). The work commitment and satisfaction of school counselors are an inseparable part of their professional identity.

As stated above, the counselors' regular work involves difficult and crisis situations and they are exposed to pressures that might reduce their job satisfaction, commitment, and the quality of their functioning (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005; Lambie, 2006; Maslach, 2003; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The current study will be the first to examine how the work components of counselors in Israeli schools affect these variables.

1.4 On the Association Between Professional Identity in School Counseling and Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy too, is an inseparable part of one's professional identity. It affects identity and is affected by it (Beijaard, Berloop, & Vermunt, 2000). Self-efficacy is one's perception of her ability to carry out a certain task. **Professional self-efficacy** is defined as the professional's faith in her capacity to control events that affect her professional life. A person with high self-efficacy will probably reach the desired outcome, while those with a low sense of self-efficacy may be expected to be unable to realize their capabilities and reach the desired outcome (Bandura, 1997). School counselor self-efficacy may be compromised, resulting in decreases in motivation and performance outcomes (Cinotti & Springer, 2018). Also, if the school counselor does not perceive that she is capable of performing educational or counseling tasks, then she will be likely to avoid those tasks or downplay their importance (Holcomb-McCoy, Harris, Hines, & Johnston, 2018).

With regard to professional self-efficacy and professional identity, studies conducted found an association between teachers' professional identity and their sense of self-efficacy. Teachers' professional identity was found to affect their sense of professional self-efficacy and their willingness to deal with educational change (Beijaard et al., 2000). Fisherman and Weiss (2011) too found that, among teachers, part of their professional identity is their sense of self-efficacy. It seems that a teacher who is confident in her abilities, knowledge, and skills, is one with a well-established professional identity. A teacher who is concerned that she lacks some of the necessary conditions for being a good teacher, as she sees them, has a more diffuse professional identity and a high risk of burnout. Counselors with high self-efficacy were found to report that they function better, invest more efforts in their work, and persist with their counseling work, as well as participating more often in counseling seminars (Daniels & Larson, 2001; Sutton & Fall, 1995).

As far as we know, no study has explored how the role definition of school counseling in Israel, its many layers, and the endless areas of activity occupied by counselors, affect the professional identity components of school counselors in Israel. A Canadian study addressed Canadian school counselors' perception of their individual

professional identity with regard to their professional roles, capabilities, reputation, and overall success as counselors. The main research question guiding this study was "How do experienced Canadian Master's-level counsellors perceive their individual professional identity in terms of their professional roles, abilities, reputation, and overall successes as counsellors?" (Alves & Gazzola, 2011). Work experience was found to have a considerable impact on individual professional identity in the field of counseling. When asked about the various effects of their professional identity, all the participants noted their experiences of the discipline as influential. The study found that counselors define their professional identity as affected by their roles. They described their professional identity by means of their roles and responsibilities, capabilities, or who they are individually. The participants related that the role definition of the counselor is at the base of the specific roles fulfilled by the counselor, and therefore their professional identity is intermixed with the roles they fulfill. In addition, the study found that professional identity develops over time. As a rule, participants believed that their professional identity had become established throughout their career. Professional identity was not described as a constant concept. Instead, it was affected by a range of factors and experiences that accumulated over time. In the current study we shall attempt to examine, for the first time in Israel and similar to the research method employed by Alves and Gazzola (2011), whether school counselors in Israel too display a direct correlation between their role definition in the field and their professional identity, satisfaction, and professional efficacy.

2. Research Method

2.1 Research Population

Fifteen school counselors from Israel were interviewed, from a variety of ages, school settings, and residential areas. Namely, the group of participants was heterogeneous with regard to demographic, professional, and personal characteristics. Of the counselors interviewed, seven were new counselors (1−4 years in the profession), five were more senior (5−9 years in the profession), and three were senior counselors (over 10 years in the profession).

Ten of the counselors had been working in the school system (pre-school teachers, school teachers, homeroom teachers, or employees of the Ministry of Education) before beginning their job in counseling and five counselors had had no prior acquaintance with the school system before beginning their job. Six of the counselors were employed in elementary schools and eight in secondary schools. One counselor was working at more than one school. Two of the counselors were from the Arab sector and 13 from the Jewish sector. All were working in government schools operated by the Ministry of Education.

This sampling method is called "maximum variation" and its goal is to identify main common patterns beyond the variation of the participants. The guiding principle in this method is that the varied selection of cases, such as "extreme" cases and "typical" cases, serves to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. Hence, in this method the investigator will seek to identify patterns among the cases by including a wide range of extreme cases rather than by seeking similar cases (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

This type of sample is useful in situations where a random sample is not tenable and also when the sample size is small. Sampling is aimed at understanding whether the counselor's professional identity changes with her seniority, professional background, and type of employing school. By means of the maximum variation method we tried to represent a wide range of experiences related to the phenomenon under examination (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Before the study began, the researchers received the approval of the institutional ethics board to carry out the study.

2.2 Procedure

An appeal for volunteer interviewees was made through a post in a Facebook group for counselors, presenting the topic of the study, its aim, and manner of execution. The volunteers contacted the researcher on Facebook. The participants were asked before the interview about their seniority in the profession, professional background, and type of school in which they are employed, so that they could be sampled by the maximum variation sampling method. Each interviewee was given the option of being interviewed by telephone or in person. All the interviewees asked to be interviewed by telephone. Before beginning the interview, the interviewer reported on her own professional and academic background, as well as the procedure and aim of the study. After receiving the interviewees' consent to participate in the study, they were informed that if the interview was not compatible with their worldview they could stop in the middle and their answers would not be used. The interviewees were assured that their answers would be presented in the study anonymously and with no identifying details.

Then the interview began in the format of a semi-structured interview. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, as customary in qualitative research. Since the term "professional identity" is abstract and very

wide, in the current study the counselors interviewed were not asked directly about their individual and collective professional identity rather about its components: the factors that led the counselors to practice the profession, what their job entails in practice, how they perceive their professional vision and whether it is fulfilled, professional efficacy, satisfaction with the profession, disappointment with the profession, and dissatisfaction and self-fulfillment in the counseling profession.

2.3 Analysis of the Interviews

In the data analysis for the current study we used a research paradigm called "**grounded theory**", which is a theory that is constructed in the process of a study and grounded in data collected in its duration (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Gibton, 2001; Shkedi, 2003). The process of joining data segments that seem to belong to the same phenomenon in groups is called categorization. Categorization is based on classification and it is carried out by distinguishing and separating the continuous data to find the meaning of the data. The researchers categorized the interviews on two bases: one, analysis of data from the first order, which is a process of dividing the data into separate segments, and second, analysis of data from the second order, which is the affiliation of segments into categories or different groups that join the segments in a different and new order (Shkedi, 2003). By means of the process of analysis in the second order we connected various data segments and thus could offer explanations based on the data.

First, we shall present the analysis of data from the first order:

2.4 Distribution into Categories

1) Definition of the counselor's role

As stated, there is an ambiguity regarding the definition of the role of counselors in Israel's school system. The role definition according to Israel's Ministry of Education is very intricate, abstract, and unclear. As a result of this lack of clarity counselors deal with endless areas within the school and outside it. Analysis of all the interviews showed us that in each school the counselor's role definition and extent of position are different and adapted to the needs of the school. When observing the variety of roles described by the counselors in the interviews, we see a lengthy list of systemic, academic, and individual roles.

We shall divide the counselor's role into three subcategories—systemic work, teaching, and individual work with students:

1(a). Systemic work: According to Israel's Ministry of Education, the counselor's systemic work is unclear. The details include subsections of responsibility for developing and assimilating development, intervention, and prevention programs, developing the school staff, counseling and advice to the management and pedagogical staff, and managing stressful and crisis situations at the school. Despite the details, the areas of responsibility are interpreted differently in each case according to the needs of the management or of the school.

For instance, one of the counselors who works in a large regional school: "*I work in a complex school. There are a lot of conflicts at the school... between students and teachers... I have to mediate between them... I have seven hours a week for meetings with homeroom teachers and other meetings with the counselors' team and meetings with the multi-disciplinary teams of each grade. I also have a regular meeting with the school psychologist. I work in coordination with six local authorities because it's a regional school... this makes the work very hard*".

According to the role vision, the counselor follows systemic principles, i.e., she is expected to advance the mental well-being of the students within the educational organization. The students, the teaching staff, the educational staff and the management, the parents, and various elements in the school environment, are also partners in the process necessary to achieve this goal. The evolvement of the systemic conception in recent decades increasingly emphasizes the involvement of counselors in advancing educational interventions that include internal and external evaluation processes, accompaniment of educational teams in their work, and purposeful investment in teachers and improving the integration of students with special needs in the mainstream system (Deshevsky, 2009). Indeed, although all the counselors but one attested that they were attracted to the profession by the desire for emotional work with students, all the counselors attest that their work is mostly or fully systemic. Five counselors expressed satisfaction with the fact that most of the work is systemic and they feel that in this format they manage to realize their professional vision: "*At the school I established workshops for the children and this was a model for the teachers. I build an individual plan for each classroom. I accompany the teachers... I plan and bring them the materials. I meet with parents and with a psychologist two days a week. And I construct a schedule for the school psychologist... I meet with children occasionally when necessary for discussions, I guide an academic student studying counseling and I'm also a guide on behalf of the Ministry of Education*".

The counselor must form a balance between individual work and systemic activity, work simultaneously with wide target populations within the school (principals, coordinators, pedagogical staff, homeroom teachers) and with relevant factors outside the school (psychologists, social workers, and other community workers). Counselors are required to combine the execution of planned tasks with providing a prompt response and unexpected demands (Deshevsky, 2009). As reported by one counselor: "*I'm a subject teacher and also a homeroom teacher in junior high... I work more than a full-time position. A full-time position in counseling and also a teacher and also a homeroom teacher. I work from 7:45 am theoretically until 3:30 pm, but in practice I stay longer hours... During the summer vacation and in the evenings, I work with no compensation... I work much longer hours than my position... I support the homeroom teachers, I check with them what assistance they need, help them with how to talk to students... I am responsible for homeroom teacher meetings... I am also supposed to build an individual plan for children who for some reason are not functioning*".

It is evident how overburdened this counselor is with systemic work. She is compelled to work beyond her hours to fit in all the work she has planned for herself… This is corroborated by another counselor: "*Most of the time I have to focus on the systemic role—to give the staff tools, forums for the teachers, workshops. The part I like the least is the bureaucracy—completing forms and evaluations... Because there is no role definition the counselor has lots of functions that I fulfill because there is no one else. I only have a 75% position... and this includes 8 hours of teaching*".

Hence, it seems that despite the State Comptroller's report from 2014, despite the complexity and the lack of clarity, no changes have been made in the definition of the counselor's role. Moreover, the role is defined as "teacher-counselor". The school counselor is also a teacher and must teach classes at the school to a varying extent according to the school's regulations.

The term "systemic work" appears to be a comprehensive term encompassing endless tasks and areas of responsibility. When no specific worker within the system is responsible, the task is given to the counselor. Almost all the counselors interviewed complained about an insufferable, overwhelming workload that always exceeds their work hours. Almost all of them lamented that due to the heavy workload they do not get to the students who need them rather only to "students on the edge", as they put it, for urgent incidents such as suicidal statements, severe violence, or dropouts: "*The hard part of the profession is that I am occupied only with children who are on the edge... I don't like doing this*".

All the counselors interviewed described an impossible situation and deep frustration. They feel like a type of octopus, lots of tentacles that are trying to perform different tasks simultaneously. They describe an intricate situation where they have to keep everyone happy. Their clients are the students, the staff, the management, the parents, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Services, and the supervisors. It is virtually impossible to keep everyone happy, as sometimes these systems clash. Because there is no clear definition of the counselor's role and they are supposed to serve everyone, it is no surprise that many counselors are confused and feel helpless.

1(b). Teaching in class: Of the 15 counselors interviewed, two were also homeroom teachers, and all were teaching life skills in several classrooms for 2–8 hours a week. The counselors must teach several hours as part of their schedule, as one reported: "*I have a 90% position because I'm not willing to be a subject teacher... that's one of the problems with this profession... that I'm called a teacher-counselor. In order to have a full position counselor are also teachers—homeroom teachers or subject teachers. I give education classes in mainstream classrooms but I won't be a subject teacher. So officially I work 32 hours a week but in practice I work much more*".

1(c). Individual counseling for students: We have seen that the counselor has endless systemic tasks at the school. Almost all the counselors complained in the interview that they do not have time left for individual counseling and for reaching the students themselves, and 10 counselors expressed their chagrin at not managing to do any individual emotional work, in contrast to their professional vision. They all described a situation where they only treat students with acute problems and difficulties. "*... I have very little time left to see students. I don't treat them... I'm like an emergency room. As a result, I meet only with students who are edge cases...*" And as one of the counselors well described—"*I have discussions with children... but not at the frequency I would like. The therapeutic work is inserted among all the other tasks...*"

Although aside from one counselor, all said that the reason for studying the profession was emotional work with students ("*I wanted to provide treatment and to be in contact with children. To help and support children*"), all 15 counselors spoke of the difficulty of finding time for individual discussions with children, even those with acute difficulties. The systemic work and teaching in class occupy all their time. All the counselors interviewed had

given up on their initial dream of personal contact with the students, receiving struggling students in their office and providing counseling, due to the lack of time and overburdened role definition.

2) Professional identity

Due to the wide definition of the term "professional identity", it is very hard to examine directly, in one question, how counselors define their professional identity. According to the literature, individual professional identity is examined by one's answer to the question "Who am I, or what am I, as a professional?" It is the practitioner's sense of belonging to and identifying with a profession (Tickle, 1999). Professional identity derives from collective professional identity—the identity of the occupation itself. Namely, how the occupation is defined by the practitioner and by the environment. The two identities are integrated and ultimately constitute a single factor. The counselor's collective professional identity is strongly affected by her role definition in the specific school where she is employed and thus affects her individual professional identity. Therefore, when coming to examine the interviewees' professional identity it could not be separated from the role definition of each of them, while understanding that professional identity can also change completely with the counselors' transition between schools. As one of the counselors said: "*I fulfill myself as a school counselor in this school… where I work. I don't know how I would feel in another school. In each school the job is different. In my school the job suits me*".

2(a). Professional identity as reflected by role definition: A senior counselor who had been in the profession for 11 years related: "*I'm not satisfied with the [employment] terms of counselors. I work with no compensation for an entire month during the summer vacation… I work without pay. The salary is low. You take work home, you work after hours, there are lots of functions and no exact definition of the profession. It is not clear what you should really be doing in this job. At the beginning you lose yourself… you don't know what to do first. Each school has a different definition of the role. Each counselor constructs the role for herself or the principal decides what to do*". The counselor spoke about her early days, when she felt that she was "losing her way". Despite the many years, it appears that even at this stage the way is not certain. The confusing and unrewarding role definition leads to dissatisfaction and low professional identity.

Another spoke about the unclear role definition that varies by school: "*I recently switched schools and in each school, you are a different counselor. When you arrive at the school you don't know how the management perceives the role. I have a great deal of confidence in counseling… but there is not always a sense of knowing what I am talking about. When you start work there is no moment of respite. You immediately have to start providing answers and functioning*".

Another senior counselor who had been working in the system for 9 years: "*I'm not happy with the politics at school and in the system… with the forms… with everything administrative and technical. There are so many questionnaires and meetings and I can't meet with parents and children. The Ministry of Education makes things hard for the counselors… Its unbelievable! They keep us from doing our job*". The counselor spoke about feeling that she is not doing the proper work for her job, technical administrative work. She talked about wanting to reach the "real" work for which she became a counselor, but the administrative work prevents this.

Another counselor complained about the basic role definition of counselors in the Israeli school system. "*The counselor is first of all a teacher and then a counselor*". She also lamented her allocation of hours as a counselor in each classroom. She feels that she does not have time to treat the classrooms for which she is responsible and that she does not manage to function professionally. She is strongly aware of feeling humiliated by the low salary and terms and the system's attitude to her role: "*You can't call a counselor a teacher counselor. You can't make more time in our schedule. The Ministry of Education doesn't understand this… the weekly allocation of hours for each classroom is a sad joke. I work so much and receive only 90% of a full-time position. The terms are humiliating… Counselors normally have a high work ethics and will not avoid working only because they are not compensated*".

Another counselor spoke about not teaching in class to give herself more time on the job, with a consequent drop in salary: "*I'm not happy with the salary. Because I don't teach physically in class I don't receive full compensation for the counseling position. Why am I called a teacher counselor even though I'm paid less than a teacher? It's a sign of contempt for the profession. This profession lacks prestige… It's a job that contains more darkness than light…*". The counselor described her frustration with the dullness of the job as perceived by society. She is disappointed that the collective professional identity of the school counseling profession is unclear both to the public and in the Ministry of Education.

All the counselors spoke of a collective professional identity that lacks cohesion as perceived by the Ministry of Education, of the lack of appreciation by the ministry and by the environment, and of their hard feelings about being marginalized. Of course, the vague identity as perceived by the environment leads to lower professional

identity of the counselors themselves, dissatisfaction with the role definition and with their appreciation, and a sense of missing out.

2(b). Professional identity as reflected by satisfaction: Erhard (2008) found, in a satisfaction survey among school counselors in Israel, that 77% of counselors reported counseling work as being very difficult. Slightly less than half (42%) evaluated school counseling as very frustrating, and two thirds contended that there is little compatibility between their job tasks and the extent of their position in counseling. Lazovsky (1998) found that practicing counselors express dissatisfaction with the material benefits of their job and appear to perceive their work as not financially worthwhile. In the current study as well, when the counselors were asked in the interview about their dissatisfaction with the profession, they all expressed their disappointment with the role definition and extent: "*I'm not satisfied with the system's professional level. I have to prove to myself that I can do big things in a different setting. I also do not receive sufficient training and support... it's not professional enough. I want to try something else... maybe more management oriented. I would like to switch jobs also for financial reasons. It is hard for me to accept many things in the system*" (A counselor with 10 years of experience).

Another reason for the dissatisfaction is burnout and overload. A study on counselors, conducted in the United States, found that two thirds defined the profession as moderately or very stressful (Sears & Navin, 1983). Lengthy regular exposure of counselors to pressures in their daily work experience was found to increase the risk of burnout (Lee, Cho, Kissinger, & Ogle, 2010; Wilkerson, 2009). Studies that focused on burnout among therapists indicate that school counselors report higher levels of burnout at work than other mental health professionals (Gündüz, 2012; Wallace, Lee, & Lee, 2010).

This was well explained by one of the counselors: "*I feel that I am severely overburdened. It is unbelievable how many areas the counselor covers. Lots of work with bureaucracy, parents, committees, forms... discussions with children, the climate in the teachers' lounge, the school climate... I feel like an octopus and I can't handle everything*".

Nonetheless, both in the current study and in two different surveys held in Israel, in general counselors seem to express medium-high satisfaction with their work and report high mental well-being (Erhard, 1998, 2008). In the surveys, the counselors emphasized the positive effect of their choice and persistence in the occupation of school counseling and that the occupation is a response to their personality and psychological needs (Erhard, 1998, 2008). Also Randick, Dermer and Michel (2019) found that school counselors in the US, appear to enjoy duties that are self-driven, collaborative, action oriented, and results driven. These characteristics are captured by coordination duties such as coordination of interventions with students, parents, teachers, and other significant stakeholders.

In the current study most of the counselors spoke about their sense of gratification from their work: "*I feel gratified because I have the ability to generate change. The change is in the small steps forward. I manage to bring teachers to see the students... I feel gratified when I receive positive feedback from the students. My work is significant...*"

Despite the sense of gratification from the profession, all the counselors were dissatisfied with their role definition, pay, and the school system and its complexity. Hence, it is possible to read between the lines that the counselors are ambivalent. On one hand they are collapsing under the burden, full of despair from the Ministry of Education and the faulty role definition of counseling, and on the other they are empowered and strengthened by the sense of gratification and self-value deriving from their success on the job.

3) Commitment to the profession and self-fulfillment

As stated, commitment to one's job is an important source of people's sense of security and continuity in their work (Fu, 2011). The degree to which a counselor is committed to her work will be reflected in her answer on whether she feels fulfilled in her job and whether she intends to remain in the field of counseling. Of the 15 counselors who answered whether they fulfill themselves in the profession, five answered that they reach complete fulfillment and will not switch professions in the future, six reach partial fulfillment and claimed that at present they feel good and a sense of self-fulfillment, but also plan to continue developing or to consider professional retraining in the future. Four of the counselors feel no self-fulfillment and would like to leave the profession. A counselor who was committed to the profession and had a sense of self-fulfillment said: "*I love the profession. I'm constantly learning new things. I want to know more and more about how to improve myself. I have a sense of mission. I don't check how high my pay is. I don't think about the salary... I work many more hours than I am paid for*".

Six counselors said that they reach partial fulfillment in the profession. They all presented an ambivalent attitude.

On one hand, they like their job and are committed to it. But they feel that something is missing. Some believe that they are capable of more, both regarding compensation and regarding the structure of the work, and some counselors found it hard to pinpoint what they miss in the profession: "*The answer to whether I feel self-fulfilled is complex. I feel gratification and I am meaningful but I have the feeling that I am capable of more… so I'm not completely fulfilled. The compensation and salary play a role… if I were properly compensated I might remain in this job*".

As stated, four of the counselors said that they do not feel any fulfillment and most decided to leave the profession at the end of the school year. A counselor who said that she felt no fulfillment further specified: "*If you would have asked me two years ago, I would have said that I am fulfilled and that I am strongly committed and invested in my job. Today I'm not. I feel burned out… I feel that the Ministry of Education is trying to detect the counselor's place and is placing her under strict requirements and an inflexible role definition. This is very detrimental to the counselor's abilities… my level of efficacy drops the moment I cannot reach decisions flexibly… I don't know whether I will remain in the profession…*"

Hence, it seems that the sense of commitment to one's job and of self-fulfillment is not unambiguous. There are obviously counselors who are not in agreement with the counselor's job structure and commitment to the job due to the complex role definition and the emotional and material compensation they receive for their hard work.

4) Professional self-efficacy

As stated, the term "self-efficacy" is applied to the professional field and defined as professionals' belief in their ability to control events that affect their professional life. Self-efficacy in counseling is the counselor's personal conception of her ability to provide professional counseling and to fill her role properly. Of the 15 counselors who answered the question "Do you believe that you can generate significant change in the system?", 8 felt that they can and that they are effecting significant change that includes changes in the school, the staff, the students, and feel gratification. Four of the counselors felt that the change they can effect is merely partial and three felt incapable of making any change in the system. The counselors who felt high professional efficacy related: "*I strongly feel that I have significant ability to generate change. I'm very significant in the system. I'm so glad that I chose counseling. I shape my role myself. I feel very significant*". "*I can produce significant change. I generated significant relationships at school with the parents and students. They trust me. Children make contact and come to me during recess. I feel that I am significant with the teachers as well*".

Counselors with moderate professional efficacy: "*I feel that I'm making a significant change with my work… I've touched lots of children. Without me they would be in a different state. But ultimately, of the three hundred children I only treat the tough cases. I don't have time for more… Many changes are necessary in the system so that I can feel capable of changing anything… I feel that I could do much more but I don't have the time or the tools*".

Counselors with low professional efficacy: "*In the school itself I have certain power… but in general from a systemic perspective I have no ability, it's a source of despair*". "*I want to believe that I can still cause significant change in the system… that's why I studied… before the counseling I was a teacher. As a homeroom teacher I was very significant and I could do more things… I had more freedom of action. Now as a counselor I thought that I would have more power because I'm part of the management. In practice it isn't happening… I won't remain a counselor if it stays like this…*"

Similar to Bar-El and Lazovsky (2008) who found that school counselors feel high self-efficacy in their work, most of the counselors in the study expressed medium-high self-efficacy in their occupation and the belief that they can truly influence the school system. Bar-El and Lazovsky (2008) also found that school counselors evaluate their self-efficacy in individual work as higher than their self-efficacy in group work and feel more success in their work with students than with teachers, management, and parents. This finding corresponds with that said by most of the counselors who feel that their efficacy in systemic work is lower, while in individual work with students they feel that they have the power and the capacity to generate change.

To examine the feelings of counselors on the job in light of their seniority, five counselors expressed a sense of considerable difficulty on the job, low professional efficacy, lack of self-fulfillment, and hence a desire to leave the profession in favor of a new course. Four of the five were new counselors in the system (1–4 years on the job) and one had been on the job for nine years. In addition, another counselor, the most senior in the study, who had been on the job for 11 years, expressed low professional efficacy and dissatisfaction with the counseling role, but still felt fulfilled. Ten counselors felt medium to high professional efficacy, and medium to high self-fulfillment and satisfaction with the profession.

The information we received from analysis of the categories indicates that the most significant factor for

establishing the counselors' professional identity is the composition of their role at the school and their role description by the Ministry of Education. At the same time, we would like to expand the boundaries of the descriptive analysis and understand the phenomenon in depth by a **second order analysis**, such that we shall affiliate segments from the interview with different groups that join the segments together in a new and different order (Shkedi, 2003). A senior counselor (11 years on the job) said: "*Before I became a counselor, I wanted to do some sort of emotional work with children... to work with children whose difficulties are normative. I wanted to help typical children with things like learning difficulties, behavior, and emotional difficulties. Counseling is close to everything... but the work is different and is more with teachers. Working with teachers gave me an inner perspective and the power to work with teachers... you're actually helping the next generations of students. Your role is in fact that they will no longer need your help and you can go and help others. The counselor cares for dysfunctional children. No one fills this role... I work closely with the school psychologist, he suggests directions but he cannot do my work! He won't summon the parents, he won't talk to the child, he won't work on individual contents. There is no alternative for my profession*". "*...The greatest difficulty is versus the system... When a child makes a suicidal statement and there is nowhere I can take him but to the emergency room. A child who says that he wants to jump from the roof, I have no one to refer hm to... Sometimes there are children with difficulties and I have no solution to give them, and no one else does, and that blows me away*".

Here we hear another counselor who spoke about how proud she is of her profession. She sees her profession as a mission and assistance for the next generations through systemic and individual work, and that is why she joined the profession. At the same time, she is torn, because she feels that the system prevents her from realizing her mission. Her individual professional identity is high, side by side with low collective professional identity. Therefore, the professional identity is incomplete as it depends on an extensive system of changing rules and laws and an unclear system of regulations.

On the other hand, another counselor (5 years in the profession) related: *I reached the field of counseling because I had always liked this field, I liked the counseling, the help. Involvement in education but without teaching... my first target audience is the teachers. My job is actually to boost them, to give them the tools to approach the students, to work with students, to have a personal conversation with the student and not necessarily me... I feel fulfilled when I see that I have an impact on the teachers. For instance, a novice homeroom teacher who held conversations with parents together with me and now she's standing on her own. And thanks to me she can hold conversations on her own... I'm doing something I like but I also feel a crazy load. It's unbelievable how many areas the counselor is involved in... I'm very happy with the work, full of gratification, influence, and doing, but it takes time until you start to have an effect, until the school principal acquires trust and gives the counselor room... Today I feel gratified and I will stay in this profession.*

This counselor sees her role as mainly systemic. She sees herself as designated for work with teachers, helping them to realize themselves. Her professional identity is well-established and strong. Throughout the entire interview she expressed a feeling of pride in the profession, solidarity with other counselors, the fact that she is fulfilling and developing herself in the profession. The fact that she understands that the counselor's role is systemic and that she is at peace with not having time in the schedule for individual work with children may contribute to her strong professional identity.

It is possible to discern a link between making one's peace with the profession as a systemic profession and stronger professional identity in counseling. A new counselor, three years in the system, related: "*I was in my third year [of studies] in psychology. I saw that this direction speaks to me. I volunteered at a school and I got to knew counselors who were my contacts. I liked what they were doing. And I saw the nature of the work, dynamic work on the individual level. The counselor was everywhere. She has an impact on the principal and on the school policy... I formed a connection with the role. I didn't have a background in education before my degree, but I had worked with children. I liked the fact that I wasn't completely giving up on psychology and it is still a profession with prestige. Optimally, the counselor should be an umbrella for processes... each homeroom teacher should be the counselor for her class. I feel a connection to the approach whereby the counselor is systemic and leads procedures. In this way, she can reach all the children. The work is systemic, with the homeroom teachers, to help them work in a counseling-oriented manner. I have to intervene only when there is a large degree of complexity... the children are my first clients. I work in the understanding that in this way I can reach more children... The difficulty is in the need to provide emergency solutions. When things have not been treated properly or timely and then I have to do the work... that's particularly challenging. Class management and classroom management skills are very hard for me... that's my weak point... I also have difficulty with the topic of discipline. I never know what to do...*"

The counselor spoke of arriving at the counseling role due to familiarity with other counselors for whom she had

great appreciation, the desire to resemble them, and in the understanding that the counselor's role is a systemic role. Her vision includes a role of process leader and not necessarily a therapeutic role, where ultimately the process aims for the student's well-being. Once again, it is possible to see that when the counselor sees the role as systemic she feels more at peace with this role definition and identifies with it. She feels dissatisfaction when new functions that do not suit her role definition as she sees it are added to her schedule, such as discipline problems, class management as a teacher, or emergency solutions in extreme cases in the school or with the students.

A new first-year counselor related: "*I was a teacher for several years and I reached [the field of] counseling because I was looking for a field that would keep me in the school system but also provide a counseling-therapeutic dimension. Work that is more emotional. At the moment, I am in my first year of work. I feel that it is more a year of learning the systemic work... If you would have asked me about my vision six months ago I would have answered differently. There is a great discrepancy between what you learn in academia and the field. The work is to connect the students and the system. I thought that I would be able to hold more workshops and to talk to the students. In practice, most of the time is devoted to exceptional cases, so I have less time for what I wanted... although it's no less important. My vision now is to be a factor that affects the students' well-being and their ties with the parents and teachers... containing emotional difficulties, forming an emotional communicative discourse... When I was a teacher I didn't understand to what degree the work takes place under the surface... and now I'm finding out that there is no end to the cases that require intensive work. I didn't think it was part of the daily routine. I experience gratification in this work mainly in conversations with students. I enjoy the individual work. Children know that they can come to me for anything... that gives me the drive to do things at work that are less pleasant. We have consultations... guides for each domain, there is a supervisor... there are lots of elements with whom I can consult, but ultimately, I have full discretion. I can do everything alone, and that generates anxiety. At college they didn't prepare us for this, there are lots of things they didn't teach us. I feel that at present I am fulfilling myself partially... it depends on the specific day... it changes from day to day, some days I feel that I will leave the profession and some days I feel empowered*".

Here it is possible to hear a counselor who is more frustrated, who brought certain expectations to the role and now sees that the role is different than what she thought. Although this counselor was previously a homeroom teacher for several years and saw counselors on the job, she didn't grasp the role as systemic. She relates that also in her studies in the teachers' college the role was not described and taught as systemic, and now in her first year she is experiencing the destruction of her dream. She feels alone, feels that she does not have enough support from external factors and that she must constantly deal with new events.

The collective professional identity of this counselor is not cohesive. She relates that six months ago she thought differently of the role. At present she has discovered that it is a completely different role than she had thought. She feels helpless when faced with the systemic work, alone versus the system. Sometimes she tries to "sneak in" personal conversations with students, topic-focused groups, or even corridor conversations with students. She's proud of the changes she causes in the students, proud of herself that the students approach her, and this part of the role makes her feel empowered. Hence, the weak collective professional identity affects the individual professional identity. The individual professional identity is still low. The feeling that she is alone, that she is not at peace with the role; she still has a sense of overburdening and disappointment and she has a way to go to establish her identity as a counselor.

Another first-year counselor: "*I took on this role because I wanted to have a systemic impact... I was a homeroom teacher and I felt less connected to the job. I was attracted to the counselor's work. I saw counselors who had worked with me when I was a homeroom teacher... I thought that I too could do a good job. Most of the counselors are wonderful people... they do a great job... I think that I can do a similar job. My vision is to do what I'm doing now... but more professionally. In fact, my vision is to do everything I can for the child's mental well-being... Because I'm new I get tripped up by obstacles that more senior counselors don't get caught up in. On one hand it's hard for me and on the other I'm still new and I'm allowed to make mistakes... I can fulfill this vision. The difficulty mainly concerns emergencies... incidents that teachers refer to me. There are lots of cases that they could handle themselves. The teachers are scared of new situations... like a suicidal statement or emotional distress, and they immediately tell the student to come to me. And I have to provide an emergency solution... they don't even try to talk to the children. I also didn't think of the internal politics at the school... the incompatibility among the staff... hating one another... all these internal intrigues turn me off*".

This counselor actually came better prepared for the role. She knew that the role was mainly systemic and therefore was not disappointed with it. She was surprised by the mediation between the teachers, which falls to the counselor, and this might have slightly undermined her collective professional identity. The individual

professional identity is not yet cohesive. She feels that she makes lots of mistakes, that she doesn't yet know how to do her work and thus is not fulfilling her vision for the role.

The new reality of the two new counselors, which emphasizes the discrepancy between their ideal and actual role perception, the high motivation to succeed but also the primary dimension of every element, the counselors' lack of professional experience as well as the vagueness of their role definition, generate an experience of confusion and lack of control. The counselors construct their role among the vague and the hidden. It is not always clear to them whether the response they provide is compatible with the needs of the role, the school, and the many expectations and demands. From this unclear place, which differs essentially from their expectations as academic students, their professional identity is constructed. The more senior counselors seem to be more "at home" in the role. Their professional vision is clear to them, they are sure of themselves and of the professional course they chose. It is clear that despite the counselor's endless roles they are already less surprised by the system's different needs.

3. Discussion

In the current study we interviewed 15 counselors of varying seniority regarding their job, the structure of their work, and their feeling on the job. The findings showed that new counselors in the profession are slightly more confused, have difficulty with the role definition that differs from what they had thought and learned in academia, they have a lower individual and collective professional identity, and sometimes they feel lost. At the same time, we also found that senior counselors are not at peace with the wide complicated role definition of the school counselor and sometimes the challenges of the definition cause them to feel dissatisfied with the profession and low self-fulfillment. Hence, in summary the unclear role definition, together with the intricate, bureaucratic school system with its many internal politics, are the source of the dissatisfaction and hard feelings among counselors in Israel.

Previous studies dealt with the subject and showed similar findings to those of the current study. Studies that examined levels of burnout and difficulty among school counselors found that one of the sources mentioned often in this context is the conflict between roles, deriving from a situation where two or more demands are made of the counselor concurrently, such that responding to one of them will create a decision-making process regarding the order of priorities and a difficulty to respond to the other demands (Lee et al., 2010; Wilkerson, 2009). Conflict between roles can also occur when the counselor is expected by principals, students, parents, etc., to fulfill conflicting demands, or when there is a discrepancy between the counselor's conception of her role and the expectations made of her by her superiors (Coll & Freeman, 1997). Also, Blake (2020) found that school counselors experienced role ambiguity due to the lack of a clear job description, the overlap with similar professions, and inadequate forms of performance evaluation. A similar finding arose in the current study and all the counselors reported being overburdened and an inability to prioritize their work.

Other sources of difficulty are vagueness in the perception of the role, manifested in a lack of clarity regarding the role definition, evident particularly in the unclear boundaries of the role and demands made of the counselor (Moracco, Butcke, & McEwen, 1984; Stickel, 1991) and the burden on the counselors who are required to carry out a large amount of tasks with limited resources, particularly time. Counselors have bureaucratic tasks that include too much paperwork, perceived as stressful and boring. They also deal with the emotional burden formed due to encountering the personal tribulations of the counselees, which remain with them after hours as well (Gade & Houdek, 1993; Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder, Lindsey, & Zlatey, 2009; McCarthy, Kerner, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzmán, 2010; Lee et al., 2010). It seems that also in the US, counselors suffer from poorly defined boundaries in their work, with multiple non-counseling duties that monopolize their time and reduce their time with students (Blake, 2020). This finding is compatible with the main finding of the study that due to the lack of clarity in the role definition, the variety of tasks with which they are entrusted, and the overload, their professional identity is negatively affected and their sense of satisfaction with the role is reduced. In further research it will be interesting to check how counselors would themselves define the profession of educational counseling, what roles they think they should assume, and which they would forego. Moreover, many counselors attested that the reason they had turned to the counseling occupation is because they thought that the work is mainly individual, with students. In practice, almost all the counselors do not work with the students and many would like to do so. It would be interesting to check how they would redefine the role in order to have designated time for individual emotional work with the students.

Collaboration is necessary for school counselors to understand each other's professional responsibilities and to work together to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that meets the needs of all students (Wilder, 2018). Studies have shown that consultations and support by colleagues, such as teachers, principals,

and parents, moderate pressure and burnout among counselors (McCarthy et al., 2010; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). A study that examined stressors among school counselors found that colleague consultations were perceived by counselors as a factor that relieves pressure in their work (Culbreth et al., 2005). In the current study some counselors work on their own at the school and some work in larger schools as part of a group of counselors. In the current study we also saw that counselors who work with colleagues feel more confidence and less loneliness. Future studies should examine the issue of support provided to counselors, the impact of additional counselors in the same school on one's professional identity, whether the counselor belongs to a group of counselors outside the school, and how inservice training provided to counselors on a regular basis affects their professional identity.

Although the issues that contribute to individual and collective professional identity may overlap, these concepts are not always strongly related. For instance, counselors may have a well-established individual professional identity, while perceiving the profession's collective identity as weak (Gazzola & Smith, 2007; Gazzola, Smith, King-Andrews, & Kearney, 2010). A similar trend is evident in the current study. Most of the counselors attest to a non-cohesive collective professional identity, but some have a cohesive and well-established individual professional identity, a sense of gratification and pride in the profession, commitment, and self-fulfillment. Perhaps despite the problematic role definition, considerable burnout, work overload, and low salary and rewards, the emotional and mental compensation still provide counselors with professional identity and satisfaction with the profession. The counselor may feel a need to help others and the response she receives to this need in her work, as well as the feedback she receives from the environment with regard to her work, are gratifying and sufficient for establishing professional identity and high satisfaction with the profession.

The findings of the current study should be perceived as the foundation for understanding the professional identity of school counselors worldwide and the factors that affect it. The interpretations presented in the current study show how critical the role definition of counseling is for the work of school counselors, their professional identity, sense of commitment to the profession, and dedication to the teachers, students, and their parents. In the absence of a clear role definition the counselors find it hard to fulfill their role fully, considering the new challenges of the school system in Israel and elsewhere together with the innovativeness characteristic of the 21st century.

If the worldwide community of school counselors and their colleagues and supervisors would embrace the current research findings and act to promote a worldwide definition of the school counseling profession, these activities may help increase school counselors' professional identity, decrease school counselor burnout, and help create a more positive school environment. Having experienced, happier, more satisfied school counselors in a positive school environment most likely means that students will receive higher quality services. They cannot remain passive members of the school staff with unclear duties. To be effective leaders and change agents, school counselors must learn to advocate for their role in the school system (Wilder, 2018).

References

Alves, S., & Gazzola, N. (2011). Professional identity: A qualitative inquiry of experienced counsellors. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, *45*(3), 189.

Baggerly, J., & Osborn, D. (2006). School counselors' career satisfaction and commitment: Correlates and predictors. *Professional School Counseling*, *9*(3), 197−205. https://doi.org/10.5330/prsc.9.3.547188866k76qg76

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.

Bar-El, Z., & Lazovsky, R. (2008). *The relationship between self-efficacy and professionalism—and the causal attribution style among school counselors*. Beit Berl, Israel: Beit Berl College, Research and Evaluation Unit. [In Hebrew]

Beijaard, D., Verloop, N., & Vermunt, J. D. (2000). Teacher's perceptions of professional identity: an exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *16*(7), 749−764. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(00)00023-8

Blake, M. K. (2020). Other Duties as Assigned: The Ambiguous Role of the High School Counselor. *Sociology of Education*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040720932563

Blau, G. J. (1985). The measurement and prediction of career commitment. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, *58*(4), 277. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8325.1985.tb00201.x

Blocher, D. H., Tennyson, W. W., & Johnson, R. H. (1963). The dilemma of counselor identity. *Journal of*

Counseling Psychology, *10*(4), 344−349. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0044274

Brott, P. E., & Myers, J. E. (1999). Development of school counselor identity: A grounded theory. *Professional School Counseling*, *2*(5), 339−348.

Bruss, K. V., & Kopala, M. (1993). Graduate school training in psychology: Its impact upon the development of professional identity. *Psychotherapy*, *30*, 1−7. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.30.4.685

Bryant, R. M., & Constantine, M. G. (2006). Multiple role balance, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction in women school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, *9*(4), 265−271. https://doi.org/10.5330/prsc.9.4.31ht45132278x818

Calley, N. G., & Hawley, L. D. (2008). The professional identity of counselor educators. *The Clinical Supervisor*, *27*(1), 3−16. https://doi.org/10.1080/07325220802221454

Canrinus, E. T., Helms-Lorenz, M., Beijaard, D., Buitink, J., & Hofman, A. (2011). Profiling teachers' sense of professional identity. *Educational Studies*, *37*(5), 593−608. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2010.539857

Cinotti, D., & Springer, S. I. (2018). *Examining the Impact of Non-Counseling Supervisors on School Counselor Self-Efficacy*. Vistas Online, 71. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327871079_Examining_the_Impact_of_Non-Counseling_Supervisors_on_School_Counselor_Self-Efficacy

Cobia, D. C., & Henderson, D. A. (2003). *Handbook of school counseling*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Coll, K. M., & Freeman, B. (1997). Role conflict among elementary school counselors: A national comparison with middle and secondary school counselors. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, *31*(4), 251−261.

Crosslin, S. L. (2006). *School counselor's perception of professional identity and role conflict*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Argosy-Sarasota.

Culbreth, J. R., Scarborough, J. L., Banks-Johnson, A., & Solomon, S. (2005). Role stress among practicing school counselors. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *45*(1), 58−71. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2005.tb00130.x

Daniels, J. A., & Larson, L. M. (2001). The impact of performance feedback on counseling self-efficacy and counselor anxiety. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *41*(2), 120−130. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2001.tb01276.x

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1−32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Deshevsky, A. (2009). *Standards for professional practice in school counseling*. Published by the Ministry of Education, Psychology and Counseling Services. [Hebrew]

Erhard, R. (1998). *Census of school counselors—analysis of findings*. Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, Psychological-Counseling Service. [Hebrew]

Erhard, R. (2008). *Research on school counselors in Israel*. Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, Psychology and Counseling Services, Research and Development Unit. [Hebrew]

Erhard, R. (2014). *School counseling—A profession in search of identity*. Tel Aviv: Mofet. [Hebrew]

Erhard, R., & Deshevsky, A. (1999). School counseling in Israel in a wearisome journey from extremity to extremity. *Iyunim Bechinuch*, *9*, 4−33. [Hebrew]

Erhard, R., & Klingman, A. (Eds.) (2004). *School counseling in a changing society*. Tel Aviv: Ramot. [Hebrew]

Fisherman, S., & Weiss, I. I. P. (2011). Teachers' professional identity: The concept and its measurement. *Dapim*, *51*, 39−56. [Hebrew]

Fu, J. R. (2011). Understanding career commitment of IT professionals: Perspectives of push-pull-mooring framework and investment model. *International Journal of Information Management*, *31*(3), 279−293. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2010.08.008

Gade, E. M., & Houdek, B. (1993). Job satisfaction and functions of counselors in split school assignments. *The School Counselors*, *41*(2), 86−89.

Gale, A. U., & Austin, D. (2003). Professionalism's challenges to professional counselors' collective identity. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *81*, 3−10. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00219.x

Gazzola, N., & Smith, J. D. (2007). Who do we think we are? A survey of counsellors in Canada. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, *29*(2), 97−110. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-007-9032-y

Gazzola, N., Smith, J. D., King-Andrews, H. L., & Kearney, M. K. (2010). Professional characteristics of Canadian counsellors: Results of a national survey. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, *44*(2), 83−99.

Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, *25*, 99−125. https://doi.org/10.2307/1167322

Gibton, D. (2001). Grounded theory: Meaning of the data analysis and theory construction process in qualitative research. In N. Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (Ed.), *Traditions and streams in qualitative research* (pp. 195−228). Lydda: Dvir. [Hebrew]

Guillot-Miller, I. M. (2003). *School counselor preparation, supervision and professional identity*. Doctoral dissertation. University of New Orleans.

Gunduz, B. (2012). Self-efficacy and burnout in school counselors. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, *12*(3), 1761−1767.

Heled, E., & Davidovitch, N. (2019). The impact of academic, personal, and professional attributes on the occupational identity of school counselors in Israel. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, *5*(4), 513−523. https://doi.org/10.12973/ijem.5.4.513

Hiebert, B., & Uhlemann, M. R. (1993). Counselling psychology: Development, identity, and issues. In K. S. Dobson & D. J. G. Dobson (Eds.), *Professional psychology in Canada* (pp. 285−312). Cambridge, MA: Hogrefe & Huber.

Holcomb-McCoy, C., Harris, P., Hines, E. M., & Johnston, G. (2018), School Counselors' Multicultural Self-Efficacy: A Preliminary Investigation. *Professional School Counseling*, *11*(3), 166−178. https://doi.org/10.5330/PSC.n.2010-11.166

Kolodinsky, P., Draves, P., Schroder, V., Lindsey, C., & Zlatev, M. (2009). Reported levels of satisfaction and frustration by Arizona school counselors: A desire for greater connections with students in a data-driven era. *Professional School Counseling*, *12*(3), 193−199. https://doi.org/10.5330/PSC.n.2010-12.193

Kozminsky, L., & Klavir, R. (2008). Professional identity in teaching. *Shvilei Mehkar*, *15*, 13−17. [Hebrew]

Lafleur, L. B. (2007). *Counselors' perceptions of identity and attitudinal differences between counselors and other mental health professionals*. Doctoral dissertation, University of New Orleans.

Lambie, G. W. (2006). Burnout prevention: A humanistic perspective and structured group supervision activity. *The Journal of Humanistic Education and Development, Education and Development*, *45*(1), 32−44. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1939.2006.tb00003.x

Lanman, S. A. (2011). *Counselor Educators: Clinical Practice and Professional Identity*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Cincinnati.

Lazovsky, R. (1998). Autonomy and uniqueness in educational counseling. In R. Lazovsky & S. Feldman (Eds.), *Space and territory in educational counseling* (pp. 34−39). Even Yehuda: Reches. [Hebrew]

Lee, S. M., Cho, S. H., Kissinger, D., & Ogle, N. T. (2010). A typology of burnout in professional counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *88*(2), 131−138. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2010.tb00001.x

Maslach, C. (2003). Job burnout: New directions in research and intervention. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *12*(5), 189−192. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.01258

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*(1), 397−422. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *The Falmer Press teachers' library* (6. Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide). Falmer Press/Taylor & Francis, Inc.

McCarthy, C., Kerne, V. V., Calfa, N. A., Lambert, R. G., & Guzmán, M. (2010). An exploration of school counselors' demands and resources: Relationship to stress, biographic, and caseload characteristics. *Professional School Counseling*, *13*(3), 146−158. https://doi.org/10.5330/PSC.n.2010-13.146

Moracco, J. C., Butcke, P. G., & McEwen, M. K. (1984). Measuring stress in school counselors: Some research

findings and implications. *The School Counselor*, *32*(2), 110−118.

Nelson, K. W., & Jackson, S. (2003). Professional counselor identity development: A qualitative study of Hispanic student interns. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *43*(1), 2−14. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2003.tb01825.x

Pelling, N., & Whetham, P. (2006). The professional preparation of Australian counsellors. *International Journal of Psychology* (Special Issue Counselling in Australia), *41*(3), 189−193. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207590544000185

Perlberg-Simcha, L., & Erhard, R. (2007). How counselors perceive the meaning of "systemic work". *School Counselor*, *14*, 153−176. [Hebrew]

Pistole, M. C., & Roberts, A. (2002). Mental health counseling: Toward resolving identity confusions. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, *24*, 1−19.

Polkinghorne, D. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, *8*, 5−23. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080103

Randick, N. M., Dermer, S., & Michel, R. E. (2019). Exploring the Job Duties That Impact School Counselor Wellness: The Role of RAMP, Supervision, and Support. *Professional School Counseling*, *22*(1), 1−11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X18820331

Remley, T. P. Jr., & Herlihy, B. (2005). *Ethical, legal, and professional issues in counseling* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Rogers, C. R., & Scott, K. H. (2008). The development of the personal self and professional identity in learning to teach. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, D. J. McIntyre & K. E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 732−746). New York: Routledge.

Schoen, L. G. (1989). In search of a professional identity: Counseling psychology in Australia. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *17*(2), 332−343. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000089172011

Sears, J. S., & Navin, S. L. (1983). Stressors in school counseling. *Education*, *103*(4), 333−337.

SHEFI (Psychological counseling service). (2018). *About the counseling division*. Retrieved December 14, 2018, from http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Shefi/gapim/yeutz/Odot.htm[Hebrew]

Shkedim, A. (2003). *Words of meaning: Qualitative research—theory and practice*. Tel Aviv: Ramot. [Hebrew]

Spector-Mersel, G. (2010). From a narrative approach to a narrative paradigm. In R. Tuval-Mashiach & G. Spector-Mersel (Eds.), *Narrative research: Theory, interpretation and creation* (pp. 45−80). Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Magnes and Mofet Institute. [Hebrew]

State Comptroller Report. (2014). *School counseling in schools and pre-schools* (Annual report 64c for 2013, pp. 913−943). Jerusalem: Office of the State Comptroller. [In Hebrew]

Stickel, S. A. (1991). *A study of burnout and job satisfaction among rural school counselors*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Eastern Educational Research Association, Boston.

Stout, D. M. (2004). *Teacher professional identity development: Initial years of teaching practice*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Colorado.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Sutton, J. M., & Fall, M. (1995). The relationship of school climate factors to counselor self-efficacy. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *73*(3), 331−336. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1995.tb01759.x

Tatar, M. (1997). Perceptions and expectations of school counselors regarding their roles. *School Counseling*, *6*, 48−71. [Hebrew]

Tickle, L. (1999). Teacher self-appraisal and appraisal of self. In R. P. Lipka & T. M. Brinthaupt (Eds.), *The role of self in teacher development* (pp. 121−141). New York: State University of New York Press.

Van Riper, B. W. (1972). Toward a separate professional identity. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, *19*(2), 117−120. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0032439

VanZandt, C. E. (1990). Professionalism: A matter of personal initiative. *Journal of Counseling and*

Development, *68*, 243−245. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1990.tb01367.x

Wallace, S. L., Lee, J., & Lee, S. M. (2010). Job stress, coping strategies, and burnout among abuse-specific counselors. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *47*(3), 111−122. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2010.tb00096.x

Watson, G. (2006). Technology professional development: Long-term effects on teacher self-efficacy. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, *14*(1), 151−166.

Wilder, C. (2018). Promoting the Role of the School Counselor. *Journal of Professional Counseling: Practice, Theory & Research*, *45*(2), 60−68. https://doi.org/10.1080/15566382.2019.1646085

Wilkerson, K. (2009). An examination of burnout among school counselors guided by Stress-Strain-Coping Theory. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *87*(4), 428−437. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2009.tb00127.x

Wilkerson, K., & Bellini, J. (2006). Intrapersonal and organizational factors associated with burnout among school counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *84*(4), 440−450. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2006.tb00428.x

Yosifon, M. (1998). The educational system in the postmodern era: Trends of change in the role of the future educational counselor. In R. Lazovsky & S. Vafledman (Eds.), *Space and heritage in educational counseling* (pp. 143−172). Even Yehuda: Reches. [Hebrew]

Notes

Note 1. Most school counselors in Israel are women. Hence, in the current article we shall use the feminine form when referring to practitioners.