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## The Impact of Academic, Personal, and Professional Attributes on the Occupational Identity of School Counselors in Israel

**Einat Heled**

Ariel University, ISRAEL

**Nitza Davidovich\***

Ariel University, ISRAEL

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the influence of academic training, job issues, personality and demographic characteristics of school counselors on their professional identity construction, which is developed in a theoretical model based on educational-psychological theories. Most of the training in Master's degree studies in school counseling is incompatible with actual job demands; Consequently, when beginning work, school counselors lack suitable training and relevant professional tools. Moreover, in Israel and elsewhere, the definition of school counseling is unclear and inconclusive, and this affects the counselors' professional identity and the quality of their work. The proposed model of the variables that affect school counselors' professional identity may enhance the relationship between academia and the field, with the aim of promoting academic excellence and a well-formulated professional identity for the profession of school counseling, as well as improving the employment terms of school counselors, in light of the challenges facing higher education systems in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** *School counseling, professional identity, satisfaction, work commitment, and self-efficacy.*

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### Introduction

#### *The profession of school counseling*

This study focuses on the variables that affect the professional identity of school counselors, who play a key role in Israeli schools. School counseling is a professional service located within the school, charged with promoting the mental well-being and optimal functioning of students and educational staff. The educational counselor is involved in advancing the mental, social, academic, and professional development of the students and the staff. The goal of every school counselor, as defined by the Psychology and Counseling Services of the Israeli Ministry of Education, is to help develop an educational climate that creates ideal conditions for the development of each student in the school, and to ensure the maximal well-being of the individuals within the system (students, parents, teachers, and management). When the school counselor (Most school counselors are female. Hence, in this article we use the female form with respect to school counselors.) advises and listens to students, she does so from a systemic perspective, and when she meets with members of the educational staff, she sees the well-being of individual students within the system.

#### *Defining the role of counselor*

In Israel, the role of school counselor is complex and intricate. In each school, the role of the counselor and the scope of her responsibilities are different and adapted to the needs of the school. The employment terms and nature of the school counselor's work depend on the school principal and her use of the counselor's services, and patterns of use vary and are renegotiated annually. The school counselor has no say as to the counseling hours or tenure in her counseling work in pre-elementary, elementary, and junior high schools. Although the counselors' areas of work are gradually expanding, most counselors are employed in partial positions of about 14 weekly hours, and most occupy additional roles as well (Erhard, 2014). At present, school counselors perform many tasks that span a diverse range of activity, including working with students, teachers, parents; assisting students with special needs; operating

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\* **Correspondence:**

Nitza Davidovich, Ariel University, ISRAEL. ✉ [d.nitza@ariel.ac.il](mailto:d.nitza@ariel.ac.il)



intervention programs; counseling within the system (Cobia & Henderson, 2003; Erhard, 2014; Erhard & Klingman, 2004; Simcha-Perlberg & Erhard, 2007; Tatar, 1997; Yosifon, 1998). Moreover, the school counselor is also a teacher, and she must teach classes at the school, according to the school's procedures.

Due to the complexity of her role, the counselor, must find a balance between her individual work and systemic activity, and she concurrently works with diverse target populations within the school (principals, coordinators, teaching staff, homeroom teachers) as well as with relevant elements outside the school (psychologists, social workers, and other community workers). Counselors are required to combine the performance of planned tasks and providing immediate responses to unexpected demands (Deshevsky, 2009).

The development of a systemic outlook in education and psychology in recent decades has put increasing emphasis on counselors' involvement in promoting educational interventions, including internal and external assessment processes, intentional work with teachers, and improving the integration of students with special needs within the mainstream system (Deshevsky, 2009). Nonetheless, in practice, in many schools the counselor's work largely focuses on traditional areas of work at the individual level and less on systemic work (Erhard, 2014; Eschenauer & Chen-Hays, 2005).

#### *School counselors – professional identity on the group and personal level*

Over the years, the profession of counseling in Israel has changed from a task once assigned to teachers and other functionaries at school, who devoted several hours a week to providing counseling to students, to a profession that requires a Master's degree (Erhard, 2014). Despite the change in status in recent years, various issues still challenge the development of a clear sense of professional identity for the school counseling profession and the counselors who practice it (Erhard, 2014).

Professional identity is shaped by to how the external environment (both close and remote) perceives the professional and the professional's perception of herself. Similar to other components of the individual's identity, one's professional identity depends on the social context (for example, the social status of the individual and of the profession), interactions between the professional and others (clients, colleagues, and other professionals), and her interpretation of her professional experiences (Gee, 2000). In the current study we distinguish between two levels of professional identity: personal professional identity and group professional identity.

The identity of a certain profession *at the group level* (i.e., how society recognizes a certain profession) is an aggregate of features such as the knowledge, attitudes and expectations of society and of the individual regarding the profession. Thus, professional identity at the group level is also the collection of expectations and features attributed to the profession, both by those who belong to it and by those who do not engage in it, which make it possible to distinguish between groups (Stout, 2004).

The literature defines *personal professional identity* as an element of one's self-identity, and it is the answer to the question "Who am I, or what am I, as a professional?" Personal professional identity is the practitioner's sense of belonging to and identifying with the profession (Tickle, 1999). Consolidation of professional identity is part of the process of professional development that begins during training and continues throughout one's professional career (Brott & Myers, 1999). Professional identity is dynamic, in a constant process of structuring and development, and it is shaped through interactions with social and cultural environments (Rogers & Scott, 2008). Professional identity is influenced by the cultural values, expectations, outlooks, and attitudes that are at the heart of the profession's identity. All these are embraced by practitioners in a process of professional socialization that is strengthened by interactions with colleagues, other professionals, and the general public (Kozminsky & Klavir, 2008).

Professional identity has much significance both for the profession in general and for its practitioners. Professional identities distinguish between professions and provide practitioners with a safe foundation that lets them better understand their work (Pistole & Roberts, 2002). Establishing professional identity is perceived as essential in order for a profession to receive public recognition (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Pistole & Roberts, 2002). Consolidation of a clear professional identity helps counselors perceive themselves as belonging to a specific professional community, which gives them an advantage in representing the profession to various professional elements and to the public (Lanman, 2011) There is a link 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).

School counseling receives its group-oriented professional identity from two different sources. On one hand, it is the youngest of all mental health professions (which also include psychiatry, psychology, and social work; Pistole & Roberts, 2002), yet it is a profession within the school system and has a systemic orientation. Therefore, it is particularly difficult to identify unique fields of responsibility (Erhard, 2014). In addition, individual, social, and systemic needs, which dictate the counselor's specific tasks, vary from one school to another and are influenced by the school's composition and management. The combination of systemic and therapeutic roles and the lack of uniformity in the definition of daily and general work make it difficult for counselors to develop a clear sense of professional identity (Crosslin, 2006).

Since the profession of school counseling has not yet managed to develop a clear sense of professional identity and role definition, unaffiliated elements (such as functionaries in local municipalities and in the Ministry of Education, school

principals as well as general supervisors) define the role of the school counselors and dictate what counselors should do in the schools (Guillot-Miller, 2003). For this reason, counselors are engaged in various administrative and educational tasks and assignments that are not unrelated to the counselor's work. In the long range, performing such tasks undermines the distinctiveness of the school counselor's role, and on the personal level it generates frustration and diminishes counselors' self-esteem (Erhard, 2014).

The Israeli State Comptroller recognized the need to address the issue of counselors' professional identity, and claimed that since the Psychology and Counseling Services do not gather updated information on the extent or success of counseling activity in each district, they lack the necessary information to develop a national policy on counseling. School counseling and teaching are subjects studied separately at institutions of higher education, yet the Ministry of Education requires school counselors employed in the educational system to teach in class for one third to one sixth of their position. This situation might generate frustration and burnout, and undermine the professional development of those engaged in this field. Moreover, the counselor has two essentially different roles: as a teacher who is a pedagogic figure who tests and enforces discipline, and as a counselor who is a therapeutic, containing, and helping figure. In these circumstances, students and staff members who encounter the counselors as teachers may find it difficult to trust them as counselors and avail themselves of the counselors' assistance (State Comptroller Report, 2014).

When exploring the personal professional identity of the counselors, it appears that school counselors are sensitive to the challenges to the construction of a distinct professional identity. The difficulty with their professional identity derives, among other things, from the counselor's unclear role definition. It is evident that personal professional identity is directly influenced by group professional identity. School counselors in Israel have two roles, that of teacher and that of counselor (Erhard, 2014). The Counselors' Survey (Erhard, 2008) confirmed that counselors within the system indeed fulfill both roles concurrently: They work eight weekly hours on average in teaching; about half (46%) teach subjects such as history, Bible, and psychology, while about half (some 44%) teach counseling-related contents (life skills, career planning, and learning strategies), and about 10% are homeroom teachers or teach in special education classrooms. According to the survey, most counselors are extremely frustrated by their dual role, which they attribute to the lack of recognition of counseling as a distinct profession.

Beyond being teachers as well as counselors, school counselors' involvement in activities they consider "non-professional", such as planning student duty rosters, addressing student disciplinary problems, completing forms, exacerbates their challenges in developing a sense of professional identity (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006). Notably, seniority in the counseling profession was not found related to professional identity. There are counselors with seniority of less than five years in the profession who have a well-established and formulated identity, and there are counselors with five or more years of seniority who have not managed to conceptualize their unique role versus proximate professionals (LaFleur, 2007).

The 2014 Israeli State Comptroller addresses the attitudes of school counselors: There is no congruence between the tasks defined for school counselors by the Ministry of Education and the scope of their responsibilities at school. The State Comptroller's Office noted the problematic implications of the reliance of counseling services in the educational system on school counselors' willingness to complete their assignments voluntarily, due to their sense of professional commitment. The discrepancy between the number of tasks assigned to school counselors and the scope of their employment has been clear to the Ministry of Education for a long time, but nevertheless it has taken no action to resolve this situation. The survey showed that as a result of school counselors' terms and scope of employment, they are unable to complete the many assignments with which they are charged or provide the proper assistance to their clients. This might have a negative impact on the mental well-being of counselors and on the functioning of educational institutions as a whole (State Comptroller Report, 2014).

The issue of the professional identity of school counselors was also discussed by leaders of the profession in the United States, who insisted that the role definition must allow counselors to work efficiently with the various stakeholders, and nurture a sense of self-value and respect for professional autonomy (Myers, Sweeney & White, 2002). In the US, there is a work model for school counselors and also an association (American School Counselor Association [ASCA]). The model was developed on the basis of reports by school counselors on burnout and frustration in their work and the need to clarify their role in the school (Cinotti, 2014). Although the profession has a clear role definition in the US, it is evident that many school counselors in the US do not follow it in their work (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). As a result, the school counseling profession in the US and its practitioners also lack a consolidated professional identity (Webber & Mascari, 2006).

#### *Job satisfaction, work commitment and job definition of school counselors*

The ongoing work of counselors involves situations of difficulty and crisis and they are exposed to pressures that might negatively affect their emotional well-being and performance, as well as their satisfaction with their work as counselors (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005; Lambie, 2006; Maslach, 2003; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

The term *job satisfaction* comprises several dimensions: (a) whether one likes or does not like one's job or parts of it, (b) to what extent is one realizing one's ambitions and desires, (c) to what extent is one satisfied with one's job

compared to other jobs and positions (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink & Hofman, 2011). In addition to job satisfaction, we also explore counselors' *work commitment*. Work commitment is an important source of self-confidence and perceived continuity in one's work (Fu, 2011) and it is a motivating force to work in a certain profession (Blau, 1985). The extent to which one is committed to one's career is reflected in one's persistence and pursuit of one's career goals (Fu, 2011), the amount of time and effort invested in acquiring relevant knowledge, and the extent to which one's career is an integral part of one's life (Blau, 1985).

As mentioned earlier, there is no clear *job definition* of the school counselor. The sources of this difficulty are vagueness in role perceptions, with no clear definition of the boundaries of the role and demands made of the counselor (Moracco, Butcke, & McEwen, 1984; Stickel, 1991). As a result, school counselors experience a conflict of their roles when two or more conflicting demands are made of the counselor simultaneously (Lee, Cho, Kissinger, & Ogle, 2010; Wilkerson, 2009). A conflict between roles may also arise when the counselor is expected to meet contradictory demands of principals, students, parents, etc., or when there is a discrepancy between the counselor's perception of her role and the expectations expressed by her superiors (Coll & Freeman, 1997). Counselors have bureaucratic work that includes excessive paperwork, which is perceived as irritating and boring. They also must cope with the emotional burden created in their encounters with personal issues of their clients, which remains with them after work as well (Gade & Houdek, 1993; Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder, Lindsey, & Zlatev, 2009; Lee et al., 2010; McCarthy, Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzman, 2010).

The excessive burden on the counselors, who are required to perform multiple tasks with limited resources, can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction among school counselors. Erhard (2008) claims that over two fifths of the counselors report burnout as a result of the profession. Over three quarters (77%) of counselors strongly agreed or agreed that counseling is a tough job. Slightly less than half (42%) agreed or strongly agreed that the school counselor's work is frustrating, and about two thirds agreed that there is little or very little congruence between their tasks and the scope of their employment (Erhard, 2008). Lazovsky (1998) found that counselors on the job express dissatisfaction with the material rewards of their work and it appears that they do not perceive their work as financially worthwhile. A study on counselors, conducted in the United States, found that two thirds defined the profession as moderately or highly stressful (Sears & Navin, 1983). Counselors' continuous and regular exposure to pressures in their daily experience at work was found to raise the risk of burnout (Lee et al., 2010; Wilkerson, 2009). Studies that focused on burnout among therapists report that school counselors report higher levels of burnout at work than other mental health professionals (Gunduz, 2012; Wallace, Lee, & Lee, 2010).

Despite the training that counselors undergo in helping others cope with pressure, they themselves receive little guidance on how to cope with pressures (Emerson & Markos, 1996). Studies have shown that consultations with and support from colleagues, such as teachers, principals, and parents, are a moderator of pressure and burnout among counselors (McCarthy et al., 2010; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). A study that explored stressors among school counselors found that counselors considered peer consultation to be a factor that reduces work-related stress (Culbreth et al., 2005).

### *Self-efficacy of the school counselor*

In the current study, we also relate address the *self-efficacy* of the school counselor and its contribution to her professional identity. Self-efficacy is one's perception of one's abilities to successfully perform a specific assignment. The concept of "self-efficacy" is applied to the field of professionalism and defined as the professional's belief in her ability to control events that affect her professional life. A person who feels highly self-efficacious will probably achieve the desired outcome, while one with low self-efficacy can be expected to encounter difficulties with realizing his potential and fail to achieve the desired outcomes (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy in counseling is the counselor's personal perception of her ability to provide professional counseling and to fulfill her role appropriately. Self-efficacy is important for the process of consolidating professional identity among students of counseling (Barnes, 2004). Studies conducted on self-efficacy in school counseling indicated positive relationships between self-efficacy and variables related to the counselor's work, such as the work environment, the counselor's traits, her performance, level of anxiety, and satisfaction. Practicum experiences, modeling by the mentor counselor, and positive feedback were found to promote self-efficacy in the initial stages of training (Larson & Daniels, 1998; Sharpley & Ridgway, 1993). Counselors with high self-efficacy are reported to function better, put more effort into their work, and persist in their work as counselors, as well as participate more often in in-service courses on counseling (Daniels & Larson, 2001; Sutton & Fall, 1995).

A study that investigated the relationship between the causes of school counselors' burnout and self-efficacy found that counselors supported by the system display a more positive attitude to the profession and higher self-efficacy. In contrast, counselors who receive no professional support reported lower efficacy (Gunduz, 2012).

Bar-el and Lazovsky (2008) found that school counselors in Israel feel a high sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction. School counselors were also found to assess their self-efficacy in individual work as higher than their efficacy in group work and they feel more successful when working with students than with teachers, management, and parents.

With regard to self-efficacy and professional identity, no studies were found to link these two variables among school counselors. In contrast, studies have found a relationship between teachers' professional identity and self-efficacy. Teachers' professional identity affects their self-efficacy and their willingness to cope with educational change (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). Fisherman and Weiss (2011) also found that, among teachers, part of the professional identity is comprised of self-efficacy. It appears that a teacher who is confident in her abilities, knowledge, and proficiencies is a teacher with a well-formed professional identity. A teacher who is concerned that she lacks some of what she believes are the necessary conditions for being a good teacher, is one with a more diffuse professional identity and a higher risk of burnout.

In summary, it appears that professional identity is related to self-efficacy and professional work-related decisions among teachers (Beijaard et al., 2000) and it has not yet been investigated whether these variables interact among school counselors.

#### *School counseling in academia and professional identity*

Many of the study programs in universities and colleges have a professional orientation, as does the Master's degree program in school counseling. In professional training tracks, higher education is concurrently engaged in the study and implementation of the studied profession and in research in the field (Davidovitch, 2005).

An important component of the quality control process of study programs is tracking graduates after graduation (Jacob & Davidovitch, 2010). Frazee (1986) claimed that in order to assess the success of an educational program in higher education it is necessary to examine its graduates' career choices and their job satisfaction. When tracking graduates of study programs, it is also necessary to include three main elements: evaluating graduates' perceptions of the scope of training they received in their studies, information on graduates' professional activity of since graduating, and demographic data on graduates, such as the field and setting of their work (Richter & Ruebling, 2003).

#### *Master's degree in school counseling – training programs and their evaluation*

At present, there are thirteen Master's degree programs in Israel for school counseling, which are taught at five universities and eight colleges.

The different training schools have a common training core (Schwartz, 2008). In the helping professions, including school counseling, training comprises a combination of theoretical studies in academic courses and practical learning that takes place while experiencing work in relevant settings, based on the rationale whereby these two worlds complement each other and are interdependent (Toombs & Tierney, 1993). In school counseling studies, practical training includes actual practicum in a school and the guidance, which helps students apply the theoretical material learned in the field. One of the goals of the guidance provided to students before, during, and after the practicum, is to develop their personal and interpersonal awareness of their own learning process and integration between the theoretical and applied materials (Scanlon & Baillie, 1994).

Davidovitch (2005) found that government funding for research and professional development differ in Israeli universities and colleges. At universities the emphasis is on research, while at colleges the emphasis is on professional implementation. No studies comparing school counseling programs at colleges and universities were found.

#### *The role of academia in developing the professional identity of the school counselor*

The seeds of students' future professional identity lie in their professional training (Erhard, 2014). One of the main stages in developing one's professional identity is the learning stage, which begins with professional studies and concludes with the first official job in the profession. The emphasis in the training stage is on learning the theoretical foundations of the profession, accumulating knowledge, proficiencies, and role performance, and learning the professional language, morals, and ethics (Jebril, 2008).

The professional identity constructed in academia is essential if students are to become proficient counselors (Monrouxe, 2009). For this purpose, students of counseling must internalize the professional culture, acquire the professional language, and adopt the accepted standards of professional ethics, and develop a commitment to the profession (Etringer, Hillerbrand, & Claiborn, 1995; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Already during their training, counseling students develop a counseling identity and undergo a change both on the intra-personal level and on the interpersonal level (Brott & Myers, 1999; Lazovsky, 2004; Sawatzky, Jevne, & Clark, 1994; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). During their studies, students of school counseling begin to think about their place within the profession and to compare themselves to students of other mental health professions. Further on in their studies, their knowledge expands and they are supposed to develop a more consolidated identity, where their expertise becomes a source of pride. With the development of their identity, students are expected to develop a sense of professionalism, i.e., to internalize attitudes, perspectives, and a personal commitment to the professional standards and ideas (Hill, Bandfield, & White, 2007).

Studies have found a strong connection between academic training and professional identity in therapeutic and counseling professions (Himelein & Putnam, 2001; Lanman, 2011). The school counseling profession is not only therapeutic but rather also systemic and educational, and training in counseling should include programs that encourage students to form attitudes and beliefs on topics of responsibility and ethics as well as professional standards, in order to promote the students' professional identity (Brott & Myers, 1999; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Training programs for a Master's degree in school counseling at Israeli universities and colleges are, however, based mainly on contents in psychology, with an individual therapy orientation (Erhard, 2014; Schwartz, 2008), and educational studies have found that training for a Master's degree in school counseling in Israel is lacking and might have an effect on the development of students' professional identity.

In addition to the significance of the study program, it was found that having academic faculty members who come from the specific therapeutic field taught helps build the students' professional identity. Furthermore, when faculty members are also those who guide the practicum that accompanies academic studies, the student's professional identity is stronger (Lanman, 2011). Erhard (2014) showed that due to the rise in the number of institutions offering Master's degree studies in school counseling, it has become difficult to recruit academic faculty members who specialize in school counseling. It was found that when faculty members discuss the professional identity of the counselor and serve as role models for this identity during training (i.e., they are professional counselors), students form a clearer professional identity for themselves in the course of their work and are more satisfied with their work in the future (Shores, 2011).

As stated, an important part of the training program of school counselors is coaching by a practicing school counselor (one or two days a week for two years). Erhard (2014) claims that due to the many Master's students in school counseling programs, some schools lack "coach counselors." As a result, a single coach counselor works with several students simultaneously, and according to Erhard, the training that these students receive is insufficient.

It appears that very few studies focus on the stage of school counseling studies in general and on the professional identity constructed in academia in particular. Asulin (2005) sought to examine the perception of school counseling as a profession among students in this field. For this purpose, she compared undergraduate students and Master's degree students of counseling. She uncovered a similar finding to that reported by Fishman (2002): Israeli students on both degree levels have extremely low knowledge of the profession. In addition, already during their studies, students of counseling express dissatisfaction with their anticipated work environments, financial compensation in the profession, and professional status. While some discovered the diversity and broad range of professional practice options, others interpret these circumstances as functional vagueness, which undermines efforts to form a professional identity (Asulin, 2005; Erhard, 2014; Fishman, 2002).

In practice, beyond the difficulty of constructing a professional identity in academia, and even as a result of this, many students who complete their school counseling studies are not interested in working in the educational system for the following reasons, according to the Ministry of Education: The requirement to engage in teaching causes them a great deal of frustration because their professional choice was counseling. The profession requires specialization and training and the demands are disproportionate to the level of compensation and professional autonomy. Moreover, there is no employment security in the counseling profession and each year the issue of hours budgeted for school counselors arises anew (State Comptroller Report, 2014). This leads to the conclusion that even if academia trains counselors and advances their professional identity, it may not be sufficiently established as unclear role definition, excessive requirements, and low compensation dissuade new counselors from working in the profession.

It is necessary to examine the long-term outcomes of programs for school counseling studies with regard to the professional identity and satisfaction of the graduates. Satisfaction with one's workplace and job may reflect the effectiveness of a training program and its response to the needs of the profession, and may indicate possible changes that should be made to the program and how it should be developed (Grilli & Rampichini, 2007; Irani & Scherler, 2002). The differences between students' satisfaction with school counseling programs and programs' effectiveness in college and university settings has not been explored in Israel and therefore many questions remain concerning these topics.

In light of the literature review, it appears that the profession of school counseling encompasses endless difficulties, both in the role definition of school counselors and in their professional identity and job satisfaction. The State Comptroller's Report (2014) unequivocally emphasizes the discrepancy between the school counselors' training and the distorted and unregulated structure of employment. This causes frustration and sometimes even attrition among counselors. One of the main goals of the current review is to raise awareness of the problems involved in inconsistent definition of the student counselor's role and its effects and highlights the need to improve the employment terms of school counselors.

Moreover, in light of the many academic Master's degree programs in school counseling and the fact that the efficacy and implications of the study program for the professional identity and satisfaction of counselors in the field have never been studied, there is a need to conduct a comprehensive survey and to inspect their contribution.

### The Research Model

The current review addresses the complexity of the school counseling profession and the difficulties encountered by counselors in building their professional identity. The model describes the factors affecting school counselors' professional identity and the components of professional identity.

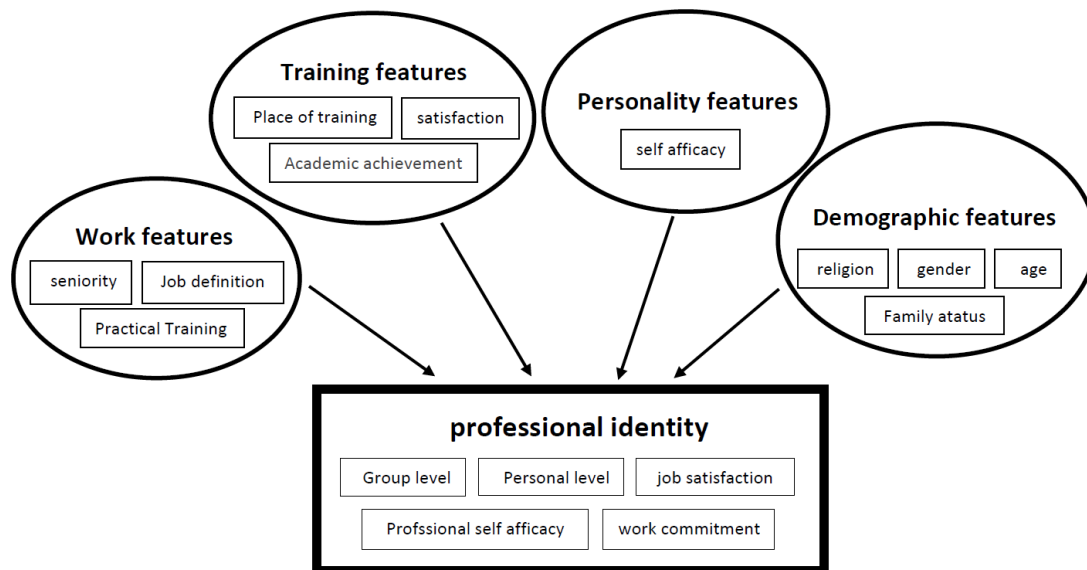


Figure 1: The impact of academic training, personal and professional features of students and graduates, on the professional identity of school counselors.

### Summary

Research published over the years in Israel and around the world reflects a continuing debate concerning the uniqueness of the profession of school counseling and its distinction from other roles in the educational system. Indeed, in light of the literature review conducted, it appears that the school counseling profession encompasses endless difficulties, both in its role definition and in the construction of counselors' professional identity and actual work conditions. Moreover, in light of the many academic Master's degree programs and their incompatibility with the profession as it is performed in the field, it appears that there is a need to conduct a comprehensive survey and to inspect their contribution.

To date, no extensive large-scope quantitative study has been conducted on the question of the professional identity of counselors and counseling students and the variables that affect and contribute to this identity.

For decades, school counselors have been struggling for recognition of the significance of their role, an agreed definition, and improvement of their terms of employment. The current review and model may further illuminate the significance of the professional identity and satisfaction of counselors and students of school counseling, and the significance of academic excellence that will contribute to these variables. Moreover, we hope that this study contributes to an improvement in school counselors' employment conditions, increased awareness of the requirements of the profession, and national and even global recognition of the significance of the school counseling role, as well as further specifying its goals.

The current review highlights the need to investigate the variables that affect the school counselor's professional identity, on both the individual and group levels. The model proposed here constitutes a basis for further research on the weight of each variable in the professional identity construction of school counselors. The results of the future studies will be able to explain how each variable affects the professional identity of the counselor and what dimensions are most effective in strengthening school counselors' professional identity. Future research findings based on this model will contribute to advancing academic excellence and a clear professional identity for the school counseling profession, in light of the challenges of the educational system in the 21st century.

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