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A Phenomonenological Examination of Middle School African American Adolescent Mens' Experiences with Professional School Counselors

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL AFRICAN

AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH PROFESSIONAL

SCHOOL COUNSELORS

by
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This study is dedicated to all African American men, whether in adolescence or adulthood, who work diligently to pursue their aspirations and make a positive impact on their communities of origin. HTP

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I want to also convey gratitude to members of my maternal, paternal and married families who supported me. I vividly recall those phone calls and encounters during the holidays when you inspired me to keep going; I am truly grateful! Special recognition to my mother-in-law Wilda Mack for her care packages and timely words of encouragement and my aunt Glenice Pearson whose knowledge of non-profit organizations made the creation of my own non-profit possible. This accomplishment would not have been possible without the periodic inquiries and occasional visit from friends from South Carolina, in particular members of "The Columbians" (Ameer, Cros, and Errick). I also want to recognize the members of the Lambda Lambda chapter of Omega Psi Phi; I really appreciate the love fellas. Lastly, I want to state how much I value the members of my spiritual home KRST Universal Temple especially my fatherly mentors Baba Derrick Jackson, Dr. Burnette Gallman, Mr. Joe Benton, MSW, and Baba Sietu Amenwahsu.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction to the Problem

For more than twenty years, considerable attention and financial resources have been dedicated to obtaining a better understanding of the educational performance of students in this country. The impetus for the increased attention, many believe, is attributable, in part, to the seminal *Nation at Risk* (1983) document, which chronicled the underwhelming performance of American students on various assessments of academic performance and ability (Henfield, Owens, & Moore, 2008; Sleeter& Grant, 2007). Even more alarming than the actual educational data was the fact that American students' performance paled in comparison with the educational performance of students around the globe, especially in the Soviet Union who, at the time, was America's arch nemesis and chief rival for economic and political supremacy. The underdevelopment of American students' intellectual ability was considered an issue of paramount importance because this underdevelopment was presumably correlated with a gradual deterioration of America's economic competitiveness.

As indispensable as educational success is with respect to the country's economic viability, the more profound impact of academic success or lack thereof reverberates in the lives of students themselves both in the short and long-term. Indeed, academic success throughout one's educational career is seen as a precursor to stability in adulthood, particularly when competitive and highly desirable employment opportunities are in short supply (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2007; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Henfield, Owens, & Moore, 2008). Jackson and Moore, III (2006) asserted that

"today, education is arguably more important than at any other time in American history. It determines, in large measure, the degree of social mobility one has or will have in American society" (p.202).

Thus, educators and policy makers have worked diligently to confront barriers to students' academic success. Often these measures are aimed at those groups of students who have chronically, relatively speaking, underachieved academically. For instance, in 2001, Congress passed legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to specifically address underachieving schools to improve the performance of chronically underperforming students. Although NCLB and *Nation at Risk* candidly illustrated what the educational dilemma confronting K-12 students from across the country, demographic information has repeatedly revealed that some students are performing more poorly than others.

Years of empirical and anecdotal educational research indicates that students from lower income communities tend to fair less successfully on academic and aptitude tests than their peers from more affluent neighborhoods (Jencks et al., 1972; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Noguera, 2008). Additionally, some racial and ethnic minority students, including African American students, have not been as successful as their White classmates on various achievement and aptitude tests (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Howard, 2008; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Jencks & Phillips, 1998). These findings have concerned educators and researchers because these disparities in educational outcomes are considered antecedents to negative implications for African American students, not the least of which include incarceration, underemployment and unemployment (Anderson, 2008). As Hurn (1993) clearly stated,

educational success represents a form of human capital which translates into tangible socioeconomic dividends. Conversely, inadequate educational attainment, Hurn contended, severely limits students' ability to ascend the socioeconomic ladder. Thus, educational success is an extremely valuable commodity.

Background of the Problem

If one were to further disaggregate educational statistics to explore disparities between White and racial/ethnic minority students in greater detail, we learn that large numbers of African American adolescent men are not achieving educationally to maximize their potential. Discussing the educational crisis of male students of color in this country, The College Board (2010) offered this vivid description of those male students who often occupy what can be referred to as a symbolic Third America because of educational struggles:

> This is an America that is almost totally ignored by mainstream society. This America is often captured in popular television documentaries and newspaper stories and includes frightening statistics about unemployment, poverty and high rates of incarceration. The citizens of this Third America are primarily men, and mostly men of color. These men now live outside the margins of our economic, social and culture systems. (p. 2)

This is especially true for African American adolescent and adult men. As the College Board statement intimates, the future economic and social status of African American men hinges on prior educational success. For this reason, the educational performance of African American adolescent men has been one of the most consistently discussed and investigated topics in recent times (Howard, 2013; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2011).

Promoting young African American men's academic success and reversing their educational trajectory requires a well-informed understanding of the dynamic nature of

the barriers they confront. Research indicates that significant numbers of African American adolescent men are disengaged educationally and outperformed by their classmates (Noguera, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). Young African American men are, and have been for some time, disproportionately represented in special education classrooms for emotionally, educationally, and behaviorally disabled students while simultaneously being underrepresented in programs for academically talented and gifted students (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008; Owens, Simmons, Bryant, & Henfield, 2011). Young African American men are also more likely to be subjected to lengthier and more draconian disciplinary action than their non-Black male counterparts for similar infractions (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Monroe & Obidah, 2004). While there are certainly encouraging examples of academically successful African American male students at various periods in the educational pipeline (e.g. Berry, 2005; Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Moore, 2006; Sanders, 1997) and a litany of suggestions about how best to support their optimal personal, social and educational development (Henfield, 2012), this cannot overshadow the educational difficulties experienced by so many school-aged African American young men.

Based on these observations and the belief that students with more favorable educational experiences are less likely to experience social and occupational difficulties in adulthood (Jackson & Moore, III, 2006), it is imperative to examine the variables impacting young African American men educationally. At the behest of various educational scholars, rather than focusing solely on African American men, attention is increasingly being paid to institutional factors which threaten African American young men's academic performance (Davis, 2003; Duncan, 2002; Jenkins, 2006; Maton,

Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Reese, 2004; Sanders, 1997) as well as those human resources (e.g., school counselors, etc.) who can encourage their academic success (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Howard, 2008; Lee & Bailey, 1997; Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008; Owens, Simmons, Bryant, & Henfield, 2011; Whiting, 2006; Wyatt, 2009).

While it is certainly important to explore the educational experiences of African American young men in general, it has been argued that special consideration should be paid to their educational experiences at critical developmental periods in their lives. Kunjufu (2005), for instance, has argued that up until the fourth grade, African American male youths are just as interested in education and succeeding educationally as their peers. However, this engagement and interest, Kunjufu contends, declines precipitously as young African American men transition out of elementary school and into middle school. Mickelson and Green (2006) corroborate this position and insist educators and policy makers should be more mindful of and attentive to African American young men's performance during this important developmental period.

Indeed, the transition to middle school can represent an extremely daunting period in young African American men' lives especially since it appears they begin to experience dramatic declines in academic engagement and academic performance (Kunjufu, 2005; Mickelson & Green, 2006; Rashid, 2009). For three reasons in particular, it seems necessary to engage in scientific inquiry to achieve a greater understanding of African American young men's educational experiences during adolescence. First, and perhaps most importantly, adolescence is a period of development characterized by several psychosocial and physical changes (Steinberg &

Morris, 2001). These converging personal, interpersonal and physical transformations

can impact adolescents' perceptions of self and others, their cognitions, and decision

making. These changes, which are observable and unobservable, can either wreak havoc

or promote developmental tasks (e.g., establishing and fostering relationships) that

impact academics.

Second, as young people enter adolescence and transition to middle school, they

begin to consider and explore more intently their identity development like never before

(Steinberg, 2011). This identity development, which is a necessary step in lifespan

development, represents a concerted effort to establish an autonomous identity

(Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). According to Holcomb-McCoy, during this period of identity

development, adolescents:

> become more aware of their own capacity to make decisions and choices. They
> begin to focus in new ways on questions of identity development, such as "Who
> am I?" "What am I good at?" and "What affiliations and activities make me feel
> valued and competent?" Adolescents begin to look around them, to their status
> among their peers, to clues they receive from adults, and even to the larger society
> and media, for messages about who they are and what they could become. (p.256)

Identity development entails several social categories including aspects of gender,

racial and ethnic statuses (Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2009; Steinberg & Morris, 2001;

Tatum, 1997, 2007). By establishing and projecting what is considered a desirable and

authentic identity, adolescents forge social networks and relationships with individuals

believed to operate from similar worldviews or perspectives. Thirdly, alongside this

vortex of personal and social identity formation, educators, including professional school

counselors, are charged with the responsibility of supporting academic success and

engaging students in dialogue about professional and career exploration through

classroom guidance lessons and tentative graduation and career guidance plans (ASCA, 2003; Schmidt, 2008).

Furthermore, middle school is a critical period in young peoples' development because it represents a transition between distinctly different primary and secondary educational settings. While educational experiences in general are important, middle school experiences are vital because they serves as a bridge to high school, which is an altogether more demanding educational environment for students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). During middle school, educators encourage adolescents to assume more responsibility for their current and future educational success as this is a hallmark of an initiative taking and self-motivated learner (Akos, 2005). Akos elaborated about the significance of independence and decision making for middle school students saying:

> For the first time, middle school students are able to choose classes they will take. They are offered multiple electives to choose from that ideally are based on students' interests. These choices serve as an early career decision point and are significant in forming early career identities. Beyond academic choices, the middle school requires independent choices during class changes, negotiating multiple teachers and new peer groups, and determining how to be successful in a more complex environment. (p. 97)

Akos' (2005) statement underscores the assertion that those students who do well academically in middle school are in a position to do well academically as they transition out of middle school and into high school and beyond (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

<div align="center">Statement of the Problem</div>

In their discussion of academic underachievement among middle school students, Clark, Flower, Walton, and Oakley (2008) wrote that disparities in academic achievement between young male and female students warrant greater attention from educational researchers. Clark et al., believe that while the achievement gap between racial and

ethnic minority (e.g. African American, Latino, etc.) and majority (Euro-American)

students has dominated the discussion in education and educational policy, much more

consideration should be given to the underachievement of boy students in general. The

authors believe this lack of attention can have negative consequences on future

generations of male students given the relationship between early academic success and

future academic and professional opportunities. Although Clark and her peers

acknowledge the academic difficulties facing many young minority male students, they

believe academic underachievement represents a legitimate threat to all male students

irrespective of racial or ethnic status.

  While Clark et al., (2005) mention several valid concerns in their discussion of

the underperformance of all adolescent male students, aggregating the performance of

male students severely obscures the extent to which adolescent African American men

underperform academically in relation to their White counterparts. This approach,

therefore, offers little in the way of a data-driven framework for school counselors and

other educators to utilize to assist greater numbers of African American adolescent men

to succeed academically (Howard, 2008). In other words, research that examines the

unique experiences of adolescent African American men in school remains an

educational imperative. As Howard (2008) and others (Jackson & Moore, III, 2006;

Ladson-Billings, 2011, Moore, 2006) posit, effective educational reform efforts must rely

on ongoing examinations of the educational experiences of African American men at

different developmental periods throughout their educational trajectories.

  As previously mentioned, an area of interest to educators and other professionals

(e.g., professional school counselors) has been the transition from late childhood to early

adolescence because educational disparities in academic performance between African American young men and their counterparts emerge and intensify there (Kunjufu, 2005; Mickelson & Green, 2006). Mickelson and Greene stated that "middle schools are essential links in the sequence of opportunities to learn" which makes it "imperative to understand the social and educational forces that influence the middle school academic outcomes of Black male students" (p. 34).

It is Kunjufu's contention that as young African American men move into adolescence, they are perceived more negatively within the educational setting. These students, who were previously perceived as "cute" come to be seen as "more aggressive and hostile" as they develop and mature (Kunjufu, 2005, p. 46). As many adolescent African American men begin to identify more with their peer groups and ubiquitous cultural/behavioral signifiers and styles often associated with African American men (e.g. conversational styles, gait, selection of attire, popular music, etc.,), adults within the educational setting sometimes respond unsupportively (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Davis, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Harris, 1995; hooks, 2004; Howard, 2008; Howard, 2013; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012). Thus, it seems important to explore how African American adolescent men perceive the effectiveness of human resources (e.g., school counselors) situated within the middle school setting to better understand how these resources contribute to academic performance.

Rationale for the study

Professional school counselors are instrumental resources within the school setting (ASCA, 2003; Hughey & Akos, 2005; Johnson & Perkins, 2009; NMSA, 2003, 2008). Professional school counselors are expected to provide comprehensive services

that contribute to various domains including students' cognitive and academic performance, self-concept, interpersonal relationships, and preliminary career exploration and planning (ASCA, 2003; NMSA, 2008, Schmidt, 2008). Members of the counseling profession, school counselors and school counselor educators included, have also contributed much to the discussion on African American adolescent male students (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Burkard, Martinez, & Holtz, 2010; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Lee & Bailey, 1997; Lee, 1995; Muller, 2002). Often, this body of literature operates from a social justice orientation, which encompasses a critical analysis of the impact adverse historical and contemporary ecological factors have on the educational experiences of African American adolescent men and what practical strategies can eliminate these systemic and institutional barriers (e.g., inadequate educational settings, sociopolitical and economic disenfranchisement, etc.) (Bemak & Chung, 2005, 2008; Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Wyatt, 2009). This social justice advocacy perspective, as organizing framework and practical approach to counseling, is an integral aspect of the multiculturally competent (Arredondo & Perez, 2003) professional school counselor identity (Baruth & Manning, 2000; House & Sears, 2002; Martin, 2002; Ratts, Dekruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). In other words, the "new vision" for the 21st Century school counselor includes an expectation that school counselors will utilize strategies and techniques to increase the success of students who have historically been marginalized from the educational enterprise in this country (The Education Trust, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

Because professional school counselors are expected to contribute to students'

development, especially those marginalized from the educational process, this proposal

seeks to explore middle school African American adolescent men's perceptions of and

experiences with their professional school counselors. The rationale for initiating this

study rests on the researcher's fundamental premise that professional school counselors

are capable of being effective with adolescent African American male students. The

premise that professional school counselors can be effective in their work with African

American adolescent men students can be ascribed, in large measure, to two fundamental

beliefs. First, by virtue of their graduate school training[1], professional school counselors

are exposed to information from various content areas which enables them to contribute

to the creation of an educational environment conducive to learning for middle school

African American adolescent men (e.g., the design of comprehensive school counseling

programs, human development across the lifespan, diversity, multiculturalism, and social

justice, etc.). In fact, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2003), the

flagship organization for the school counseling profession, considers diversity,

multiculturalism, and social justice essential aspects of the school counselor professional

identity. ASCA (2004) said specifically: "Professional school counselors have the skills

necessary to collaborate with students, parents and school personnel to identify attitudes

and policies that impede the learning process of culturally diverse students" (p. 1).

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[1] An overwhelming majority of graduate level school counseling programs are CACREP
accredited. CACREP, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education
Programs, helps ensure the rigor of school counseling graduate programs through an explicit
articulation of expectations regarding program content and an attendant methical evaluation
process to which these programs are subjected periodically.

Secondly, given their proximity to students, professional school counselors are ideally positioned within the educational setting to identify and respond to the educational and societal issues confronting students in their school, which includes adolescent African American men (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). For these two reasons, it is difficult to identify another educator or helping professional better situated or prepared to positively impact middle school African American adolescent men than professional school counselors.

Unfortunately, despite the fact several studies on African American adolescent men and their perceptions of their school counselors have been conducted, there is a noticeable dearth in the professional school counseling literature on middle school African American men's perceptions of their school counselors. In those studies when African American male high school students have been questioned about their perceptions of school counselors, these students often express what they believe the purpose of school counselors to be as well as varying degrees of gratitude for the services rendered by school counselors; however these students also state that revisions to the nature and quality of services they received would be appreciated. Bryan and Gallant (2012) found that while a majority of the 215 African American male 9th-12th grade students they surveyed were knowledgeable about the services provided by their school counselors, a small number believed school counselors were there to assist with their personal, social or emotional concerns. In their qualitative study, Owens, Simmons, Bryant, and Henfield (2011) found that although urban African American adolescent men were complimentary of the services they received from school counselors, they desired more specific academic services and an increase in the amount of direct contact with their

school counselors. Similarly, Moore, Henfield, and Owens (2008) learned that several African American adolescent men in their sample did not have contact with their school counselor, and those students who did interact with their school counselor infrequently discussed social issues which indirectly pertained to their academic performance.

This research study sought to accomplish one major objective: to contribute to the professional school counseling knowledge base by exploring how middle school African American adolescent men perceive and describe their experiences with professional school counselors. This is important because, for African American adolescent men, middle school represents a critical period that contributes greatly to their future social functioning and educational and occupational aspirations and opportunities (Brown, 2005; Gentry & Peelle, 1994; Mickelson & Green, 2006; Kunjufu, 2005). As Brown (2005) states during the "crucial middle school years" many African American young men may feel as though:

> they do not belong in school—instead they are received with open arms by the environment of the streets. As these students meet with continuing academic failure, as they become suspended from school more often, and as they have more contact with the law, they are increasingly drawn out of school and into the streets and may eventually drop out of school entirely. (Brown, 2005, p. 5)

So, while various studies have explored high school African American young men's perceptions of and experiences with professional school counselors, a conspicuous absence remains in the professional school counseling literature on middle school African American young men's perceptions of their professional school counselors. Therefore, this study sought to fill this hole by providing an opportunity for middle school aged African American young men to discuss how they perceive their school counselor during this important developmental period.

Definition of Terms

The most important terms and concepts associated with this study are operationalized here:

1. African American—a person who identifies as a member of the African American ethnic group. Whereas the designation Black denotes membership in an overarching racial category, African American represents membership in an ethnic group subsumed under the larger racial category Black.

2. Ecological perspective—a psychosocial theoretical perspective which considers how nested proximal and distal contexts impact human behavior. While variations of the ecological theoretical perspective exist, the origin of this perspective is ascribed to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) seminal contributions to the discipline of social psychology.

3. Masculinity—a socially constructed category/identity. Unlike biologically grounded conceptions of masculinity, in this study masculinity is operationalized as an amalgam of personality/character traits socially negotiated and performed by young men. Also, there is tremendous heterogeneity among men in regards to how often and when men subscribe to or abandon dominant and non-dominant tropes of masculinity. Dominant masculine tropes, often referred to as hegemonic masculinity, consist of traits including independence, a restricted range of emotions, and physical strength just to name a few.

4. Middle schools—an educational setting comprised of grades 6-8. These educational settings emerged during the 1960s and are characterized by a more

comprehensive, responsive, and developmental focus to serve early adolescents more effectively (Akos, 2005).

5. Professional school counselor—a Master's level counseling professional who renders various counseling services (e.g., classroom guidance, group and individual counseling, individual planning, responsive services) to students and professional development opportunities to faculty and staff within an educational setting to maximize student outcomes.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were present in this study:

1. Only middle school African American young men who have had a minimum of two counseling interactions with their school counselors were considered for participation in this study.

2. The research participants were students residing in a Southeastern city comprising 129,765 residents.

Assumptions

This study was conducted with the following assumptions in mind:

1. Middle school African American young men are generally receptive to the educational process and possess academic capabilities.

2. Middle school African American young men's perceptions of their school counselors are informed by how school counselors perform their duties and the perceptions of school counselors held by salient people in middle school African American young men's personal lives (e.g., parents and other relatives, friends and associates).

3.   Middle school counselors can serve as valuable resources in contributing to middle school African American young men's academic, personal/social, and career development.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This study is presented using the five chapter model. Chapter One has included a statement of the problem and background for the problem in question in addition to operational definitions for the constructs that will be examined. In Chapter Two, the author presents a review of literature associated with each of the research variables, including adolescent African American men and their experiences in the educational setting, professional school counseling and counseling at the middle school level. The methodology for this study is presented in Chapter Three. Chapter Three entails a discussion of the research participants, research procedures, data collection process, and data analysis. The presentation of data and data analysis is provided in Chapter Four, while Chapter Five is dedicated to a discussion of implications, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A cursory review of historical research conducted with minority populations, African Americans especially, has typically operated from the deficit perspective (Brown, 2011; Whiting, 2006, 2009). Various complimentary academic disciplines, including anthropology and psychology, have often depicted African Americans as inherently inferior to Whites in regards to a number of categories/variables including, but not limited to, moral development and critical thinking skills (Baker, 1998; Guthrie, 2004; Howard, 2013; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012; Jenkins, 2006). Arguably the two most blatant examples of this deficit orientation—which argues "children in poor families, disproportionately of color, have inherited flaws from an inferior genetic stock, and their failure in school and society simply reflects that flawed inheritance" (Sleeter& Grant, 2007, p. 41)—can be found in the historical work of Jensen (1969) and, more recently, Herrnstein and Murray (1994). The deficit perspective proved instrumental in influencing beliefs within the scientific community and general population about African Americans, and undergirded and rationalized discriminatory and exclusionary practices including race-based educational, occupational and residential segregation (Howard, 2013; Nobles, 1986).

However, this academic trend and narrative about African Americans' presumed inferiority was challenged and interrupted by one monumental change; a paradigmatic shift in how this group's behavior is conceptualized. This shift was instigated by activists, researchers and educators—especially activists, researchers and educators of

color—who focused critically on the racially biased organization of society and how the

social context must always be considered when attempting to examine and understand the

lived experiences of African American people (Swanson, Spencer, Harpalani, Dupree,

Noll, Ginzburg, & Seaton, 2003). Swanson et al., go on to say that by examining the

social context and implications of barriers existing within said context (e.g., overt and

convert forms of racism, economic difficulties), research helps to decrease the likelihood

that African Americans' behavior, including African American adolescent men, would be

misconstrued and pathologized.

In their discussion and research into the structural conditions, achievement

patterns, needs and opportunities of adolescent African American men, Swanson,

Cunningham, and Spencer (2003) insisted:

> Understanding adolescents from a perspective that considers the interactive nature
> of culture, context, and gender is particularly important when research efforts are
> focused on African American adolescent men…when focusing on men who are
> developmentally transitioning from childhood to adulthood, a focus that
> highlights how adolescents interact within a cultural ecological niche is needed.
> (p. 619)

In fact, in the past twenty years researchers have utilized ecological perspectives with

increasing regularity when examining the psychosocial development and academic status

of adolescent minority students, including adolescent African American men. Lee,

Spencer, and Harpalani (2003) acknowledged that the increase in ecological research on

African American students represents a welcome departure from "the prevailing deficit-

oriented perspective" which "focuses on negative outcomes and ignores the resilience

demonstrated by many youth of color. This view also misinterprets how youth make

meaning of their own experiences, instead substituting assumptions of cultural

deficiency" (p. 745-46). More importantly, perhaps, is ecological researchers' dissection

of the dynamic relationship between human behavior and the multilayered social contexts within which human behavior and development occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). So, rather than examining constructs such as motivation and attribution in a social vacuum, the ecological perspective considers how motivation and attribution are a manifestation of preexisting interfacing proximal and distal sociocultural variables. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1995) ecological theory of human development guided the review of literature on African American men' psychosocial and academic development and served as the backdrop for this study.

Given the researcher's desire to explore middle school African American adolescent men's perceptions of their interactions with their professional school counselors, it was important to select a theoretical perspective which fundamentally accounts for how social interactions unfold within nested social contexts and how these social interactions and nested contexts impact the participants' subjective human experience. As Wertz (2005) points out these subjective human experiences "must therefore be acknowledged by any psychology that seeks full knowledge of the human being" (p.169). Before examining the systems comprising Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory or discussing how they pertain to adolescent African American men's perceptions of school counselors, this review of literature will present information on how the experiences of adolescent African American men have been shaped by overarching historical social forces, peer group relationships and identity development, familial and neighborhood support, and the academic setting.

The socio-historical context of African American adolescent male development

To effectively counsel ethnically and culturally different clients, it is essential for counseling professionals to overcome cultural encapsulation—the belief that personal worldviews are universal in nature—and limited insight into the unique experiences and perspectives of these individuals (Arredondo et al., 1996; Katz, 1985; Sue, et al., 1982; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue & Sue, 1977). Consistent with this position, many counselor educators and counseling professionals believe that in order to fully appreciate the present status of adolescent African American men, it is absolutely necessary to learn about and appreciate the socio-historical context in which African American men have developed (Madison-Colmore & Moore, 2002; Wyatt, 2009). For instance, Lee and Bailey (1997) submitted the following:

> Responsive counseling with African American men, at any age, must be predicated on an understanding of the historical and cultural context that shapes the psychological development of this client group. Professional counselors must possess not only solid intervention skills but also knowledge of the historical forces that have impacted on African American male development. Likewise, they must appreciate the dynamics of African American culture and their influence on optimal mental health. (p. 125)

According to Baker (1998) and others (Dale & Daniel, 2013; Hawkins, 1998; Jenkins, 2006; Katz, 1985), this means understanding how racially biased and stereotyped propaganda was used strategically to depict African American men as threatening, subhuman, and morally and intellectually bereft, and the racial stratification which ensued as a result of this propaganda.

The most devastating historical event which has impacted the current functioning of African Americans in general and African American men in particular was the institution of chattel slavery, often referred to as the Maafa (Ani, 1994; Helms & Cook,

1998; hooks, 2004). Within the context of slavery, enslaved African men were broken—

a process of physical and psychological abuse and dehumanization—to facilitate

compliance and conformity to slaveholders' wishes and the institution of slavery. This

process was implemented systematically by slaveholders to emasculate and exert their

power over enslaved African men.

Following the emancipation of enslaved Africans, Jim Crow laws and de jure and

de facto segregation threatened African American men physically and impeded their

ability to gain and maintain access to various educational, professional and political

domains (hooks, 2004). While writings suggest that African American men' inability to

achieve widespread educational and professional success did not diminish their self-

concept, these impediments did prevent African American men from securing the

birthright of masculinity and masculine privilege common among White American men,

especially those White American men who possessed land and other forms of financial

wealth/capital (hooks; Neal, 2006).

The marginalization of African American men did not only occur through forms

of physical intimidation and interference. Perhaps no strategy for ensuring the continued

marginalization of African American men was as effective as the strategic utilization of

disparaging racial imagery and propaganda. Whether executed explicitly or subtly,

African American men have historically been depicted in two manners. First is the

African American male as "shiftless", "shuffling" or mindless caretaker caricature

(Adams, 2007; Neal, 2006, p. 25). This figure is rather buffoonish, exceedingly

immature and preoccupied with entertaining others, Whites especially. The second

manner in which African American men were depicted is through the hyperaggressive,

"threatening and dangerous Black men" trope evidenced in popular culture artifacts (e.g., movies, music) and media outlets (e.g., local and national news) (Giroux, 1996; Hawkins, 1998; Jenkins, 2006; Neal, 2006, p. 25). Although these depictions of Black masculinity differed in form and content, they were deployed to achieve a primary objective, which was to represent African American men as a group that did not possess innate intellectual abilities but did have the propensity to commit violent acts. Therefore, Black men were considered socially undesirable, qualified for only menial labor, and perceived as a legitimate threat to others, including all Whites but especially White women (hooks, 2004). These pervasive images were contested by African American community members who considered these images to be deliberate pieces of propaganda and inaccurate representations of Black masculinity.

<center>African American Adolescent Men and Contemporary Issues</center>

Again, it would be counterproductive to initiate any examination of contemporary adolescent African American men without first engaging in meaningful reflection on the aforementioned historical variables (Brown, 2011; Fultz & Brown, 2008; Lee & Bailey, 1997). These variables played a critical role in the evolution of the existing social structure (e.g. equitable academic opportunity, equal employment opportunities, etc.) in this country available to African American adolescent men as well as how African American adolescent men perceive these opportunities, and there relationship to future aspirations (hooks, 2004; Mickelson, 1990).

Within both scholarly literature and popular media, the plight of African American men has been a heavily discussed and analyzed topic (Brown, 2011; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Fultz & Brown, 2008; Laubscher, 2005; Staples, 1978; Wallace, 2002).

With the exception of notable studies on academically successful African American male students (e.g., Berry, 2005; Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Moore, 2006), it is not uncommon for research to present a very pessimistic view of the current social and educational status of African American men (Gordon, 1997; Harris, Torres & Allender, 1994; hooks, 2004; Laubscher, 2005). From these accounts, one could logically deduce that to be African American and male virtually predisposes one to academic difficulties, and as a result, a multitude of other undesirable psychological, economic, and social outcomes (Adams, 2007; Gibbs, 1988; Hunter & Davis, 1992; Hunter & Davis, 1994). Thus, it comes as no surprise that these personal, social, and educational difficulties can, in many cases, threaten the actualization of adolescent African American men's potential (Adams, 2007; Cassidy & Stevenson, 2005).

However, because African American men are not a homogeneous or monolithic group, significant diversity exists within this group about the implications sociohistorical factors may or may not have on an individual's future. Further, subscribing to or disavowing the notion that race and racism can constrain opportunities can inform how African American adolescent men see and respond to their surroundings (Mickelson, 1990; Sanders, 1997). African American men, especially during adolescence, receive cues about these issues from members of their immediate and extended family members, community members, peers, the educational setting, and society (Harris, 1995; Kunjufu, 2005; Lee, 1992; Lee & Bailey, 1997; Tatum, 1997, 2007). Therefore, it is important to consider this interplay of variables especially during adolescence because during adolescence young people begin to consider more seriously their place in the world (Tatum, 1997, 2007).

African American Men and Adolescence

There are innumerable developmental issues young people encounter as they transition into adolescence which can contribute to or stymie academic functioning (Akos & Ellis, 2008; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). As teenagers embark on this journey, many experiment with and indulge in activities that can significantly impact their lives (e.g., drug use, unprotected sexual intercourse, delinquent/violent activities and behavior) (Dryfoos & Barkin, 2006; Neubeck, Neubeck, & Glasberg, 2007). Adolescence can be a particularly overwhelming period in the lives of African American men for a number of reasons (Gibbs, 1988; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Jackson & Moore, 2008; Kunjufu, 2005; Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). Kunjufu (2005) asserted that the physical transformation associated with adolescence prompts society to perceive young African American men more negatively than they would have during childhood. During adolescence, Kunjufu contends, society begins to view Black men pathologically. As this occurs, young Black men are no longer seen as innocent children, but young men with a propensity towards abhorrent behavior (hooks, 2004; Jenkins, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2011). What is more, during adolescence African American men consider more seriously the confluence of variables including their family, peer networks, and the school setting impacting their lives.

African American men and Bronfenbrenner's Microsystem

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory on human behavior, behavior must be considered within the context it is exhibited. As such, it is critical to understand how young African American men's development unfolds out of the confluence of factors associated with their immediate (e.g., home and community) environments.

African American Adolescent Men and the Family

  Brofenbrenner posited that an individual's immediate family constitutes an important variable which must be considered when attempting to understand behavior and development. A review of literature on the social and academic experiences of adolescent students, and in particular African American male students, appears to support this assertion (Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010; Noguera, 2008; Reynolds, 2010). When examining parental involvement literature, for instance, several factors seem to contribute to the range and nature of involvement parents exhibit with respect to their child or adolescent's social and academic development. For quite some time researchers have emphasized how instrumental parental and familial support and encouragement are to the personal, social, and academic performance of young people (Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Reynolds, 2010). Research has shown repeatedly that:

> whether construed as home-based behaviors (e.g., helping with homework), school-based activities (e.g., attending school events), or parent-teacher communication (e.g., talking with the teacher about homework), parental involvement has been positively linked to indicators of student achievement, including teacher ratings of student competence, student grades, and achievement test scores. (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 105)

In other words, family involvement can be viewed as a composite entailing everything from actual assistance with work assignments, consistent communication with educators and administrators, or attendance at school conferences, just to name a few (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010).

  In addition to understanding the constituent characteristics subsumed under family involvement, it also important for school counselors and other educators to understand how a family's status affects involvement. For instance, it has been suggested

lower socioeconomic status parents exhibit less parental involvement than middle income or affluent status parents (Jencks, et al., 1972). However, despite the notion that racial/ethnic minority parents especially those parents from lower class or socioeconomic status backgrounds are disproportionately disengaged, it has been suggested these parents exhibit a pattern of parental involvement often unwelcomed by administrators and teachers (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

In recognition of the significant role parental and familial involvement plays in the overall development of students, professional school counselors' are expected to consider more seriously strategies to be used in increasing parental involvement and facilitating more consistent collaboration between the school, home and surrounding community (ASCA, 2003; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). For African American parents and family members, their support for their children's academic success hinges on a belief "that education is the most powerful way for their children to challenge racial stereotypes, overcome the racial barriers to success, and advance the cause of racial justice" (Hill, 1999, p. 59). In addition to providing academic support, parents and other family members often contribute to how adolescents are oriented towards and socialized with respect to various identity domains, including racial and ethnic and gender identities. For African American parents and family members this manner of socialization is seen as a mitigating force in combating the institutionalized social and educational barriers African American adolescent men often confront.

Familial Interactions, African American Adolescent Men and Racial Socialization

Much has been written about the relationship between racial and ethnic minority adolescents' levels of racial and ethnic identification and their academic performance and

social behavior. Not surprisingly, empirical and conceptual literature on the subject is

replete with confounding results and positions (Nasir et al., 2009). Arguably the most

referenced and critiqued position on racial and ethnic identification as a detriment to

academic performance and behavior was Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) theory of

oppositional identity. Fordham and Ogbu's research found that African American

students exhibited an oppositional identity, which is characterized by disengagement

from institutions and patterns of behavior associated with the dominant culture (e.g.,

academic achievement, communication styles, etc.). Palmer and Maramba (2010) posited

that the oppositional identity exhibited by some African American male students is a

function of social realities and can therefore be attributed to and exacerbated by an

anticipated "job ceiling that precludes minorities from attaining employment and

financial status compared to their White counterparts with comparable academic

credentials" (p. 6). Additionally, the oppositional identity argument has been

corroborated by qualitative research suggesting that some African American adolescents

experience double consciousness or difficulty in reconciling the desire to maintain

relationships with their African American peers and their own academic aspirations and

success (Stoughton & Sivertson, 2005).

Conversely, research has demonstrated that strong racial and ethnic identification

can be advantageous to students. This identification is thought to promote academic

success and, at the very least, serves to protect racial and ethnic minority students from

the potentially negative impact of racism and discrimination on academic performance,

behavior, and future aspirations. Sanders (1997), for instance, learned that a strong

African American identity actually inspired high achieving African American students to

be more resilient when they perceived or encountered instances of racism and

discrimination.

Nasir et al., (2009) provide a comprehensive review of this confounding literature

and attributed the disparate findings to several critical variables. First, this literature

reflects dissimilarities in how racial and ethnic identity is operationalized. Secondly,

researchers often underestimate or ignore completely the reciprocal relationship between

how racial identities are constructed and the environment in which these constructions

occur. The latter point is significant because it means that the process of developing a

racial identity is negotiated within a social context. Therefore, racial and ethnic minority

students, including African American adolescent men can exhibit a wide array of

behaviors perceived to be indicative of an authentic African American identity

(Stoughton & Sivertson, 2005; Tatum, 1997). This body of research is germane to this

study because, for adolescent African American adolescent men, socialization to

racial/ethnic and gender norms is a process which can have repercussions on immediate

and long-term academic and social progress (Davis, 2006; Noguera, 2008). A primary

mechanism through which adolescent African American men become familiarized with

what it means to be African American is racial socialization.

Racial socialization can be defined as a protective resource that racial/ethnic

minority parents provide to their children to shield them from the racial barriers that

could adversely affect educational performance and professional goals (Boykins & Toms,

1985; Franklin & Boyd-Franklin1985; Miller, 1999; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999).

Stevenson (1994) viewed parents' racial socialization messages as valuable buffers which

can promote resilience in African American children. Parents' racial socialization is

thought to be critical, especially during adolescence, because of the difficulties associated with being African American (Irving & Hudley, 2005). These difficulties are often associated with having to navigate social situations and experiences that are not necessarily parallel, complimentary, or easily reconcilable (ex. mainstream/dominant culture and the rules that govern African American communities) (Boykins & Toms, 1985).

Researchers have asserted that parents' socialization is pivotal for young African American students' perceptions about racial barriers and education (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 1985; Irving & Hudley, 2005). Constantine and Blackmon (2002) found a relationship between African American parents' socialization, their children's perceptions of White institutions and self-esteem. In their study, 115 African American middle school students (72 girls and 42 boys) from the Northeast participated in a study designed to examine the relationship between racial socialization and domain specific self-esteem. The predictor variables were the five subscales of the Teenagers Experiences of Racial Socialization (TERS) to determine levels of racial socialization. The criterion variables were the subscales of the Hare General Area-Specific Self-Esteem Scale (HGASSES) to measure the levels of area-specific self-esteem. Constantine and Blackmon (2002) found students' support of conventional racial socialization messages to be negatively related to their sense of school self-esteem. This suggests that adopting more Eurocentric cultural values could decrease African American students' academic self-efficacy in predominantly African American school settings. Constantine and Blackmon determined that this has prompted some African American parents to expose their children to Afrocentric material to support and promote their academic performance.

In a similar study, Bowman and Howard (1985) concluded that racial socialization messages were a means of preparing African American children to effectively confront racial barriers. Bowman and Howard suggested that parents' racial socialization in fact "improves the mobility prospects of Black youth by enhancing their sense of personal efficacy and effectiveness in academic roles…" (p. 139). Thus, research into the messages that African American parents convey to their children has often found that such messages can be beneficial for African American children's sense of being as well as their academic performance (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999).

While it has been revealed that adolescent African American women receive racial and ethnic socialization messages from parents and significant others within their families, these messages appear to differ drastically from those transmitted to African American adolescent men. African American parents often inculcate a sense of racial pride in young women while young men are more likely to be instructed on how to exhibit resilience and fortitude when encountering racial bias and discrimination (Allen, 2010; Bowman & Howard, 1985; Reynolds, 2010). Interestingly, these messages are often withheld until children either reach a certain age or developmental period, typically pre-adolescence, or when children initiate conversation about race after experiencing discrimination or racism themselves (Hill, 1999; Tatum, 1997).

While it may be logical to assume socializing adolescent African American adolescent men to anticipate racism is detrimental, it has been suggested that this approach to parenting assists young African American men in preparing for racial prejudice, an unfortunate and highly likely part of many African American men's future (Tatum, 1997). Franklin (1999, 2004) believes African American men's encounters with

racial prejudice and discrimination provokes a psychologically destructive condition called the invisibility syndrome. The invisibility syndrome is, in part, the experience of not being fully seen or accepted as whole and the cumbersome psychological toll that accompanies African American men's assertion of their intersecting racialized and gendered identities when confronting discrimination. Furthermore, Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) believed repeated encounters with racism can have a deleterious impact on African American men. Thus, Franklin and Boyd-Franklin and others believe it is advantageous to African American adolescent men's development to intentionally and proactively engage in conversations about racism and discrimination.

Familial Interactions, African American Adolescent Men and Gender Socialization

While the categories man and woman refer to one's biologically determined sex, gender, conversely, is a social construct. Davis (2006) wrote, "masculinity is not an individual or biological trait; rather it makes itself known through social interaction. In essence, masculinity comprises the social and culturally constructed meanings and definitions attributed to being male" (p. 292). In regards to young men, various socializing mechanisms contribute to what they come to understand as socially acceptable gender roles and norms. In other words, young men are socialized into masculinity, a concept steeped in centuries of heterosexual male privilege and the subordination of women (Hill, 1999). Historically, notions of socially acceptable masculinity have encompassed several fundamental characteristics including heterosexuality, self-sufficiency, emotional stoicism, independence, and assuming the role of primary breadwinner for one's family (Davis, 2006).

Overwhelmingly, examinations on masculinity and African American men have focused on the experiences of poor urban African American men and how their environment influences and restricts the manner in which they perform their masculinity (Anderson, 2008; Harris, 1995). While this is considered a shortcoming of gender socialization research, examining race and limited economic opportunities in African American adolescent men is warranted because these variables are believed to interfere with and undermine African American men's ability to successfully obtain the characteristics associated with prototypical masculine behavior (e.g., financial independence, power and influence; Hunter & Davis, 1994).

It appears that African American parents often take unique measures in regards to race and gender as they socialize adolescent African American men. In addition to racial socialization, which encompasses messages about what it means to be a member of the African American ethnic group, adolescent African American adolescent men's emerging gender identity seems to also be attributable to messages received from the various members comprising the immediate community (Harris, 1995). According to Bronfenbrenner's theory (1977), in addition to the nuclear and extended family, the microsystem also consists of the other immediate contexts in which a person is embedded. For adolescent African American men these immediate contexts encompass their communities or neighborhoods. Historically, especially for urban adolescent African American men, these contexts have often been portrayed as adverse and involving a myriad of psychological, economic, and social barriers derived from historical incidents of racial bias, discrimination and pervasive societal power

differentials (Bush, 1999; Franklin, 2004; Gibbs, 1988; Jenkins, 2006; Spraggins, 1999; Staples, 1978).

African American Adolescent Men and Peer Networks

In addition to the influences nuclear and extended family members have on adolescents' social development, relationships with and acceptance from peers becomes more salient to young people as they enter adolescence. According to Erikson's (1968) seminal work on psychosocial development throughout the lifespan, as children embark on the journey towards adolescence, they begin to consider more seriously their identity and place in their immediate setting and society. Corbin and Pruitt II (1999) describe the process of "identity achievement", which in their estimation involves:

> defining who one is and hopes to be within a social context. The individual explores different social roles while experimenting with various attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. Feedback from others validates or invalidates which of these roles will be assimilated. The achievement of this identity has long been considered to be central to adolescent development. Adolescents are faced with finding out who they are, what they are all about, and where they are going in life. (p. 68)

As Noguera (2008) mentioned, peer groups exert significant influence by validating adolescents' sense of identity, which contributes greatly to, among other things, their social status and sense of security.

Effectively negotiating peer networks is a critical aspect of identity development for African American adolescent men because achieving this task can engender respect and acceptance from their peers (Corbin & Pruitt, II, 1999). In discussing this point, Carter (2003) suggests:

> One of the most apparent instrumental purposes of non-dominant cultural capital is to navigate the terrain of ethnic authenticity. Racial and ethnic groups create cultural boundaries to demarcate both intergroup and intragroup differences. That

is, groups create internal cultural boundaries to separate the "real" ("authentic") from the "not real" ("inauthentic")… (p. 138)

So, much like financial capital, cultural capital represents currency that enables a person to gain access to certain physical and social spaces, while those lacking said capital are denied. For many African American adolescent men, accruing this cultural capital strengthens self-esteem and self-concept (Harris, 1995; Majors & Billson, 1992).

Unfortunately, through the course of interactions among peers groups, some adolescent African American men, especially those men who reside in poor and urban neighborhoods, may exhibit a type of masculinity which can have negative implications on their academic progress. Perhaps the most frequently referenced example of this type of masculine behavior among adolescent African American men is Majors and Billson's (1992) work on the *cool pose*. According to Majors and Billson some adolescent African American men project a *cool pose*, or a defiant and apathetic disposition towards institutions associated with the dominant culture. This persona, which is usually deemed detrimental to adolescent African American men's immediate educational performance, is thought to protect African American men within their communities of origin and the frustration they experience as a result of not fully achieving traditional masculine expectations. Harris (1995) describes the disposition and behavior indicative of this cool pose thusly:

To compensate for feelings of powerlessness, guilt, and shame that result from the inability to enact traditional masculine roles, some African American male youth of low-income social status have redefined masculinity to emphasize sexual promiscuity, toughness, thrill seeking, and the use of violence in interpersonal interactions. Observable mannerism characteristic of this set of alternative masculine behaviors include physical posture, style of clothing, content and rhythm speech, walking style, standing form of greeting, and overall demeanor. Less frequently described but nevertheless relevant cognitive and affective components involve suppressed emotions (other than anger), distrust of

organizations and authority, need for approval and support from peers, disdain for feminine qualities, predominant heterosexual focus, and denial of vulnerability. (p. 280)

In their qualitative examination of African American high school students Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) found evidence supporting aspects of Harris' (1995) and Majors' and Billson's (1992) conclusions. Peterson-Lewis and Bratton explored the notion of 'acting Black' with 56 African American high school students by questioning them about the constellation of behaviors they associated with an authentic Black identity/persona. These students associated acting Black with wearing certain articles of clothing and using profanity (e.g. aesthetic/stylistic, dispositional/constitutional, etc.), and stated that performing these behaviors could have an inadvertent negative impact on African American students' academic achievement. Similarly, in their study of conceptions of African American identity Nasir et al., (2009) found that several African American students subscribed to the belief that:

being African American meant being "gangsta" or being connected to "the street" or "the block." It also included both the speaking of Ebonics and a clothing style that included baggy jeans, oversized T-shirts, and a cap. In addition, this street-savvy identity was considered by some to be antithetical to doing well in school or being a "nerd." (p. 87)

From these studies, one can see how African American students' conceptions of what it means to behave in an authentically African American manner can reverberate, positively or negatively, on how they can be perceived by adults within their academic setting. Therefore, it is critical to attend to how their conceptions of race and gender emerge and the implications they may have within African American adolescent men's academic settings.

African American Adolescent Men and the Educational Setting

Since the advent and wide-spread implementation of the contemporary compulsory educational system, schools have assumed numerous socio-educational responsibilities (Davis, 2003, 2006; Hurn, 1993). Schools were created to provide a more objective means of educating and evaluating students; this was an essential function because until that point, students were educated primarily by their parents, mothers especially (Young, 2007). By creating a more unbiased means of educating and evaluating students, it was believed that schools could select the most intelligent and well-equipped students to occupy existing occupations, create others, and assume leadership positions in society (Hurn, 1993). Later, schools evolved into institutions dedicated to providing more adequate educational opportunities for students who had previously been denied opportunities to learn. Therefore, few would debate as to what schools in this country had come to represent: settings where students receive instruction on reading, writing, and arithmetic.

However, while the teaching of academic content has understandably received a disproportionate amount of attention regarding the purpose of schools, another function of schools, albeit a more subtle one, is the inculcating of students with the cultural values championed within this society (Hurn, 1993). Schools are not culturally neutral; in fact, successful performance in the contemporary school setting hinges, at least in part, on students' ability and willingness to conform to the cultural patterns exhibited in even the most mundane of school activities like walking in line (Brint, Contreras, & Matthews, 2001).

Additionally, researchers have stated repeatedly that subtle gender socialization messages are conveyed to students through the structure and operation of the school setting. Kunjufu (2005) argues that characteristics of the American approach to education, including communication patterns and a limited number of male teachers, often lead male students to consider schools and education feminine domains. Polite and Davis (1999) believe a major reason adolescent African American adolescent men disengage from school is "they perceive most educational experiences as irrelevant to their masculine identity and development" because "schools and teachers impose a feminine culture on men that inadvertently induces oppositional behavior" (p. 3). Hence, the school setting constitutes another socializing institution which exerts influence on how male students perform academically; therefore, the failure "to interrogate masculinity—adolescent masculinities in particular—and come to grips with its potential power and influence, we may seriously undermine our current and future efforts to address problems of differential educational achievement and attainment of young Black men" (Davis, 2006, p. 292). The identity development of adolescent African American men takes on even greater significance because the pedagogical styles and cultural background of a vast number of teaching professionals in this country are often dissimilar and incongruent with the culture endorsed by many culturally diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Thompson, 2004). This lack of cultural synchronism between teachers and students is believed to exacerbate existing preconceived notions about the ability of diverse students, especially adolescent African American male students (Jenkins, 2006). These issues will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

Effects of Negative Perceptions on African American Adolescent Men

Ideally, schools should be constructed in such a way that all students, irrespective of their statuses or backgrounds, feel nurtured and supported by adults who possess the utmost confidence in their ability to learn. Unfortunately, barriers preventing the realization of this ideal image of the educational system remain. As American classrooms become increasingly more diverse, teachers are expected to increase their cultural awareness and sensitivity, and recognize the unique experiences of students from diverse racial, ethnic and class backgrounds (Sleeter & Grant, 2007). As African American students are taught and counseled overwhelming by White middle class females, it would behoove everyone if these teachers and counselors became more effective in educating and counseling adolescent African American male students (Kunjufu, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Muller, 2002; Rashid, 2009). This reality is compounded by the fact that many of these pre-service and in-service teachers have not been adequately prepared, whether through their formal education or personal experiences/encounters, to interact effectively with minority students, much less, adolescent African American adolescent men (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Monroe (2005) suggests that this lack of familiarity with the nuanced cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors some African Americans exhibit can cause teachers to misinterpret African American adolescent men's behavior. This presents a genuine problem that can have lasting consequences on the educational experiences of African American male students.

Having their behaviors misconstrued is but one challenge some African American adolescent men encounter within the schools they attend. Swanson, Cunningham, and Spencer (2003) found that teachers' lowered academic expectations for African American

adolescent men were statistically significant predictors of bravado among young African American adolescent men. When African American adolescent men determined the school environment did not support and nurture their academic development, they were often more likely to disengage from school. Swanson and her colleagues concluded that with the proper support, African American adolescent men can construct more empowering views of themselves as competent learners rather than confirming preexisting stereotypes of African American men as inferior learners.

School identification and belongingness are also important constructs in education because of their relationship academic engagement (Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Honora (2003) conducted a qualitative study with African American adolescents to examine their levels of school identification. Honora found that irrespective of academic achievement, African American young men were more likely to receive feedback from teachers about their behavior rather than their academic potential or performance. Honora concluded that this tendency for teachers to focus disproportionately on African American young men's behavior while ignoring their academic potential could lead to a devaluation of academic achievement.

In his ethnographic study Duncan (2002) investigated the circumstances which precipitated African American adolescent men's marginalization in a Midwestern high school. Duncan presented the stories of students, teachers, and administrators to explore how this process of marginalization could be reversed to improve young African American men's educational outcomes. Duncan found that African American adolescent men were frequently denied the opportunity to discuss the systemic variables within the school that contributed to their disempowerment and marginalization. Duncan also

learned that stereotypes about African American men's intellectual abilities were rampant. In addition, African American adolescent men regularly reported that they felt ignored and mistreated by teachers, and unnecessarily surveilled and harassed by school administrators.

White students in Duncan's (2002) study were especially resentful of African American male students and characterized these students as "dependent" learners who were not excelling academically (p. 135). One student commented that African American adolescent men "need" significant assistance to achieve the lofty academic expectations of CHS (Duncan, 2002, p. 136). Duncan concluded that CHS personnel and district officials' lack of intervention spoke volumes about their lack of interest in alleviating the persistent dismissiveness experienced by African American adolescent men. Duncan (2002) believed that a redistribution of power within the school district was insufficient and would not ameliorate the problem encountered by African American men in this particular school primarily "because Black men are constructed as a strange population, that is, as a group with values and attitudes that are fundamentally different from other students, their marginalization and oppression are understood as natural and primarily of their own doing" (p. 140). Similarly, Fine (1986) and Fine and Rosenberg's (1983) seminal work found that recurrent instances of racial and class bias by teachers prompted minority students, many of whom were African American, to terminate their schooling. Following several critical incidents, including teachers' persistent disregard of their comments, these students concluded they could not express their frustrations with the educational system. Moreover, Fine learned that several of these students were persuaded or even advised by school administrators to actually terminate their schooling.

While it appears that unsupportive learning environments can have an adverse impact on African American men' educational experiences, the existence of racial stereotypes can have an equally pernicious effect on the performance of African American students (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Racial barriers and discriminatory behaviors have also been shown to produce maladaptive reactions among some adolescent African American men (Ford, 1993). As previously stated African American men are often depicted as hyperaggressive and pathological in nature both within schools and society in general (hooks, 2004; Jenkins, 2006). Pervasive negative stereotypes about African American men which exist in various mediums (e.g., print and visual media), can impact African American adolescent men's self-perceptions regarding academic performance (hooks, 2004) and how they are perceived by others (Giroux, 1996). As these illustrations are increasingly commonplace through the accelerated proliferation of social media (Giroux, 1996; hooks, 2004), members of society often internalize these images and apply them to future interactions with African American men (Davis, 2003).

Researchers have attempted to understand the effect of habitual racial discrimination on African Americans willingness to trust those institutions associated with the dominant White culture. Irving and Hudley (2005) conducted research to investigate the impact of racial barriers in this country on African American students' academic status and performance. The researchers hypothesized African American students who maintained high levels of cultural mistrust (Terrell & Terrell, 1981) would have less favorable academic outcomes. Cultural mistrust is an attitudinal adaptation to a legacy of racial, political, economic and social subjugation. In this study, Irving and

Hudley (2005) found that high levels of cultural mistrust were related to low outcome expectations and outcome values. These findings suggest that the perception of structural racism can lead African American students to maintain disheartening expectations about their ability to penetrate the existing opportunity structure even if they are academically successful.

Schmader, Major, and Gramzow (2001) conducted a study with a racially diverse group (i.e. African Americans, Latino, and European American) of students to assess the role of ethnic stereotypes in psychological disengagement in the academic setting. They found evidence suggesting that the perception of ethnic injustice is related to academic disengagement. Schmader and colleagues established that students are more likely to disengage if they believe that they are being mistreated in the educational domain. In a similar study, Smalls et al., (2007) found that African American Midwestern middle and high school students who had experienced more frequent incidents of racial discrimination were more likely to demonstrate decreased levels of academic engagement. Wakefield and Fajardo (2004) conducted such a study and presented some troubling findings. Students in this study reported that teachers were suspicious of their presence and "always watching them" (p. 7). In response to cues such as these, several African American adolescent men believed their access to college was impeded. One student said they were rarely engaged in discussion about college when interacting with their school counselor. Another student said the school counselor had discouraged him from applying to the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and prompted him to pursue a degree at a local community college. In this study, the persistent surveillance and diminished educational expectations served as a constant reminder to African

American and Latino students that not only were they different, they were perceived by adults within the school as educationally inferior to other students. Moreover, the students asserted that these incidents were rooted in the racially biased perceptions about young African American men that permeate society.

Rosenbloom and Way (2004) found that African American students in a multiethnic New York City school reported the existence of racial discrimination. Many African American adolescent men reported constant harassment by campus police and lowered teacher expectations. These observations prompted one young African American male to say "I'm like in a stereotype." Another student responded that being African American in this particular school was a genuine "struggle" (p. 435). This student said that the constant scrutiny was difficult to contend with and he, therefore, wanted it to end.

While causal relationships between prejudiced behavior and African American adolescent men's academic engagement could not be gleaned from the aforementioned research studies, inferences about such a relationship have been made nonetheless. It is believed that prejudice, racism, and discrimination exert tremendous influence on the psychological and social functioning of members of stigmatized racial/ethnic groups (Van Laar & Sidanius, 2001). Frequently, notions of racial/ethnic group inferiority can be internalized by racial/ethnic group members and these internalized beliefs can precipitate disempowering behavior. Fanon (1967) eloquently outlined the psychological burden experienced by marginalized and oppressed people of color. Fanon described the dual roles which members of oppressed groups have to occupy to achieve in racially biased and stratified societies. Van Laar and Sidanius (2001) concluded that while

attempting to undo racist depictions, members of racial/ethnic minority groups often unintentionally contribute to their continued marginalization by behaving in a manner that reinforces, rather than contests, racist stereotypes. For African American adolescent male students, such an approach often complicates and exacerbates their academic dilemma (Majors & Billson, 1992; Reese, 2004).

To address this issue many counselors and counselor educators design culturally relevant individual and group interventions to equip young African American men with useful strategies for counteracting negative experiences and encounters and enhancing their academic potential (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2007; Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Bradley, 2001; Muller, 2002; Utsey, Howard, & Williams, 2003). According to Polite and Davis (1999), schools have been unresponsive to the unique needs of African American youths while doing very little to correct the systemic and organizational flaws which impinge upon their success. Thus, African American adolescent men are repeatedly blamed for their own academic failures while various issues including systemic racism and economic and political marginalization are often ignored (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Brown, 2011; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Polite & Davis, 1999).

Therefore, swift action must be taken within educational institutions by educational personnel including professional school counselors to address the unique needs of African American male students (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Lee & Bailey, 1997, Muller, 2002). To do this, professional school counselors must first recognize how race is mobilized and the psychological and social impact it can have on African American adolescent men's academic performance (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999; Tatum, 1997). To this point, Lee and Bailey (2006) and Fashola (2003) encouraged school counselors to

monitor young African American men more consistently to determine whether they perceive their futures optimistically and whether the anticipation of barriers negatively affects their behavior and performance. School counselors are also encouraged and expected to advocate on behalf of their students and support academic success through various strategies (ASCA, 2003). These exhortations emphasize the importance of direct and culturally sensitive approaches to explore frustrations associated with roadblocks that can impede success.

African American Adolescent Men and Bronfenbrenner's Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1977) hypothesized that it would be problematic to ignore the interrelated nature of major systems operating in our lives. As a result, his ecological perspective considers examinations of how systems in which people exist and function correspond essential. This sentiment is reflected in Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem. For adolescent African American men, the mesosystem consist of the interrelation between the immediate and extended family and school setting, among other things. In the following section, interrelations and ruptures between these major systems in adolescent African American men' lives will be discussed.

Environmental factors that converge to impact adolescent African American men's desire to become and remain engaged in their schoolwork are under intense scrutiny (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995; Parham & McDavis, 1987). Redlining, stigmatization, high-stakes testing, poverty, and limited educational resources are but a few ecological factors that can threaten a large swathe of African American male students' academic functioning (Jenkins, 2006; McMillian, 2003; Tucker, 1999; Van Laar & Sidanius, 2001; The Schott Foundation, 2012). Arguably the most influential of

these factors comes in the form of racial barriers African American men encounter inside and outside of school (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Lee & Bailey, 2006; Wakefield & Fajardo, 2004).

Students who do not successfully adapt or perceive that their educational environment is insensitive to their cultural patterns tend to perform poorer academically. Often, African American men's vernacular, interactive and aesthetic styles are misconstrued by teachers as acts of defiance that are incompatible with academic success (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004; Majors & Billson, 1992). Teachers' inability to effectively communicate with African American adolescent men is frequently associated with this cultural incongruence (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Cultural incongruence is often intensified if teachers expect students to assimilate and conform to a desirable set of behavioral patterns without acknowledging or valuing the unique behavioral patterns that children bring to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Moreover, because a majority of a schools' educational community (e.g. school counselors, teachers, administrators) often differ from an overwhelming number of minority students in regards to race/ethnicity and gender, schools and the means by which students are taught appear culturally incongruent. If cultural incongruence persists, it can seriously jeopardize attempts to establish a working alliance between teachers and students, and thwart academic success. Palmer and Maramba (2010) highlight the frequency with which African American male students are funneled into less rigorous low ability academic tracks by teachers and school counselors. Cultural incongruence is often seen as the major reason African American adolescent men are often more likely to

be reprimanded, suspended, and expelled than students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds (Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Noguera, 2008).

On another note, perceptions students hold about society in general can impact how they perceive the usefulness or utility of educational attainment. Ford (1993) found that several high potential, yet underachieving African American students held cynical views about their professional futures because of existing racial barriers. Many of these students determined that racism and discrimination had prevented other educated and qualified African Americans from attaining their professional goals and they had, therefore, come to expect a similarly difficult time. Because these students concluded that racial barriers were often insurmountable for African Americans despite qualifications and academic attainment, they committed less effort in their pursuit of academic success.

Similarly, Mickelson (1990) found that African American students held conflicting evaluations of educational attainment. African American students in this study held positive abstract beliefs about educational attainment. This meant that they espoused the necessity of education in this country. Although these students reported a belief in the indispensability of education they also held negative concrete views about education. These concrete beliefs were derived from African American students' observations within their communities where African American high school graduates experienced tremendous difficulty accessing various professions. Frequently, racial discrimination was thought to be the primary barrier preventing African Americans from achieving their professional goals. These beliefs, which apparently permeated the

community, were heard and subsequently internalized by these African American students.

<div align="center">African American Adolescent Men and Bronfenbrenner's Exosystem</div>

Even if one is oblivious to their existence, Bronfenbrenner (1977) argued that structures operating in society indirectly impact the course of human behavior and development. Additionally, obliviousness to the existence and ramifications of the exosystem is a function of the fact that most members of society have limited conscious contact with this system. In regards to adolescent African American men, the exosystem consists of local, state, and federal organizations and privately owned media corporations. The social and academic landscape historically and contemporarily, as it pertains to African American men is especially relevant to this study and, therefore, warrant further exploration and elucidation.

Morris and Monroe (2009) implored educational researchers considering the educational status/outcomes of African American students in the South to first contemplate the present day implications of the historical legacy of politically sanctioned racial segregation. Morris and Monroe find this negligence by social science and educational researchers to examine correlations between race, place and educational outcomes for African Americans perplexing because, as they point out, "the majority of the nation's Black population has always resided in the region" (p. 21). Moreover, geographic location does more than denote one's physical position; rather geography has implications on students' social and academic development and performance (Morris & Monroe, 2009).

These entities which make up the exosystem are vital in the development of African American adolescent men for two fundamental reasons. First, sociopolitical and economic transformations at the local, state, and federal levels reverberate in the everyday lives of the citizenry. Perhaps nothing exemplifies this more than the startlingly swift post-industrial expansion of a global economy where neoliberal economic principles are of paramount importance (Giroux, 1996). Unlike the industrial/manufacturing economy which preceded it, the ability to compete and succeed within the new economy required exposure to advanced educational experiences the likes of which adolescent and young adult African American men were less likely to have had because of educational disenfranchisement and marginalization (Anderson, 2008; Kantor & Brenzel, 1992; Kozol, 1991; Wilson, 2009). In other words, those individuals with higher educational attainment and more specialized knowledge and skills were best equipped to seize more desirable positions in, what was at the time, a burgeoning technological society (Kantor & Brenzel, 1992; Wilson, 2009). Second, when discussing the impact of privately owned media corporations, some have critiqued the type of materials these corporations produce and disseminate to the public. Giroux (1996) considers how aspects of popular culture, in particular movies and hip-hop music, reinforce—sometimes intentionally other times inadvertently—rather than challenge traditional conceptions of Black masculinity as inherently pathological. Discussing the influence of popular culture on developing African American men hooks (2004) writes:

> Movies represent the caged Black male as strong and powerful (this is the ultimate false consciousness) and yet these images are part of the propaganda that seduce and entice Black male audiences of all classes. Black boys from privileged classes learn from this same media to envy the manhood of those who relish their roles as predators, who are eager to kill and be killed in their quest to get the money, to get on top. (p. 28)

Another oft mentioned byproduct of the existing exosystem that is closely

connected to the foregoing issues, is the eye-popping incidents of incarceration among

African American men:

> African Americans have been more acutely affected by the boom in incarceration than any other group. Blacks comprise over 40 percent of the current prison population, although they are just 12 percent of the U.S. population. At any given time, roughly 12 percent of all young Black men between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine are behind bars, compared to less than 2 percent of whites in the same age group. (Pager, 2008)

To make matters worse, it appears that deep seeded racial stereotypes contribute

significantly to disparities in rates of incarceration between African American and White

American citizens. Civil rights organizations report that the profiling of African

Americans, and especially African American men, contributes much to the

disproportionate number of African American men entering the criminal justice system

for drug related offenses (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Human Rights Watch speaks

specifically about the "war on drugs" initiated during the 1980's and how the association

between minorities and underworld street economy shaped policy and public perception

about who is most likely to be a drug offenders, and how drug offenders should be

prosecuted:

> It is impossible to determine whether and if so to what extent conscious racial hostility has influenced US drug control strategies. But even absent overt racial animus, race has mattered, influencing the development and persistence of anti-drug strategies. The emphasis on penal sanctions, for example, cannot be divorced from widespread and deeply rooted association of racial minorities with crime and drugs. The choice of crack cocaine as an ongoing priority of law enforcement—instead of the far more prevalent powder cocaine—cannot be divorced from public association of crack with African Americans, even though the majority of crack users were white. In short, unconscious and conscious racial stereotypes have affected public perceptions of drugs, crime, disorder, and danger, and helped shaped political and policy responses. (p. 5)

Because trends in incarceration can be contorted to reinforce the presupposed criminal proclivities of African American men, public perception about and sentiments towards African American men are often less than sympathetic (Eberhardt et al., 2004; Graham & Lowery, 2004; Jenkins, 2006). These beliefs about African American male inferiority and their propensity for criminal activity, in conjunction with the inverse belief about the inherent superiority of members of the dominant culture, have, some argue, gradually been woven into the ideological foundation upon which the contemporary American social landscape is constructed (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

African American Adolescent Men and Bronfenbrenner's Macrosystem

The macrosystem is a ubiquitous pattern of common sense notions and ideological beliefs which shape everything from the most routine interpersonal interactions to the organization of larger social institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The predominant ideological perspective in this country is a form of neoliberalism, characterized by rugged individualism and the notion of meritocracy as some of its fundamental tenets (Lipman, 2004). According to Hurn (1993), this means the modern American society is "viewed as increasingly rational and meritocratic, a society where prejudice, racism, intolerance, and the ignorance that fostered these evils would gradually disappear" (p. 56). Bonilla-Silva (2006) contends the idea of individualism and meritocracy are related to the liberalist ideology and that the architects of this country, in particular Thomas Jefferson, espoused these concepts and argued that through the implementation of liberalism persons are seen "as an "individual" with "choices…" (p. 28). Therefore, if an individual choses to apply him or herself, in theory, the best and brightest will inevitably rise to the top. Due to the entrenched and prevailing notion of

meritocracy, an individual and group's relative social mobility or immobility as well as the existing social order, are presented as naturally occurring phenomenon which are attributable to individual psychological or cultural traits/factors (e.g., intelligence, persistence) rather than a dynamic system of privileges and negating oppressions (Greenleaf & Bryant, 2012).

The liberalist ideology and attendant beliefs of meritocracy and individualism have found their way into the educational setting and are often used to describe underperforming minority students, especially adolescent African American men. Hence, as Dodd and Irving (2006) point out, rather than considering how systemic issues (e.g., racism, discrimination) may harmfully impact minority students' academic performance, "some teaching professionals prefer to say that they are "color-blind" and view all people the same" (p. 235). By operating from this perspective, teaching professionals and others within the school setting (e.g., professional school counselors) do not consider the degree to which instance of overt and subtle manifestations of racism (e.g., racial epithets, racial microaggressions) can affect minority students' performance (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Henfield, 2011; Solorzano & Yasso, 2001).

"The psychosocial development of African American male youth needs to be interpreted within the context of psychosocial issues that may impede development of this client group" (Lee & Bailey, 1997). While this approach to the provision of counseling services with all African American men has been endorsed, it is of the utmost importance that professional school counselors engage this group as they transition into adolescence (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005). Unless retained academically, students are usually in adolescence as they transition into middle school. In the forthcoming

sections, the middle school setting and the function of the middle school counselor will be explored in greater detail.

<div align="center">The Middle School Setting</div>

Following childhood, young people experience numerous physiological and intrapsychic changes. The changes indicative of puberty can have profound implications on students' personal and academic self-concept, identify formation and interpersonal functioning (Akos, 2005). Akos asserts these variables, especially identity formation, can have serious repercussion on students' post-secondary and career exploration and choices. Thus, for educators it was important to develop a post-elementary educational environment where students can develop optimally.

In their article on identity development in middle school students, Akos and Ellis (2008) wrote, "Conceptually, the emergence of middle schools is an attempt to attend to the unique growth and development of the emerging adolescent. The middle school format configures grades, classes, and learning opportunities to facilitate development" (p. 26). Interestingly, the emergence of the contemporary middle school configuration is a relatively new phenomenon. According to Akos (2005), the impetus for the emergence of middle schools occurred in the 1960s. Akos goes on to describe middle schools as places organized to "work with early adolescents…to be more student-centered, focus on creative exploration, allow for flexible scheduling, organize teachers into interdisciplinary teams and emphasize affective and cognitive development of students" (p. 95). At the time, proponents of the burgeoning middle school concept argued that students in early adolescence were immersed in a unique developmental process and that

the most effective way to foster their psychosocial and academic growth was to create a more comprehensive and responsive educational setting (Akos, 2005; NMSA, 2008).

Professional School Counseling

As Burnham and Jackson (2000) state clearly, the school counseling profession is designed to be responsive to the often unpredictable and fluctuating needs of society. Practically speaking, this means the manner in which pre-service and in-service school counselors are prepared and expected to perform their duties reflect the needs prioritized by various influential individual (e.g., parents, politicians) or stakeholders (e.g., communities, business people). However, the modern-day function and scope of professional school counselors' role, as put forth by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2003), differs greatly from how the subspecialty was initially envisioned (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2008). Evidence of this can be found in the fact that terminology used today to characterize the essence of the school counseling profession differs significantly from the terms used in the late 1800's when the profession first emerged. Previously, the term vocational guidance was used to describe counseling interactions between a counselor and student "similar to modern career counseling with a focus on the transition from school to work, emphasizing an appropriate client-occupational placement match" (Lambie & Williamson, 2004, p. 124-125).

In addition to the previous emphasis on client-occupational placement, contemporary professional school counseling also owes much to the work of seminal figures including Frank Parsons, who is commonly referred to as the Father of Guidance (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Paisley & Borders, 1995; Schmidt, 2008). Operating from

a Parsonian perspective, the formative years of guidance counseling were dedicated, almost exclusively, to counselor-client interactions intended to facilitate effective vocational placement. Also, this emphasis on the counselor-client dyad and vocational placement was instrumental in the emergence of contemporary trait-factor career counseling perspectives (Lambie & Williamson). During this period, directive counselor led interventions represented the quintessential approach to the counselor-client dynamic.

While the subspecialty of school counseling is indebted to the early contributions of the vocational guidance movement, additional sociopolitical developments have shaped not only the parameters in which contemporary professional school counselors operate, but how this role should ideally be performed. For instance, during the Cold War in which the United States and Russia competed for ideological supremacy, considerable federal dollars were allocated to secondary vocational counselors to assist in the identification of academically gifted students (Lambie &Williamson, 2004). It was believed these students would have enabled the United States to achieve various historical milestones that would exceed those of their Cold War combatant.

A more recent shift within the school counseling profession has been the increased emphasis placed on the nature and quality of services rendered to racially, ethnically, and other culturally different students (Akos & Ellis, 2008; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Muller, 2002). For culturally different students like many African American adolescent men, professional school counselors are encouraged to be cognizant of the social impact labeling and categorizing can have on the psychological, social, and academic functioning of African American students. Because of current trends in the education of African American men—African American adolescent men's

underrepresentation in talented and gifted programs and overrepresentation in special

education classes—the stigmatization African American male students experience may

be of particular concern for school counselors (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012;

Ladson-Billings, 2011; Whiting, 2006, 2009). A hallmark of the contemporary

functioning of professional school counselors that facilitates consistent interaction with

African American adolescent men to explore these things is the comprehensive school

counseling model.

Comprehensive School Counseling Models

    Burnham and Jackson (2000) point out that a school counselors' role and

professional obligations will vary depending on which comprehensive school counseling

model is used as a frame of reference. Although ASCA has offered what is, probably, the

most referenced model of comprehensive school counseling, by no means should this be

taken to mean that other incarnations have not existed. Myrick (1993) and Gysbers and

Henderson, (1988, 1994) have contributed much to how the contemporary school

counselor role is described, especially the duties school counselors are expected to

perform and how school counselors should allocate time to adequately perform these

duties to address students' developmental needs. According to ASCA (2003),

professional school counselors are advised to construct and implement comprehensive

school counseling programs because they provide the most efficient framework for

establishing consistent contact with students, teachers and other stakeholders to promote

positive student outcomes. ASCA encourages professional school counselors to work

collaboratively within their schools and districts to create these more comprehensive

school counseling programs that help to advance the fundamental academic mission of

their schools. Additionally, these programs clearly articulate the school counselor role in such a way to decrease the likelihood of being assigned a disproportionate amount of non-counseling related administrative duties. Another endorsement for the implementation of the comprehensive model is that this system provides each student access to the services rendered through the school counseling program. Finally, the school counseling program systematically assists teachers and administrators in disseminating knowledge and skills students need to function successfully in all relevant domains (e.g., academic, social/personal, occupational/professional).

ASCA (2003) goes on to say that the comprehensive model should be rooted in the profession's fundamental beliefs of education and development throughout the lifespan, rather than an emphasis on sickness and pathology, and encompasses specific core domains including academic and personal/social development, and preliminary career exploration and planning. School counselors should be innovative in designing and implementing developmentally appropriate interventions to explore academic, personal/social and career related issues into the existing educational curriculum. Furthermore, because ASCA maintains different expectations for elementary and secondary school counselors with respect to the execution of various counseling related duties (e.g., classroom guidance, individual planning, system support), middle school counselors have to address academic, personal/social and career-related topics in the most time-efficient manner. As the primary proprietor of the program, the professional school counselor should exhibit certain character traits and skills including advocacy, leadership, collaboration and a commitment to systemic change (ASCA, 2004).

While adhering to the guidelines and specifications of the comprehensive ASCA national model, state departments of education and school districts have the freedom to create comprehensive school counseling programs that correspond to the unique needs of the students they serve. For instance, the South Carolina Department of Education (1999) created its comprehensive school counseling model as "an essential component of the total instructional program through which all students have maximum opportunity for their total development, including *learning to live* (knowledge of self and others); *learning to learn* (education and academic knowledge); and *learning to work* (career planning and knowledge)." (p. 7). For the middle school professional school counselor, these foci take on monumental importance given the development of middle grade students (Thornburg, 1986). These foci and the implications for professional school counselors in middle school will be discussed in the following section. First, though, the counseling relationship between students and school counselors will be discussed since all subsequent interactions depend on how well this relationship is initiated.

The Counseling Relationship

While a concise description of the roles school counselors are expected to perform is essential to how school counselors are trained and evaluated, it is also vital for school counselors to be knowledgeable about the personal attributes and characteristics which help foster constructive relationships with the students they serve. Not surprisingly, many of these characteristics are virtually identical to those espoused by other helping professions (e.g., mental health/community counseling).

Lambert's (1992) analysis of counseling literature revealed the interrelated variables most often associated with the promotion of positive counseling outcomes and

therapeutic change. According to Lambert, nearly thirty percent (30%) of this positive therapeutic improvement can be isolated and attributed to the therapeutic relationship forged between the counselor/clinician and client. Much has been written on how the therapeutic alliance exists and operates among adult clinicians and clients; however, while undoubtedly significant with regard to understanding what makes counseling efficacious, this research has usually focused on counselor interactions with adults, which cannot necessarily be smoothly extrapolated to counseling interactions with children and adolescents (Baylis, Colins, & Coleman, 2011; Zack, Castonguay, & Boswell, 2007). Therefore, researchers have emphasized the importance of studies which attempt to better understand the counseling relationship between an adult clinician and younger clients. While sparse in nature, there are examples which can be explored.

Perhaps no other variable is as integral to counseling as the strength and integrity of the counselor client relationship, also known as the therapeutic alliance (Lambert, 1992; Zack, Castonguay, & Boswell, 2007). Bordin (1979) emphasizes the significance of the therapeutic alliance by stating "I propose that the working alliance between the person who seeks change and the one who offers to be a change agent is one of the keys, if not the key, to the change process" (p. 252). While Bordin put forth a conceptualization of the therapeutic alliance, a conceptualization consisting of three components—agreement on goals, tasks, and bond—bond will be explored here because of its relevance to the what and how of the actual relationship between school counselor and student. Baylis, Colins, and Coleman (2011) state "…the concept [bond] refers to the elements of trust and an emotional closeness experienced in the therapeutic relationships" (p. 82).

In a grounded theory exploration of the therapeutic alliance, Baylis, Colins, and Coleman (2011) conducted interviews with six (6) children and adolescents receiving services from a Canadian mental health program. From this study, The Child Alliance Process Theory was developed, which consists of "distal and proximal factors that influence the development of an alliance over time" (p. 86). The Child Alliance Process Theory posits that for children and adolescents the therapeutic alliance depends on how effectively the therapist periodically engages in Alliance Dependent Behaviors (ADB) and Alliance Expectant Behaviors (AEB) over the course of the relationship. Practically speaking the Alliance Dependent (ADB) behaviors were "the micro skills identified by participants which the therapist can attend to or initiate at will in a counseling relationship, e.g. being nice, active listening and expressions of caring" (p. 87) whereas Alliance Expectant Behaviors entail "skills in the therapeutic relationship that await opportunity for expression, e.g. respecting confidentiality, validating feelings, expressions of patience" (p. 88). Baylis, Colins, and Coleman stated that as the counselor on client embark on counseling there is an overrepresentation of ADB but that AEB increase as the relationship proceeds through four transitional periods called layers. According to Baylis, Colins, and Coleman (2011, p. 87):

1. Layer I—"…encompasses the most proximal factors associated with the person of the therapist as experienced by the child. This includes things such as being experienced as patient, nice, caring, and possessing a level of training that informs how to display these qualities in a meaningful way to distressed children."
2. Layer II—"…represents all of the micro skills valued by participants in the research such as the expression of sincere caring, patience, active listening, validating feelings, and less talk, and doing activities."
3. Layer III—"…represents the importance of a plan as it contains anxiety, and relates to problem solving from the perspective of the child client."
4. Layer IV—"…represents the importance of creating a sense of privacy and confidentiality."

In summary, this research explores qualitatively how it is incumbent for the counselor, when working with child and adolescent service recipients, to display certain attributes early in the counseling process to effectively establish rapport with the client. According to The Child Alliance Process Theory, it is of major importance that at the early juncture of the counseling relationship, behaviors such as being nice and polite, listening attentively, allowing the client to speak, an expression of caring and engaging the client in some manner of activities are integral because they constitute the bedrock upon which future alliance expectant behaviors (e.g., ethical practice and confidentiality) are established.

<div align="center">Middle School Professional School Counseling</div>

There are dramatic differences in the academic context and expectations of students attending elementary and middle schools (Johnson & Perkins, 2009) as well as concurrent changes in middle school students themselves (Scales, 2005). Scales elaborated on the uncertainty students experience as they enter adolescence and how this can also create havoc in the lives of parents and school personnel (e.g. professional school counselors, teachers, administrators, etc.). Scales contends that educators and parents who are entrusted with the responsibility of assisting these students must fully comprehend and appreciate these developmental milestones, and enjoy their interactions with these young people.

Similar to the changes which occurred historically within the entire profession of school (e.g., role/function, guidance rather than holistic emphasis), school counseling at the middle school level has experienced several critical metamorphoses as well, not the least of which being the need to define "a clear identity and describe their role and

function…" (Schmidt, 2008). However, Schmidt goes on to say that the middle school professional school counselor's ability to adequately articulate their function within the middle school setting is limited significantly by insufficient knowledge and skills tailored specifically to middle school students. Additionally, Thornburg (1986) suggested the middle school counselor must exhibit compassion and empathy for students as they enter adolescence and attempt to progress successfully through unfamiliar developmental stages.

Akos (2005) highlights the emergence of the existing middle school educational structure and how school counselors can address the unique needs of middle school students. In particular, Akos highlights students' psychosocial and cognitive development and transitioning into adolescence and how professional school counselors can be responsive to their intertwined academic, occupational, and psychosocial needs. Various organizations have put forth explicit expectations for professional school counselors (e.g., The National Middle School Association (NMSA) and The American School Counselor Association (ASCA)) to guide their services to effectively address the holistic development of middle school students. NMSA (2003) advises professional school counselors to render direct and indirect support services to students. These services are to be multifaceted in nature and should include "guidance and support services…Classroom guidance (including supporting advisory programs), one-on-one and small group guidance, peer mediation and peer tutoring, consulting with teachers and parents, and facilitating transition programs…" (p. 98). Similarly, ASCA's National Model (2003) indicates middle school counselors' approach should be firmly rooted in and derived from the philosophical and pedagogical foundation of the school and district.

Furthermore, ASCA expects professional school counselors at the middle school level to collaborate within and outside the school, manage their comprehensive school guidance programs effectively, and to advocate for systemic change intended to promote the overall development of all students.

With respect to the potential impact on students, The National Middle School Association (2003) commented that "middle level leaders can be cautiously optimistic that more fully comprehensive and developmental guidance programs can lead to positive student outcomes" (p. 3). The NMSA summarized the findings of extant professional school counseling research which illustrated that asserting comprehensive school counseling programs were correlated to middle school students' development is empirically justified and not mere speculation. In their research examining the impact of the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs, Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski (2001) made several important discoveries. First, their research revealed a relationship between comprehensive school counseling programs and students' sense of security and success. Deeper examination revealed middle school professional school counselors in this study were able to perform, through a commitment to students' development, critical duties including consistent classroom guidance, assistance with social/personal issues, academic and career development, group and individual counseling, school/community collaborations, and effectively communicating the objectives of the counseling program to others. Research has also revealed statistically significantly differences in the academic performance of students attending schools where a comprehensive counseling program has been in existence for a minimum of five

years and those schools where no such program exist (Sink, Akos, Turnbull, & Mvududu, 2008).

While research consistently reinforces the utility and efficacy of comprehensive school counseling models in general, the comprehensive school counseling model is comprised of distinct, yet complimentary components. As previously mentioned, the comprehensive school counseling model consists of a core guidance curriculum, individual planning (e.g., group and individual counseling), responsive services and system support (ASCA, 2003; NMSA, 2003). Recently, though, professional school counselors and counselor educators have conducted research on one or more of these components to determine, as best they can, which make the most significant contribution to positive student outcomes. It appears that most often, classroom guidance is the focus of this stream of research. Brigman and Campbell (2003) examined cohorts of fifth, sixth, eighth, and ninth grade students to evaluate the impact of the Student Success Skills (SSS), a classroom guidance and group intervention facilitated by the school counselor to address academic achievement and constructive school behavior. This study found that the SSS program was correlated with an increase in students' cognitive ability, sociability, and their ability to manage themselves more effectively. Poynton, Carlson, Hopper, and Carey's (2006) study on the effect of classroom guidance on conflict resolution yielded useful findings. The Conflict Resolution Unlimited program researched in this study was associated with an improvement in middle school students' self-efficacy with respect to addressing interpersonal conflict more effectively. From these data, one can glean some degree of confidence in the effectiveness of

comprehensive school counseling programs as it pertains to the promotion of positive student outcomes.

Student Perceptions of the Professional School Counselor and Their Roles(s)

As members of the contemporary K-12 school administration, school counselors are positioned to impact students' personal development, interpersonal communication skills, academic success and pursuit of career aspirations (Gallant & Zhao, 2011; Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008; Owens, Simmons, Bryant, & Henfield, 2011; Kuhn, 2004). Given this proximity to students, how and what school counselors can and should contribute to a school's educational mission is posited by members of the administration, community stakeholders and students themselves. For students, impressions about school counselors often pertain to the degree of confidence in school counselors' ethical behavior and professionalism or the various roles and duties performed by school counselors.

School counseling services are multifaceted and are tailored developmentally to address variety of personal/social, academic and occupational issues (ASCA, 2003). However, certain institutional constraints can interfere with school counselors' ability to articulate this to the student population which could, as a consequence, create a misconception as to what the function and foci of the school counseling program actually are. Thus, school counselors are advised to periodically evaluate the school counseling services they render to identify ways to maximize the implementation of the counseling program (ASCA, 2003). One way in which school counselors can engage in this type of evaluation is to assess students' attitudes and perceptions of the school counseling services at their disposal. Within the school guidance/professional school counseling

profession literature, this type of research is not in short supply and has intimated, in some manner or another, that students perceive school counselors as useful (Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008; Leviton, 1977; Pellegreno & Engen, 1975; Wells & Ritter, 1979).

Wells and Ritter (1979) found that a large percentage of students in a large high school saw their school counselors as a resource in relation to a number of duties and responsibilities, especially revising their existing schedule (81%), academic planning (51%) and mediating a dispute with a teacher (40%). Approximately one quarter of students responded they would consult their school counselors about issues including financial aid (24%), career exploration and decision making (26%) and selecting a possible college major (26%). Generally speaking, then, Wells and Ritter (1979) were able to conclude "…from the data…it appears that the counselors in the school surveyed are seen by the students as being there to provide help and assistance to them, as opposed to being disciplinary and supervisory personnel" (p. 173). While students expressed a confidence in school counselors and their knowledge about various school related issues, they were also identified areas of improvement for the guidance services at their school. Chief among these areas of improvement were the suggestions that measures should be taken to make accessing school counselors less time consuming (e.g., "few forms, less waiting, less clerical protection of counselors"), a desire for more counselors in general and counselors with applied knowledge of certain content areas.

Historically, school counseling researchers have questioned students about the counseling services they receive, especially those factors which facilitate and impede students' ability to connect with or relate to school counseling professionals. School

counseling literature is replete with data which illustrates how students perceive the guidance and counseling services at their disposal within their schools. This research is indispensable to the endeavor of professional school counseling because this data enables practicing school counselors to become more enlightened about their performance, how that performance is perceived, and what revisions may be necessary to be more responsive to the needs of the students they serve (Baylis, Colins, & Coleman, 2011; Furey, 1987; Lindsay & Kalafat, 1998; Wells & Ritter, 1979; West & Kayser, 1991). Additionally, students' feedback about the counseling services being rendered to them could also serve to shape the manner in which pre-service counseling students are prepared.

West and Kayser's (1991) survey research questioned 235 high school seniors about things which dissuaded them from seeking the assistance of their school counselors. West and Kayser arranged hierarchically these high school seniors' responses. The item which received the highest percentage of strong responses from students was "I do not like to tell a stranger about personal things" (29%). The items "Afraid counselor will pass information about me to other people"; "I did not have the time"; "I would be embarrassed to reveal my real concerns; "Counselor was busy or not in" were next highest strong responses with percentages of 18.3%, 15.7%, 15.7%, and 15.3% respectively.

Another issues correlated to the forging and quality of the relationship between an adult counselor and child or adolescent client are the characteristics demonstrated by the former and how those characteristics are perceived by the latter. Utilizing a focus group qualitative methodology, Lindsey and Kalafat (1998) questioned 9th graders about the

characteristics of school based personnel (e.g., school counselors, teachers, etc.) which

increased or decreased the likelihood they would be sought for consultation about various

personal issues and concerns. Although these students were questioned about

professionals other than school counselors, this research data is, nevertheless, germane to

this study. Lindsey and Kalafat were able to glean eleven (11) school based adult

facilitative characteristics from an initial group of one hundred (100) characteristics.

According to Lindsey and Kalafat these eleven characteristics included ""active problem

solving," "effective listening," "empathic," "familiarity," "genuine," "knowledgeable,"

"makes self available," "nonjudgemental," "projects a professional image," "relates to

teens," and "trustworthy"" (p. 179).

In a similar vein, Lindsay and Kalafat (1998) were able to identify those

characteristics 9th graders saw as barriers to their seeking the assistance of some school

based adults. From an initial grouping of 67 characteristics the researchers yielded eight

over-arching categories including ""active negativity," "breach of confidentiality," "dual

roles," "judgmental/shows favoritism," "nonhelpful responses," "out of touch with

teens," "psychologically inaccessible," and "too busy"" (p. 182). In regards to the

facilitative characteristics identified by students and how those characteristics are

germane to seminal contributors to the counseling profession, Lindsay and Kalafat (1998)

said:

> …a substantial portion of student responses was organized into categories that
> read like a primer on effective helping skills. Three of the categories reflect the
> basic facilitative conditions of empathy, genuineness, and warmth/acceptance (in
> this study, "nonjudgmental" and relates to teens") first posited by Rogers (1957)
> and ubiquitous in the therapy process literature. These facilitative conditions rest
> on a foundation of effective listening. (p. 183)

Conversely, of those characteristics that impede connecting with adult school based adults, none was more relevant to school counselors than when one appears "too busy" or "psychologically inaccessible." Lindsay and Kalafat (1998) said school counselors in this school may have appeared preoccupied or too busy when in actuality they were attempting to function with daunting counselor student ratios.

Bryan and Gallant's (2012) descriptive study design illustrates how high school African American adolescent men perceive their school counselors as well as how those adolescent men believe other adults perceive school counselors. The overwhelming majority of the two hundred fourteen African American male high school students agreed somewhat or completely that their school counselors were trustworthy, friendly, knowledgeable, accessible and helpful. As it relates to beliefs about the roles of school counselors at their schools, these same students agreed somewhat or completely with the notion that school counselors assist with academic problems, testing, student interventions, meeting with teachers and parents if necessary, and help students with career choices, scheduling classes and emotional issues, and divulge information only if a student is in imminent danger. Because students perceived their school counselors so favorable perceptions, they also did not see school counselors as a waste of time or someone who only spoke with students when they are failing. When questioned about how they believed others perceived their school counselors, these students believed that parents, teachers, principals and their peers saw the school counselor as at least somewhat helpful.

In addition to discerning how some school counselors are perceived by students research has also been instrumental in gleaning information about the level of students'

awareness about the counseling services offered in their school, how often they access these services and the degree of satisfaction they express with the services they have received. Gallant and Zhao (2011) broached these questions with a sample of 701 9-12th grade students. These researchers learned that a vast majority of the students surveyed were well aware of the multifaceted (e.g., personal, social, academic, college and career preparation) services rendered by school counselors in their schools; unfortunately, though, less than fifty percent of the students surveyed indicated that they had visited their counselor at least once to discuss college preparation, or career, personal/social or emotional related services.

Perceptions of school counselors have also been researched qualitatively within the school counseling literature. Rather than quantifying students perceptions of school counselors or the services they provide, qualitative analyses enable an in-depth analysis of the content and nature of these perceptions and counseling services rendered. For instance, Owens, Simmons, Bryant, and Henfield (2011) qualitative exploration of urban African American adolescent men's perceptions of school counseling services yielded three themes that are relevant to the current study. First, students in this study verbalized a belief that when school counselors are engaged they are an asset to the learning process. Students felt their school counselors advocated on their behalf and assisted them in successfully traversing school. Secondly, despite maintaining general positive beliefs about their school counselors the participants expressed a desire to receive more specific academic services including class selection, information on scholarships and effective study skills they believed promoted success. Lastly, the participants wanted more school

counselors in their schools, more direct student services, and for their school counselors to have an increased visible presence.

Based on the findings from these studies, it appears school counselors do themselves a tremendous favor—vis-à-vis professional advocacy and student outcomes—by periodically evaluating how their services are perceived by students and to publicize and reiterate the nature of their services to students to eliminate any misconceptions or erroneous preconceived that lead them to not perceive school counselors as a resource (Wells & Ritter, 1979).

Professional School Counseling and African American Adolescent Men

While significant conceptual work and empirical data on African American adolescent men's educational, occupational, and psychosocial status has been produced, there remains a limited body of research which examines middle school professional school counselors' role in supporting African American adolescent men's holistic development. Repeatedly, this literature fails to consider with any degree of consistency the role professional school counselors could potentially play in assisting middle school African American adolescent men with regards to the three critical domains (e.g., academic progress, personal/social development, career interests and exploration) through advocacy or leadership (ASCA, 2003, NSMA, 2003). Corbin and Pruitt II, (1999) implored professional school counselors to assume a more active role in the lives of their adolescent African American male students. To accomplish this objective, professional school counselor should exhibit a nonjudgmental posture towards adolescent African American men and encourage strategies conducive to academic, personal and

future career success (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2007; Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005).

However, various issues can compromise the school counseling professional's ability to affect change in the lives of the students they serve. For the professional school counselor, these issues can include mountains of administrative duties which can restrict their ability to develop rapport with students or a school administrator's inaccurate description of the counselor's role. Also, students may exhibit or express reticence towards the mere notion of speaking with the professional school counselor. For African American male students, such apprehensiveness could be because soliciting assistance from the school counselor may not be approved culturally. As Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005) state, conversing with counseling who may be considered an outsider or stranger, may defy the dictum 'What goes on in this house stays in this house!' To this point, historically, statistics have shown that as a group, African Americans have often underutilized counseling services when compared to Whites (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2001) due to stigma and a lack of insight into the purpose of the counseling profession (Sanders-Thompson, Bazile, & Akbar, 2004). Also, African Americans are more likely to terminate treatment prematurely particularly when the client perceives therapy to be culturally incongruent with their worldview (Smith, 2010).

In addition to racial and ethnic factors, gender can impact how African American adolescent men perceive counseling services. Gender, as previously mentioned, is a social construct which encompasses explicit and subtle messages about how men and women are supposed to behave. Because femininity is often associated with attributes including sensitivity, and characteristics such as a willingness to discuss emotions,

counseling may not be seen as incompatible with what it means to be a woman. By contrast, prototypical or hegemonic masculinity is characterized by, among other things, internal fortitude, independence, and a disinclination to discuss feelings and emotions (Addis &Mahalik, 2003; McCarthy & Holliday, 2004). Because these social categories (race and gender) cannot be compartmentalized, it is necessary for multiculturally competent helping professionals to understand and appreciate these variables, and the profound toll they can have on men of color (Liu, 2005). A component of this approach to counseling with men of color is the integration of aspects of their cultural backgrounds as a means of forging a therapeutic alliance that helps facilitate goal attainment. Therefore, middle school professional school counselors must understand that adolescent African American men's perception, thoughts, emotions and behaviors towards them have to be examined through the lens of a young person's evolving ideas about what it means to be a racialized (African American) and gendered (male) being.

Summary

In the preceding pages, the researcher presented existing educational and counseling literature on the historical and contemporary experiences of African American men in general and, in particular, their educational performance and functioning. Operating from Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological perspective, this review of literature highlighted personal, social, and systemic variables (e.g., adolescence, immediate family, neighborhood context, peer networks, educational environment, socioeconomic) most frequently associated with the academic performance of adolescent African American men. In the following section the methodology utilized in conducting this study are presented.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Overview

With the exception of some noteworthy examples (e.g., Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Moore, 2006), educational research has illustrated that large numbers of adolescent African American men experience chronic academic underachievement as they progress through the American educational system (Jackson & Moore, 2006, 2008; The College Board, 2010). Various explanations and practical interventions have been posited as a means of contributing to the overall development of young African American men students. Within the school counseling profession, there is an expectation that professional school counselors will take the necessary measures (e.g. development of comprehensive guidance programs, advocacy and collaboration within and outside the school, etc.) to promote personal/social, academic, and career success among all students, and especially those students whose attempts to achieve academically have historically been hindered (Bemak & Chung, 2005, 2008). This expectation is evidenced in not only the guidelines governing the profession of school counseling (ASCA, 2003) but also those organizations dedicated specifically to students' progress during adolescence (e.g., NMSA, 2003). Operating from this logic, this study explored the phenomenon of school counseling from the perspective of middle school-aged African American adolescent men.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of research study was to explore middle school African American men's perceptions of and experiences with their school counselors. The research questions for this study were:

1. How do African American adolescent men middle school students describe the purpose of school counseling?

2. How do African American adolescent men middle school students describe their expectations of their school counselor(s)?

3. How do African American adolescent men middle school students describe their experiences with the school counselor(s)?

4. How do African American adolescent men evaluate their school counselors' performance?

5. How do African American adolescent men believe their decision to speak with their school counselor would be perceived by their peer group?

6. How do African American adolescent men believe their decision to speak with their school counselor would be perceived by their family?

Research Design

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has unique characteristics which distinguish it from empirical quantitative research. Qualitative research reflects distinct ethical (e.g., concerns of morality), epistemological (e.g. how does one know the world?), ontological (e.g., what is the nature of reality), and methodological (e.g., what are the most effective means of obtaining insight about the world) underpinnings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). These underpinnings are evidenced in the subjectivity of the researcher (e.g., researcher as the primary research instrument), the researcher's position and posture in relation to the subject/topic of investigation, the formulation of research questions, and the methods by which the researcher acquires research data.

Phenomenological Qualitative Research

Patton (2002) states that phenomenological research inquiry explores "how human beings make sense of experiences and transform experiences into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 104). Patton iterates that phenomenological researchers are ultimately interested in "the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of this phenomenon for this person or group of people" (p. 132). Similarly, Creswell (2007) said that the phenomenological researcher is interested in how individuals experience a particular occurrence. Patton (2002) concludes that through the methodical implementation of phenomenological techniques, the researcher invites the person to describe how they perceive, characterize, judge, and make sense of the phenomenon under investigation. Consequently, "phenomenologists work much more from the participants' specific statements and experiences rather than abstracting from their statements to construct a model from the researcher's interpretations as in grounded theory" (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007, p. 252).

Researcher Subjectivity Statement

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative methodology demands the researcher to recognize that because they are the primary research instrument they must "monitor those perspectives that might, as you analyze and write up your data, shape, skew, distort, construe, and misconstrue what you make of what you see and hear" (Glesne, 1999, p. 109). In other words, it is essential and incumbent upon the qualitative research to take every conceivable measure, including disclosure about their connection to the research they conduct, to reassure the reader that their personal experiences did not compromise the authenticity of the data.

The researcher is a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at a Research I institution in the Midwestern region of the country. Dating back to graduate school, the researcher has utilized his academic experiences and professional networks to explore and address the psychosocial and educational experiences of adolescent and young adult African American men; at the doctoral level this has involved a more critical examination of the role professional school counselors can play in the development of this population. Presently, the researcher serves as a full-time counselor at a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) located in the Southeast. In this capacity, the researcher provides individual academic counseling and career exploration services to undergraduate students who either initiate contact with the Office of Student Affairs or have been referred by a faculty person or other staff member. Additionally, the researcher collaborates with other staff members in The Office of Student Affairs to engage in program development to recruit and retain students.

As a K-12 student, the researcher had limited encounters with his professional school counselors. Upon reflection, this lack of contact was not a result of anything school counselors did or did not do, but rather to perceptions about the school counselor and what they purpose they could serve in the researcher's personal, academic, or professional development. Furthermore, it should be noted that during his K-12 educational tenure, no mandate regarding the frequency or nature of school counselors' contact with students existed as it does now (e.g., ASCA National Model, comprehensive school counseling models). It was not until the researcher entered doctoral studies that a true appreciation for the significance of the professional school counselor was fully developed. It is this realization, in conjunction with the statistics on the widespread

educational underperformance of many adolescent African American men that prompted this study.

The researcher worked diligently to avoid making presumptions about the research setting or participants based on previous experiences; however, the qualitative research approach demands an honest discussion of potential biases which could, if not properly bracketed, distort the data collection and presentation process. The researcher's sensitivity to the current academic and social dilemma of many adolescent African American men constitutes one significant potential bias. This is significant and potentially problematic because "Researchers are tempted to talk primarily with people they like or find politically sympathetic" (Glesne, 1999, 102). Because researchers have discussed how insensitive and inhospitable academic settings marginalize and alienate African American men (Duncan, 2002; Ferguson, 2001), or the adverse impact of blatant and subtle racial stereotypes on minority students' performance (Allen, 2010; Henfield, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995), it was essential for the researcher to not presume these issues or concepts would have any bearing whatsoever on how the participants responded to the research questions.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

Description of City and School Districts

Eventually, this study involved five students from the capital city of the Southeastern state who attend two schools in two separate school districts. According to the US Census Bureau website (2013), as of 2010, the state and city where the study was conducted had 4,625,364 and 129,765 residents respectively. The middle schools represented in this study are in the capital and are members of two districts that bear the

name of the geographic center of the state. Allen Middle School is located in School

District One, while Destiny is located within School District Two. The websites for

School District One and Two read respectively:

> School District One is the state's seventh-largest school district. We educate 23,000 students who represent 41 countries and as many languages. Geographically, our district stretches over 482 square miles. Our 50 schools and centers are nestled in urban, suburban and rural communities, from downtown Columbia to St. Andrews to Lower Richland.
> School District Two serves more than 26,000 students (including adult education and pre-kindergarten) in 39 locations throughout the district: 18 elementary schools, seven middle schools, five high schools, four magnet centers, two district-wide child development centers, and two alternative schools. Our newest schools are built to LEED specifications.

Description of Individual Schools

Educational accountability is a primary concern of the school districts where

participants currently attend school, and this commitment to accountability is

demonstrated in how the schools are assessed annually. The State Department of

Education displays publicly an annual report of the academic progress for each school

district which reveals the progress being made towards long-term academic goals. A

profile for the two schools in this study is provided in Appendix C. The absolute rating

denotes a school's progress towards the state's 2020 performance vision of equipping all

students with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully compete for professional

opportunities in an evolving global economy and contribute actively to the creation of a

more democratic society. According to the state, the determination as to whether this

performance vision is being fulfilled is based on students' performance on evaluations of

English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Writing.

Sampling and Identifying Potential Research Participants

Since the purpose of this study was to investigate middle school African American adolescent men's experiences with their school counselors, it was necessary to identify prospective participants who possessed the necessary criteria to satisfy that purpose. Hence, participants in this study were located and recruited through purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) writes that the rationale for purposeful sampling is to achieve "an in-depth understanding" from "information-rich cases" (p. 46). Due to the purpose and proposed phenomenological methodology of this study, purposeful sampling, is justified because participants must "have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (Kruger, 1988, p. 150). According to Creswell (2007), it is recommended that phenomenological researchers seek to interview a maximum of ten (10) research participants as this may generate adequate data from which the researcher can initiate data analysis. This number was achieved initially but five prospective participants who did not satisfy the minimum number of counselor contact criteria were removed from consideration. Two follow up attempts were made to replace these participants but these attempts were unsuccessful. Although ten participants were not interviewed for this phenomenological study, through data analysis process, a point of saturation or repetitiveness (Wertz, 2005) with regard to aspects of school counseling did occur.

Participants in this study identified as African American male students enrolled at any middle school located in the state, who had at least two direct contacts (e.g. individual counseling, group counseling, and/or classroom guidance) with their professional school counselor. Gender and ethnic identification and contacts with school counselors were self-reported and triangulated with a demographic questionnaire

distributed before the actual study was initiated. Middle school enrollment was verified

by the participants' parents/guardians. As it pertains to other variables (e.g., age, grade

or socioeconomic status), the following expectations/specifications existed: The middle

school setting is comprised of grades 6-8; usually, unless retention or accelerated

promotion have occurred, students in the 6th-8th grade are between the ages of 11 and 14,

as such, students who are younger than 11 or older than 14 were not eligible to

participate. Socioeconomic status, a variable long since correlated to educational success

(Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Kozol, 1991), did not serve as a specification for participation

in this study.

Participant Selection

Conversations with prospective research sites did not begin until approval from

the Institutional Review Board (IRB) had been received. Upon receiving IRB approval,

the researcher contacted the Pastor of a local Baptist church in the state. A description of

the research study was given to the Pastor to review; after reviewing this description, the

Pastor made the determination to allow a brief presentation to be made to his

congregation. This church was identified to achieve convenient and purposeful sampling.

A sample of convenience was sought because financial constraints (researcher was

unemployed at the time of data collection) prevented the researcher from traveling

significant distances to collect data. With regard to purposeful sampling, this church was

selected because the congregation is almost entirely African American and was,

therefore, presumed to have a sufficient supply of worshippers who satisfy all of the

research criteria (e.g., identify as a male, African American middle school student with a

minimum of two counseling interactions with their school counselors).

Participants were screened if they volunteered to participate after the presentation was made to the congregation. Several students and their parents or guardians expressed interest in contributing to the study by providing their contact information. Ten prospective participants and their parents or guardians were identified. However, this number dwindled to five after it was revealed that five of these prospective participants possessed some but not all of the prerequisite research criteria; five adolescents were disqualified from consideration because although they were in middle school and identified as African American and male, they did not have the minimum number (two) of counseling interactions with their school counselors in the current or previous academic year. Because this study sought to explore participants' perceptions about and experiences with their school counselors, actual counselor contacts were an obvious prerequisite for participation.

<div align="center">Procedure</div>

Prior to initiating this study, the researcher completed the mandatory Institutional Review Board (IRB) research paperwork. After receiving approval from IRB, the researcher established contact with the Pastor of a local Baptist church to discuss the possibility of utilizing his church as a place to recruit participants for this this research study. The researcher created a description of the research study including the purpose and significance of the study, and what would be expected of each participant (e.g., the number scheduled interviews, the duration of those interviews); this description was then provided to the Pastor for him to review, modify, or approve outright. After approving the description, the Pastor allowed the researcher to conduct interviews at the church with participants who had been recruited. With the Pastor's assistance, a schedule was created

and a secluded location for these interviews to take place was identified. Two weeks

after approving the document describing the dissertation, the Pastor allowed the

researcher to read the description during the 11:00 am Sunday morning service.

Individuals who were interested in participating were instructed to provide their contact

information and times they preferred to be contacted. The researcher was available to

answer questions directly; however, no such questions were posed by prospective

participants or their parents or guardians at that time. This one presentation yielded 10

individuals who expressed interested in eventually participating in the study.

     The researcher reached out to the 10 interested participants to coordinate times to

become better acquainted, provide the informed consent documentation, answer any

questions participants or their parents or guardians may have had, and to elaborate further

on the purpose of the study. Per the Pastors wishes, these meetings were coordinated

during the week during the hours of Bible study in classrooms located in the church

basement. It was the Pastor's belief that this time and location would maximum

participation. The first interview was scheduled on the second Wednesday following the

presentation to the congregation. Arrangements were made to meet briefly with the other

prospective participants on that Wednesday to provide the informed consent paperwork

and to schedule times for their interviews to occur. When the researcher met with the

other four individuals, it was then revealed they had not had the prerequisite number of

school counselor contacts. Although these individuals were aware of their school

counselors and knew their names, they had not had any substantive face-to-face

encounters with their school counselors. Conversations with these individuals about

subsequent interview times were suspended and the originally scheduled interview was conducted at that time.

Due to the elimination of more than half of the preliminary sample, two subsequent presentations to the church congregation were made to solicit additional participants. It was hoped that this subsequent presentation would attract members who had been absent for the initial presentation and stimulate their interest in participating. Following this presentation, four (4) additional participants expressed an interest in participating. After providing the necessary informed consent documentation and answering any questions they had about what was expected of them, times to conduct the interviews were scheduled. Rather than having the interviews conducted during the week at the church, the parents of the four new participants all requested that initial and follow-up interviews be conducted on weekends, preferably at their homes or places in the community (e.g., McDonalds). The parents stated that work schedules and additional responsibilities would not allow them to transport their sons to the church for these interviews. To satisfy the parents, these requests were honored.

As was the case with the first interview, the four new parents were provided the informed consent documentation. These were returned to the researcher before the initial interview was conducted. Additionally, the parents received a lay summary (Glesne, 1999) or written biographical sketch that discussed the study in further detail and why the researcher chose to pursue it. Glesne says the lay summary is a valuable component of the pre-data-collection phase because "it prepares participants to take part most effectively for data collection" (p. 35). Participants and their parents were also reminded that a gift card in the amount of ten dollars to either GameStop or Barnes and Nobles

would be given to participants at the conclusion of the follow-up interview. Only after participants' and their parents' questions had been answered completely were the initial interviews conducted.

Data Collection

Initial and Follow-up Individual Interviews

Two interviews were conducted with each participant. The individual interviews served as one component of the data collection process. Prior to initiating the initial interviews, the participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire/survey. The demographic questionnaire asked participants to provide their name, age, school name, a description of current academic performance (e.g., A, B, C, D, F), their level of enjoyment with school, the frequency of contact with school counselor for the previous and current academic years, issues discussed with the school counselor, a description of the effectiveness of their interactions with the school counselor (e.g., helpful, extremely helpful, not helpful at all), and the factors which impede or encourage interactions with the school counselor. This survey can be found in Appendix One. This questionnaire represented an attempt to increase the trustworthiness of the study by accumulating supplemental information associated with the overall purpose of the study (Glesne, 1999). While the participants were given the opportunity to describe their perceptions of their school counselor on the demographic questionnaire/survey, the initial individual interview was intended to constitute the primary mode of data collection where participants were provided the opportunity to elaborate on the comments made on the demographic questionnaire/survey.

Operating from the guidelines of phenomenological research, the researcher endeavored to create a relaxed environment for the interviews that would "yield a conversation, not a question and answer session" (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). To accomplish this, the researcher attempted to be non-directive, avoid pretentious or judgmental behavior, and convey to the participants that the interview was a collaborative venture where learning about their perceptions and experiences with the school counselor was the primary goal (Thompson, Locander, &Pollio).

The follow-up interview was used as a time for verification through member checking where participants were asked to determine if the researcher had accurately portrayed the essence of what they expressed during the initial interview. There were only two instances where something was arrived at inaccurately from the first interview: with Jay, the researcher misunderstood and confused how Jay's school counselor utilizes participation in activities outside of school (e.g., G's to Gents and 100 Black Men of ------); with Hines the researcher misunderstood which counselor was being described and where this counselor was employed. In both cases, the participants corrected the researcher during the follow-up interviews and those corrections are reflected in the presentation of the data.

Potential Risks to Participants

The following risk was associated with students' participation in this study. Because participants were asked to describe their experiences with their school counselors and their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about their school counselors, they were informed that their responses may stimulate an emotional or psychological reaction. The researcher reiterated to the participants that if such reactions occurred, they

reserved the right to temporarily suspend or discontinue altogether their participation in the study without consequence. None of the participants demonstrated or voiced any such concern or emotional or psychological reactions, and they all remained for the duration of the study.

Data Analysis

To contribute to the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher solicited the assistance of peer debriefer and external auditors. Due to the dispersed locations of the external auditors (e.g., Georgia, Virginia) these encounters occurred exclusively through email or verbally by phone. Contact with the peer debriefer occurred on a weekly basis. The initial contact with the peer debriefers and external auditors was for the purpose of asking their assistance and then when the meaning units and initial codes had been created. The peer debriefer and external auditors provided their feedback electronically in Microsoft Word, verbally on the phone, or through direct contact. Conversations about their feedback occurred during phone conversations or in person.

In keeping with the tenets of phenomenological data analysis, the researcher began the process of data analysis with the transcribing of the audio recorded, during which particular attention was paid to "the participant's expression and meaning in the broadest context" (Wertz, 2005, p. 172). The researcher relied heavily on the transcribed data to achieve: 1). an emic understanding of the phenomenon and 2). an independent, non-theoretical source of information about the phenomenon under study informed by the participants themselves (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). The interviews for all participants—one initial and one follow up interview—ten in all, were created in separate Microsoft Word documents.

After transcribing the data the researcher began the process of assigning codes to the data; these codes served as preliminary meaning units which were a precondition for more thorough data analysis. The codes were created and compiled in another Microsoft Word document separate from the transcribed interviews. In this coded Microsoft Word document, colors were applied to participants' direct quotes to identify and distinguish participants from one another. The preliminary codes were copied from the transcribed interview documents and pasted in the vertical comments window to the right of the coded Microsoft Word document. These initial codes were created by taking the first letter of each word in a participant's quotes. So, for instance, POSC/HKWE equaled "purpose of school counseling/help kids with emotions." These codes were then organized around and underneath preliminary themes underlined in bold.

To establish these meaning units and eventual codes the researcher sought to capture what the participants stated explicitly about the phenomenon of interest. The researcher:

> reads between the lines and deeply interrogates in order to gain access to implicit dimensions of the experience-situation complex…the phenomenological researcher continually focuses on relations between different parts of the situation and the psychological processes that subtend it while attempting to gain explicit knowledge of how each constituent contributes to the organization of the experience as a whole. (Wertz, 2005, p. 172)

As data analysis continued Patton's (2002) data analysis procedures were also utilized. These procedures included:

a. Epoche—the researcher focused on the participants' written and verbally communicated words to understand the phenomenon under investigation rather than attempting to impose theories onto what the participants expressed. Secondly, the researcher was cognizant to suspend preconceived notions about

the data and participants by maintain a document apart from the data to record personal perceptions, affective and cognitive reactions. Again, this was done to avoid intertwining personal perceptions with the actual statements about the phenomenon under investigation.

b. Phenomenological reduction—this involved bracketing out the world and presuppositions to achieve untainted and genuine data. Throughout this study, bracketing was important for two reasons. First, without the proper bracketing, the researcher's experiences in a doctoral counselor education program (e.g., classwork, practicum and internship) and as a former counselor educator could have influenced how this study was organized, how data was acquired, or subsequently analyzed and presented. Second, the researcher's own experiences with school counselors could not negatively influence how this study was conducted. Therefore, terms associated with the essence of counseling and how counseling services are rendered (e.g., informed consent, rapport, empathy, listening, confidentiality, trust, etc.) were not used unless expressed by the participants themselves. It was the participants' descriptions of their experiences with their school counselors, rather than the researcher's perceptions or counseling literature that were the focus during data analysis.

c. "Horizontalization" of the data— all data was examined equitably rather than having certain pieces of information prioritized over others. The researcher began the process of generating meaningful codes by creating preliminary the meaning units emerging from the data. To accomplish this, the researcher relied on member checking and the assistance of the external auditors and a

peer debriefer. Members were asked to examine these tentative meaning units for accuracy and the external auditors and peer debrifer were provided the opportunity to question the legitimacy of these clusters. Throughout this process data found to be "irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping" will be eliminated (Patton, 2002).

d. "Structural description"— the researcher questioned participants about the meaning units and codes to ensure they reflected their perceptions and experiences with their school counselors.

e. Process of integration—the final process of phenomenological data analysis included the integration of the agreed upon codes and the descriptions of the meanings of experiences provided by research participants.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

Credibility of Findings

To contribute to the credibility of the findings several measures were taken. First, it was important to exhibit "*neutrality* with regard to the phenomenon under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 51). By neutrality the researcher does not mean objectivity or ambivalence; instead here neutrality means analyzing the data to decrease the possibility that data will be tainted or obscured by the researchers' desires and increases the chances the findings are an honest reflection of the participants actual words, ideas, and sentiments. To achieve this, the following techniques were employed:

Triangulation. Triangulation, or the process of acquiring data from multiple sources, is advised in qualitative research (Glesne, 1999). Patton (2002) stated that triangulation between multiple data sources provides qualitative researchers with a more

credible interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. Three triangulation strategies were implemented for this study. First, to obtain a more comprehensive view of the guidance/counseling programs and services/activities rendered to participants in this study; participants' comments were triangulated with digital artifacts (e.g., mission statements, parent newsletters) about the schools and its guidance/counseling departments publicized on the schools' Internet webpages. Second, triangulation of data was also achieved in this study by comparing and contrasting participants' comments about frequency of contact, issues discussed, and satisfaction with the quality of services rendered by their school counselors with their responses on the demographic questionnaire/survey completed prior to the initial individual interview. Thirdly, investigator triangulation was accomplished through peer debriefing, the utilization of two external auditors and member checking. During email and direct contact with the peer debriefer and external auditors, the researcher provided updates and insights about data collection and analysis. Peer debriefing was beneficial through the data analysis process as the researcher was able to speak with someone informed about the nature of the study but detached enough from the research process to provide unbiased feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The external auditors are both currently Assistant Professors of Counselor Education and Supervision; one at a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in Georgia, the other at a large Predominantly White institution (PWI) in Virginia. They have both assisted in the conducting of qualitative research and served as unaffiliated persons responsible for reviewing and examining everything including interview strategies, preliminary meaning units and codes, and coding strategies. Member checking

occurred during the follow-up interviews. With a copy of the transcribed interviews, the researcher presented the participants with the preliminary meaning units and asked them to determine whether these units accurately represented their responses and what they intended to convey during the initial interviews. There were corrections that needed to be made regarding the correctness of data with regard to Jay and Hines initial interviews. These revisions were made during the follow-up interviews. Lastly, methodological triangulation was achieved in this study through direct initial and follow-up interviews conducted with participants and the demographic questionnaire. For instance, information was gleaned from participants' responses on the demographic questionnaire as well as data iterated and reinforced through the course of the initial and follow-up interviews.

Peer Debriefing. The researcher also received the assistance of a peer debriefer with whom conversations about this study were had on a weekly basis. The peer debriefer is also a doctoral candidate at a Research I University in the Midwest who is also currently conducting a qualitative dissertation. The researcher asked the peer debriefer to pay particular attention to how data was collected and analyzed and to verbalize any concerns about the intrusion of researcher biases or preconceived notions. By debriefing with this peer, the researcher was taking a deliberate measure to contribute to the confirmability of findings by not allowing subjectivities to distort the data analysis process.

External Auditors. Rather than relying solely upon personal interpretations of the data through the data collection and analysis process, the researcher sought the assistance of two external auditors. The external auditors inspected "the research process

and product through "auditing" your field notes, research journal, analytic coding scheme, etc." (Glesne, 1999, p. 32). Both possess experience in qualitative research.

Member Checking. Member checking was used to contribute to the credibility of the findings of this study. Member checking is the process of soliciting participants' feedback on the interpretations made from their comments. Participants were questioned about whether the researcher had accurately represented their statements about their school counselors. Member checking occurred periodically throughout the initial interview and at the time of the follow-up interview.

Field Notes. A self-reflexive journal was maintained throughout this process. The researcher made notes during the initial and follow-up interviews. These notes were thoughts and ideas for follow-up questions or questions that needed clarification. At the conclusion of the initial interview the researcher sat and wrote notes about what had been discussed and what appeared to be salient topics; this included a general reaction and perception about how the interview was conducted. These field notes and comments were an effort to accurately record what occurred in the research settings as well as an attempt to remain aware of preconceived notions and perceptions which could have altered how the research data was collected and subsequently analyzed and reported (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002).

Transferability of the Findings

Transferability of findings refers to the degree to which the insights in a particular qualitative study have applicability in other comparable settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although Destiny Middle School is much more racially diverse than Allen Middle School, more than 75% of the student population at both schools is on free and reduced

lunch. According to Lincoln and Guba, an effective strategy for increasing the transferability of qualitative findings is through the inclusion of thick descriptions. Patton (2002) and Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) insist that this is the hallmark of a credible qualitative research study. Unlike synopses or shallow participant descriptions, thick and rich participant descriptions are elaborate detailed accounts of the phenomenon being researched. Between the utilization of member checking, triangulation, and external auditors, the researcher made efforts to arrive at sensible inferences from participants' quotes about their school counselors.

Dependability of the Findings

Qualitative research findings are considered dependable when they are an accurate representation of the data provided by research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an attempt to contribute to dependable findings the researcher invited individuals uninvolved in the research study to examine the manner in which the study was completed as well as the product of the study. This audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) serves as a record for others to use to either verify or replicate the study. Using Lincoln and Guba's position as a guide, this study's audit trail is comprised of:

1. Unanalyzed data—audio taped interviews and demographic questionnaire findings.

2. Data reduction and analysis—the researcher's field notes made during and immediately following the initial and follow-up interviews and transcribed interview data.

3. Data reconstruction and synthesis—preliminary meaning units and codes, feedback from external auditors and peer debriefer.

4. Process notes—Email correspondences with prospective research site contacts, dissertation advisors, and external auditors, Institutional Review Board and informed consent documentation, demographic questionnaire, interview transcriptions, meaning making units and coding documents, bank statements documenting purchase of gift card incentives, audio recording of interviews were all maintained as process notes.

5. Intentions—Intentions and expectations about and for this study have been communicated through the lay summary, dissertation proposal, Institutional Review Board proposal to the following entities and individuals: Institutional Review Board Committee, prospective research site contacts (e.g., school district officials, Pastor), prospective and eventual research participants, parents and guardians.

Confirmability of the Findings

As the primary research instrument, the researcher has attempted to assure the reader that the participants' words have not been misrepresented nor have the interpretations made from the participants' words been obscured by bias or personal interests. The confirmability of qualitative research findings is evident in the findings being derived from the respondents' responses rather than the researcher's self-interests (Lincoln &Guba, 1985). To achieve confirmability in this study, triangulation (e.g., data, investigator, and methodological), member checking, and field notes were all utilized as strategies to contribute to a trustworthy study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Overview

In this chapter, the findings from the study are presented. As mentioned previously in the methodology section, the researcher created meaning units from the participants' responses and from these meaning units, general themes describing perceptions of and experiences with school counselors were generated. Responding to interview questions, participants offered their perceptions and discussed encounters with their school counselors. Participants also discussed the importance they ascribe to school counseling in general and their school counselors in particular. Prior to presenting the findings, a brief biographical sketch of each research participant is provided; this sketch is composed from the written data each participant provided on the demographic questionnaire/survey prior to the initial interviews.

- Hines – is a 13 year old 8th grade student at Destiny Middle School. Hines describes his current level of school performance as a C. Responding to the question about whether he enjoys school Hines says "Yes, I enjoy school because you get to meet new people, make friends and also the teacher I know what I want to do in my future. So yes, it's because of the teachers, the counselors [sic] on why I love school." Hines says he has worked with his counselor "about 8" times this past academic year. He typically discusses academic or school issues, job or career issues and "teacher problems" with his school counselor.

- Jay – is a 13 year old 8th grade student at Allen Middle School. He reports that his current level of education performance is a B. When asked on the initial questionnaire about whether he enjoys school he states "yes, I think school is an excellent place of challenging learning and that is a good place for a person to learn."

He estimates he has worked with his school counselor 15 times this past year and 3 times in the previous year. When asked to identify the things discussed when interacting with the school counselor, he said academic or social issues, personal issues, social issues and other (e.g., bullying, drug use, class discussions). He describes his interactions with the school counselor as extremely helpful. Lastly, when questioned about the factors influencing his decision whether or not he speaks with his school counselor about an issue, Jay wrote "The factors that will is that I always be [sic] lifted from him. He always have [sic] my back, and he helps other people, also me with problems."

- Keyshawn – a 12 year old 7th grade student at Allen Middle School. Keyshawn indicates that he is currently a C student. About whether he enjoys school, Keyshawn writes "Yes because we do a lot of stuff and go on a lot of field trips." When asked about the frequency of contacts with his school counselor, Keyshawn says he has interacted with his school counselor three times, and topics of conversation with the school counselor include social and job or career related issues. Keyshawn evaluates his interactions with his school counselor as helpful and says the factor that has the most influence on his decision to speak with his school counselor is whether "they will give you good advice when you need it."

- Vernon – a 13 year old 8th grade student at Destiny Middle School. Vernon describes himself as a B student. For Vernon, school is enjoyable "because it is a place where I can only improve. I enjoy getting better at the subjects that will determine my future." Vernon says he has visited with the school counselor twice this past academic year and four times in the academic year before that. The issues discussed with his school counselor are socially and occupationally oriented. Vernon noted that he has found his interactions with his school counselor to be helpful. Lastly, when asked what factors influence his decision about whether to speak with the school counselor about a particular issue, Vernon says "My friends and family's opinions."

- Nathan – a 12 year old 6th grade student at Destiny Middle School. Nathan self-identifies as a B student. Although he does not enjoy school because "I hate waking up so early" Nathan does enjoy school because "I love to learn." When asked about the frequency of school counselor contact during this past academic year, Nathan states he has had two contacts. The issues discussed with the school counselor included academic or school issues, personal issues, social issues, and job or career issues. Nathan assesses his interactions with his school counselor as helpful.

Introductory Description of Themes

Themes emanated from the participants' replies to the interview questions. The first theme created from participants' responses was *An Understanding of the Role of the School Counselor*. Underneath this theme are the sub-themes: 1). Personal, social, academic and occupational purpose of the school counselor, 2). Preventative/diverting from the negative (e.g., dropout, gang activity, violence, bullying, academic pressures, etc.), 3). Promotive/directing toward the positive (e.g., reiterating the importance of education, career exploration, advice giving, PSAT test information, suggestions on study skills, leadership skills etc.), and 4). The implementation of non-traditional school counselor activities. The second theme was *Effective and Ineffective Performance of the School Counseling Roles* and reflected participants' differentiation between effective and ineffective performance of the school counselor role. Participants' comments about how effectively or ineffectively school counselors' perform were arranged under the sub-themes: 1) Effective school counselor and 2). Ineffective school counselor. The third theme, *Factors Contributing to School Counselor/Student Dynamic*, encompassed the sub-themes: 1). How the relationship is created/nurtured, 2). Gender similarities, and 3). Counselor disposition. The fourth theme is *Personal and Social Factors Encouraging or*

Deterring Interactions with the School Counselor. Underneath this theme are sub-themes: 1). Deterring: Holding it in; 2). Deterring: A lack of rapport; 3). Encouraging: Endorsement of counselor from other students and family; 4). Encouraging: Previous experiences with a counselor. The fifth theme is entitled *Students' Tentative Occupational Interests.* While participants were not questioned specifically about their educational and/or occupational/professional aspirations, on several occasions during the initial interviews, these young men talked about what they were pursuing and connected these pursuits to the assistance they have and continue to receive from their school counselors.

Theme One: An Understanding of the Role of the School Counselor

Personal, social, academic and occupational purpose of the school counselor

The purpose of school counselors, as expressed by participants, is complex and interwoven and is comprised of an amalgamation of personal, social, economic and institutional/school related variables. For instance, when asked his opinion of school counselors' purpose, Vernon indicated school counselors should assume myriad responsibilities to assist students in not only rectifying family related problems when they arise but also gaining a better understanding into what students wants to become professionally. "Family problems, um, yea, like I said before family problems, personal problems, and career things…" The multidimensional nature of school counseling is also evidenced in Nathan's articulation of his understanding of what school counselors provide to the students they serve. Here, Nathan alludes to the fact school counselors possess the ability to effectively conceptualize students' issues which often includes the

realization that behaviors students exhibit in school are, probably, precipitated by issues

occurring outside the school:

> "…the purpose of school counseling is, pretty much, like, usually school
> counselors, really, they like to help people, with like issues they might have in
> school, probably more like trouble, maybe something that uh, that, probably like,
> people that have problems at home and don't know what to do and then that cause
> that trouble in school in classes that make them act the way they act cause the
> things that happen at home, that's what I really think counselors really helps is to
> help people pretty much to figure out what, what's wrong and how to fix it and
> what's the solution and how to fix the problem."

Jay asserted his belief that school counselors should be resources to serve the

needs of students no matter what they are. For Jay, this resourcefulness is exhibited in

school counselors' helping him "getting things of my chest" a generic term used to

describe a process of liberating or unencumbering facilitated by the school counselor's

presence:

> "I should be able to talk to somebody and get, get it off my chest and get it off my
> mind so I won't have to feel it when I go home or feel it every day; to feel the
> same thing that happen to me one day, just keep feeling it over and over. I
> shouldn't have to do that."

For Nathan, school counselors should converse with students about a variety of

topics, all of which contribute to students' attempts to become better:

> "the counselor will talk to me and tell me why and how can I fix it and what I can
> do better and how, and how that can change and over time and stop and it will
> stop for like the rest, the rest of the year how, can I got, and how I can be a better
> student and how can be I can be a more much of a leader in class…"

Similarly, Keyshawn believes the school counselors' purpose is very complex. This

purpose means facilitating personal and students' academic success, which includes

discouraging bullying and teaching and assisting students in the coordination of

schedules:

"I mean like, like teaching something like they teaching you let's not to bully but not like, like specifically, teaching you ELA, math, and social studies and science like that. They, I think they're are a big, a big, a big importance to the school because really, all mainly all the time and you see them they always coming, well they really coming to class more often like I said but really they be in like the hallways, like teachers usually be, they usually be in the hallways. And they come to class to give you papers and stuff when you want to change your schedule or something like that."

A discussion of the purpose for school counselor was also evidenced in the expectations students held for their school counselors[2]. Keyshawn expresses his desire for the school counselor to make more frequent visits to his classroom to facilitate career exploration activities, and discuss career related concerns and the pervasiveness of bullying in his school. Specifically Keyshawn says school counselors should:

"talk to the kids about, like I said bullying, um, their jobs, what they want to be, and do more activities with them, like have a fun day and do more field trips and counseling about like the different places like if you want to have a job fair and either want it to be at the school you can have it, we can take a field trip to the different places for the jobs and we can copy down notes…to come to our class more often and so that, and have like job fairs in the middle of the year like around about March so we can have more interacting stuff in schools… to talk to us, to talk to us about bullying and how, so you cannot bully kids in school and know how bad it is to bully and personal issues when you want to talk to them in private… because if he come to our class more often, the kids in our class might lower down with some of the bullying and then after that they might tell everybody else to lower down with the bullying and you won't have that problem, for, for, for no, for a while."

Although Keyshawn saw the school counselors' job as multifaceted, throughout the course of the initial and follow-up interviews he reiterated that, for him, career exploration was what he wanted most from the school counselor:

"I want the job fairs because so we can make up our minds by 8th grade what we need to do because they said you got to make your mind up by 8th grade cause

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[2] The distinction made here between purpose and expectation reflects the researchers' belief that the former is initially expressed by members and/or representatives of a particular profession while the latter encompasses a set of standards held by members of the public/recipients as to what members of the profession are to do and how those duties are to be performed.

they, you really going to take them classes in high school, and that's why we want the job fairs so I can decide which job I want to do… like, jobs cause mainly when you, when you go there, they ask, they take your survey 'do you know what to be, do you know what to be?' So when I go to the guidance counselor that's what mainly I talk about what I want to be when I grow up."

Participants expressed that they see the school counselor's primary purpose is to help promote students' overall development by addressing academic, occupational, personal and interpersonal issues. These student concerns include adapting to familial/domestic concerns that occasionally manifest within schools, helping to design academic schedules, and stimulating dialogue about career interests and pursuits. If not mentioned as an actual component of the school counselor's overall purpose, participants voiced their beliefs about what school counselors should do ideally when discussing their expectations of school counselors. From participants' description of the school counselor's role, it appears that school counselors can play an integral part in diverting students away from barriers and negative influences and channeling them towards those that are good.

Preventative/divert from the negative

While the purpose of school counselors is obviously broad, participants talked about how this purpose should help students avoid social and academic barriers and pressures that can interfere with the path to academic progress. If, for instance, a student is having a reoccurring issue with a particular class, a school counselor should assess the appropriateness of the course and the level of effort a student is to committing to help ensure that student achieves success. This means, therefore, that school counselors help to redirect students away from difficulties and towards success.

When asked about what he believed the purpose of school counseling to be, Jay indicated that much of what the school counselor is responsible for is helping students to avoid troublesome situations. Jay stated a belief, though, that this is not something school counselors can accomplish without the right approach; the correct approach requires time and consistency:

> "to take time with the situation, it's, it's, like say if I have a situation where gang violence, he if, is there is a problem with it and it takes an X amount of time or certain amount of days to really get the situation over with he'll take the time and help me with and go through with me. He'll sit, he'll, he'll be there with me the whole way through."

Jay continued to discuss how school counselors divert students from negativity this way:

> "to me is that to help other kids with their problems or emotions that they can't really express… help them get through life without having violence or the use of bad things…So if I really have a problem, I really, I know where I can come to help kids help kids be better instead of being worse like dropouts or anything else to help them become bigger I'm talking about like, if imma like, say if I'm probably like, I'm having problems and I'm finda end up getting drop out of school but I'm, I have good grades and everybody bullying on me though, he helps me where I can get back up and get ahead and get mo better in my life.

On more than one occasion, school counselors were characterized as pivotal in the interrupting or prevention of bullying, which participants often saw as commonplace within their schools. Jay offered this about the negative implications of bullying and how his school counselor has attempted to address this behavior:

> "ok well yea, he comes either in our classrooms or other places and just talk with the class or group of people about how bullying, drug use, or any other thing… imma say bullying, I can't hold that. I'm not gone let somebody beat on me, tease me or hit me and I'm not letting nobody know. And then I go home my momma asking me where all these bruises and scars coming from and I'm not telling her, I'm telling her lies. I'm willing to tell her the truth and imma let her get it or imma go to the counselor and let him know and let them handle it."

Vernon corroborated other participants' comments about the prevalence of bullying.

Vernon believes school counselors can do much to interrupt the cycle of bullying, a cycle

about which his classmates are apparently very familiar:

> "I expect her to, um, direct and help people; if there's a bullying problem, which
> is a big problem at my school… yes, uh, we would, well, I would want her to tell
> whoever is getting bullied or whoever's doing the bullying, what they should do
> to stop it, what they should do to get that person to stop, what they should do to, I
> don't know, maybe, get help in a way."

> While diverting students from destructive behaviors/activities like bullying that

can complicate their personal and academic success was seen as a major component of

what school counselors do, Hines emphasized how critical it is for school counselors to

help students manage the numerous pressures students confront. Although Hines

acknowledged the social pressures exerted by peers, he mentioned the academic pressures

present in this school which he attributes to teachers:

> "teachers put pressure on you, counselors are there to ease that pressure… people
> around you put pressure on you. You have pressure, pressure's there no matter
> what you do, no matter what you say, pressure's there. For me, you know like,
> pressure it can help you, you mean, you have pressure to do well in school."

Vernon reinforced the idea that school counselors should attend to these academic issues:

> "counselors are supposed to help you with your personal problems and they are
> supposed to help you with any problems that you have academically or socially…
> maybe you're having a difficulty, well not difficulty, maybe you have some
> difficulty in a certain subject and um, you need to be taken out of that class, that's
> what a counselor can help you do, make that decision on whether you really need
> to be taken out of that class or if you're just not putting enough effort into the
> work… like, um, let's say that you are failing a math class, like algebra and you
> need to be put down into a pre-algebra class but maybe it's, you're not failing
> because it's hard, maybe you're because you're not doing the work or you're not
> focusing."

Promotive/directing toward the positive

From participants comments below we can see that school counselors' directing

students towards the positive includes a variety of interventions including reiterating the

importance of educational attainment, clarifying career choices, and communicating with

parents the connection between educational assessments to college access. Hines

concisely states, "the counselor's there to help you"; exactly what this help entails for

participants seemed to vary in degree and complexity and reflected participants' unique

needs, desires and concerns. Participants did, however, consistently affirm that this help

served a critical function in promoting their own positive personal, social and academic

outcomes. Participants indicated that their school counselors frequently funneled them in

positive directions. Keyshawn, for example, mentioned that he most often discusses

"bullying, job, job fairs, um, classes, schedules and stuff like that…" with his counselor.

Through the initial and follow-up interviews Keyshawn reiterated that of the

aforementioned concerns, career exploration was a definite priority. Keyshawn

elaborated on how his school counselor utilizes career interest surveys to clarify and

crystalize his career interests and how the data gathered from these surveys would

undergird and permeate his high school academic curriculum and individual graduation

plan (IGP):

> "like, you, if you go there you take a survey first, and you got you a list of
> different jobs what you want to be and then you check off the one you want to be,
> and for me I checked off a lawyer or engineer and then when you go there and
> you say you want to talk about the jobs I talk about lawyers, I want to be a lawyer
> or a [sic] engineer… like, he came to get me out of class and he said Keyshawn
> since we did your survey what do you want to be? We see what you want to be,
> and like, we see what you wanted to be and you wanted to choose a lawyer so
> why, he asked why you wanted to be a lawyer, I said cause I like, I like, I like to
> do arguments, like not really arguments but like help out of people that did
> something wrong and didn't mean to do it and like then he asked me well, like,

what do you feel would happen, then I said, I said, I might not when every case I get but I would try win some of them so the person won't get as such many years as that they need if they didn't do nothing wrong but if they do something wrong they can get the certain amount of years that they need… like when we get to 8th grade, we got, got, we definitely got to have our mind up what we want to be so, they can take that classes in high school and I think that's good cause when we get in high school we need to, like, take those classes so when we get to college, like a little bit ahead, and not behind, behind."

The idea that the school counselor assist in clarifying futures was not at all lost on other participants. Vernon stated unequivocally that he wants specific advice from his school counselor about how to effectively pursue his future endeavors:

"I would want my, uh, school counselor to give me advice, to direct me to the right direction if needed… I do want my counselor to help me figure out my career, or what I would want to be because that's a big part for me... I was looking, I was looking for her to tell me what class I should take in the future, how I should actually go about actually becoming an author, what college I should go to, uh, the grades I need."

This advice or insight not only pertains to academics and occupation, but also includes, as Hines stated, helping "students better understand school" and to "better understand life." With regard to the former Hines provided an example of how his school counselors have helped advance his academic career by communicating to his parents the relevance of academic assessments to his future educational opportunities:

"when I first, when I first went to, I went to my eight grade counselor and he told my parents about the PSAT and he says if I take the PSAT now it can help me in the future… The PSAT is there to help you get into college, so my counselor he told, he told me and my mother about the PSAT."

Hines' comments below reveal how the school counselor's clarification and his subsequent exposure to the PSAT provided a powerful experience:

"I just wanted to take the PSAT so that way I would know what kind of questions they were going be asking in high school and stuff like that and so like if I take the SAT or PSAT in high school I can pass it and I can like, go to a good college."

Essentially school counselors are providers of services that can help promote

positive futures. In other words, a major responsibility for school counselors is, as Jay

states, is "to help us get better too." Hines elaborated on this position by highlighting the

myriad positive avenues facilitated by his school counselor:

> "it's to help young, young boys like me; if like I have questions about high school and colleges and stuff like that, you know, counselors can help with that stuff; school, counselors are there to explain, they like, counselors are there to help create opportunities for the student; counselors, they help create academic opportunities; my counselors, like, if I have a question or if I want to be, I wanna be participating in something that can help me in the future; counselors are there to help me in the present so my future can be as great as my present."

Similarly, Nathan went into detail about how his school counselors, Ms. Norris and Mr.

Tyler, help him. Despite Ms. Norris' periodic immature behavior, Nathan stated

adamantly that this silliness disappears completely whenever Ms. Norris converses with

him about the importance of education:

> "like, like, when, when we conversate [sic], when we have conversations about education, I mean, like what I'm saying Ms. Norris is like the nicest lady, but when I told you about the expectations and the wants that I need, when she talks to me about education, that's like a whole different level, she doesn't play, I mean, I think she's serious about me getting my education."

In addition to emphasizing the significance of educational attainment, Nathan said his

counselors emphasize how educational attainment is ultimately his responsibility:

> "my guidance counselor, Ms. Norris, before she even, even gets the chance to dial my mom's number , she would at least tell me, stuff about, like I was saying, how, how I can be a better student, I can be a better leader, so that, that's what I pretty much think that's another purpose… that's why he [Mr. Tyler] doesn't like that cause he wants me to get my education, he said, he said the teachers already go theirs, their degree, they just want you to get yours, so that's why, so that's what I sometimes I get why teachers get a little bit mad, because they don't want, they not doing this for their health they doing it for us because they already know, they already got what they need, they already got they diploma, they college degree, they Master's, so they just trying to help us to get to that level and know that, how important it, school is and how, and how uh, and how good of a, good of a student you can be."

While career exploration was often mentioned as one of the many purposes of school counseling, participants often elaborated on how this purpose actually enlightened them about their preliminary career ideas and paths. After one memorable exercise with his school counselor, an exercise best described as a lifestyle assessment, Vernon the aspiring author, discusses how he paused after realizing his tentative career path probably would not generate the finances to achieve the lifestyle he had envisioned:

> "we went to the computer lab and we got to choose our career and then we had to do our expenses, and stuff and see how much we would have to make to cover those expenses and I don't think that really has to do with anything being necessarily an author…it was uh, well I chose like this artistic career so like when, it involves writing, and art, playing instruments stuff like that… I learned that I'm going to need a lot of money well we had this little thing sorta like a checkbox and you would check off what you wanted to have and stuff so I checked off like cell phone, home phone, computers, stuff like that
> I was, and like, I think it was $400,000, I think, I don't know."

As it relates to tangible learning strategies and outcomes, perhaps no other strategy was mentioned as frequently as the provision of suggestions to improve study skills. Hines recalls an experience with his 6th grade counselor and how he initiated the contact for the expressed purpose of improving his grades. After initiating contact Hines' school counselor collaborated with him and his mother about improving his study habits:

> "I mean he's there to help you, like, when I was in, think it was 6th grade, I had a counselor, I went to him, I talked to him about my grades, he helped me, he talked, he talked to my mom and he said, he said I was, cause like I wasn't doing so well, and so like he helped me study and stuff I started getting good grades and like he helped me with my study habits... yea he helped me with my study habits; he explained why I have to have good study habits, and why I have to, why I have to take tests, why I have to, you know, what's the purpose of school."

Above, participants spent a substantial amount of time discussing actual scenarios and incidents where they had received something tangible from their school counselor which translated into a positive academic or social outcome. It should also be noted that

this beneficence can also occur when a school counselors acts as an intermediary between student and teacher to create positive rather than negative outcomes. Talking about this role specifically, Hines illustrates exactly what this intermediary role has meant to him personally:

> "Teacher pressure, like, teachers, they give you a certain amount of time to do this… They give you a certain amount of time to do this, like, tests, you have tests, you have (inaudible), you have a lot of things, that you, that teachers pressure you and stuff like that… they pressure you to score high on like SAT and stuff like that so you can get to those big colleges… like they drill you and stuff like they drill you in math, ELA, science, social studies but, I mean, basically they drill you in ELA and math cause you have to have those things in real life… he's [school counselor] there to tell you why the teachers are doing what they do."

Here Jay talks about the strategy offered by his school counselor to address the academic difficulties he experienced previously:

> "because I used have problems with doing my work cause, my, it used to be so
>
> hard where I just give up. But it got to the point where they say if you really have
>
> problems with it, go to your teacher and ask them to help you through it. And
>
> they'll tell me cause if you really having problems you should really need to ask
>
> your teacher cause if you really having problems in class you should raise your
>
> hand and ask your teacher 'I really need help on this.' Or if, my home, or, if I'm
>
> at home and I really having problems with it, I should be able to ask, ask my
>
> momma or my dad and they should be able to help me to get the answer for
>
> myself instead of them really giving me the answer. I should be able to really get
>
> it, it just comes quick; if you're having problems with it because if you're in class
>
> and you probably gone learn about, I say algebra, or you worrying about multistep
>
> equations. I probably might, I probably might, get the first part done, but the
>
> second part I can't probably get done because it's hard or I learned it but I forgot

it or it's not really clicking in my mind I should be able to raise my hand and she

might give me a brief, a brief refresher of how you do it."

For Jay, the recommendation he received from his school counselor, to request

assistance rather than sitting quietly while struggling, led him to initiate contact with his

teachers about his concerns and to ask for assistance. By employing this strategy Jay

practically guarantees he will receive "the brief refresher" he needs to better understand a

particular mathematic equation. Jay continued to talk about these self-advocacy

strategies which involve his requesting the assistance he needs within the classroom:

> "I say, like, to, to not, if you doing your work to not just sit there and do nothing
>
> if you can't do it. To not sit just sit around and do nothing or play around with
>
> your friends all day in class. Or to not, to not sit there and just act like you a cool
>
> guy and just sit in the back of the class and don't nothing at all. Or to rather play
>
> than do work or don't do nothing at all just sit there and just look cause I can't get
>
> it, and, yea… yea, to not just sit and do nothing at all… yes sir, be active, be
>
> active in extra, extracurricular work or school. To don't talk all day, hang out with
>
> your friends, just laugh and giggle all day or get in trouble or disrupt class. Just,
>
> just do, get your lesson, and play, play later."

Strategies for minimizing conflict, improving interpersonal communication, and

managing emotions more effectively were often topics of conversation for Vernon and

his school counselor. Vernon said his school counselor's "adages" like "the do upon to

other like as you'd like them do to you" are of import. Here Vernon recalls suggestions

provided by his school counselor to address several upsetting situations, including his

sister's irritating behavior, possible problems within the school, and his biological

father's unavailability and unreliability:

sister:

> "cause she [school counselor] just tells me, sort of like ignore my sister in a way,
> even cause my sister she tries to get a reaction out of me a lot cause she thinks it's
> hilarious."

possible problems within the school:

> "well she tells me and a lot of people just talk it out if I have a problem inside the
> school, so, you know, like, she just tells me to go talk to that person see what I
> can do to make the situation better, and if I can't just leave the person alone, let's
> not make the situation worse."

father's unavailability and unreliability:

> "she's been helpful and uh, I problems with my dad, he's in Korea right now, and
> she helps get over that, she helps me not to get upset with him when he's not there
> when I need him to be, um, stuff like that… she's told me that some people just
> can't do what they need to do for whatever reasons. She's told me that uh, I have
> to forgive, not necessarily forget cause she doesn't want me to get repeatedly
> injured by him and me believing in him... uh, the forgive but not forget thing.
> Like I forgive my dad for what he's done but I won't forget it cause if I forget it
> I'll just let him do it again."

At times, school counselors' efforts to assist students are not always appreciated

no matter how well intentioned these efforts may be. According to Nathan, his school

has disallowed sixth graders from participating in sports. Although no such rule appears

in the school's 2010-2011 Student Handbook, part of the school's strategic plan to promote student achievement does involve assisting "new students in their social transition to Destiny." Moreover, guidance is one of the departments responsible for helping to ensure this happens. From this one can deduce a way to foster a smooth transition for incoming students is to prevent participation in extracurricular activities which may interfere with their ability to become acclimated to the new school environment. An aspiring collegiate and professional basketball player who absolutely loves the sport, Nathan is not at all fond of this rule:

> "the counselor help with the new rule that sixth grade, through seventh grade and eighth grade, if you in sixth grade that means that you can't play any sports basketball, football, baseball none of that stuff because it's an academic rule so that's why, pretty much people said the counselors made up that rule so that's why I know, so that's what I'm really getting in my head I was thinking, ok, so the counselors' not really just people that help people, they also, they also are people that um that make up stuff, they can, they help things, they help people also, but they have a strong suit of you know doing things instead of just helping people, even though that's their job."

The implementation of non-traditional school counselor activities

During the study participants discussed certain non-traditional roles and functions they have come to expect of their school counselor. As these non-traditional roles were discussed, it became clear that they were far from trivial or inconsequential. For instance, two participants mentioned how their school counselor had developed a reputation for engaging in non-traditional activities like providing items like deodorant,

soap and other hygiene products, book bags, professional attire and other essentials for students when families encountered "hard times." Recognizing that parents are occasionally unable to provide certain necessities, the school where these two students attend provides these resources. In the January 11, 2012 parent newsletter it is mentioned that the school houses a food pantry to assist "families experiencing a temporary crisis."

These participants talked about how the provision of these materials helped mitigate harassment students experienced due to poor hygiene. During the initial interview Jay spoke at length about school counselors who "get us what we need. Cause, say if we have a struggle at the house, then that, that helps us where we can get what we need." Whether accurate or inaccurate, in Jay's estimation, school counselors are not constrained as teachers are when it comes to these needs, which enables to school counselors to:

> "get the supplies you need. If you need supplies the teacher will not be able to give you that because they can't give you things that you need because if they give you something from their house and it affects you badly then it's going go back on them and they end up getting fired. Cause say if, if a teacher gave me some deodorant and the deodorant broke me out they can end up getting fired for giving me some because they don't supposed to."

Jay details other items received by students from his school counselor:

> "And he's [school counselor] the one to help us get prepared for it [100 Black Men], if we don't have our shirt, we'll get like a dress shirt or if you don't have a tie, we, he, he, has a tie, or if we don't have jeans or dress pants, he'll have us

dress pants. And help us prepare for like things, and then he help us answer

questions or other stuff."

"he [school counselor] help like a girl when their need, their needs, like for pads

and all that, they help, he help do that too, cause he tries to find ways cause say if

they momma is like in a rut and can't really get nothing for them, he is trying to

help them get what they need so they can be comfortable coming to school. Or a

dude if a dude be smelling stank all the time and he be trying to get deodorant or

he really need it or his hair cut, try to help, help them get it."

Keyshawn, who attends the same school as Jay, also mentioned these non-traditional

duties. Keyshawn talked about the non-traditional duties this way:

"well the purpose really cause kids they really don't have like personal hygiene

like deodorant or book bags and the counselors will have that stuff like you can

come to them, that's personal issues and then that you can come to them and say

that I need so and so, or I need so and so, do you have this item…deodorant, book

bags, toothbrushes, stuff like that, soap."

Jay describes how the provision of these items positively impacts his school:

"so people won't, won't pick on us or, or just tease us, where we can have

something already there…less, less, less afraid to go and walk around."

In a way similar to Jay, Keyshawn says it is "good" that school counselors are not

discouraged from providing these things to students:

"…because some of the kids will be more professional and they won't be like

stink or nothing and you won't have to and the bullying will go down because

that's what mainly the bully is about is you know the kids be picking on you

because of your stench or you don't smell good."

Thus, by providing these materials school counselors proactively help to create a

nonthreatening learning environment where students are less likely to experience the

ridicule, shame and embarrassment from other students because of offensive body odor.

School counselors' efforts to promote students' development and success are

often buttressed by resources outside of school. The supplementation of intra-school

counseling services with external resources is often considered an essential characteristic

of a truly comprehensive school counseling program especially when considering current

counselor-student ratios. Jay's school counselor enrolled him and a group of his peers in

a program called "G's to Gents" where culturally relevant conversations and activities are

designed for African American adolescent men. A perusal of Jay's school's website

provided the following description of the G's to Gents program:

> "G's To Gents is a club designed to provide young men with the qualities of a
>
> Real Man! Club members participate in a number of mentorships and community
>
> service. Our goal is for each student to improve in discipline, academics,
>
> attendance, and social skills."

Programmatically, Jay says G's to Gents is a program to accomplish the following

objectives and long-range goals:

> "like in the word G's to Gents, it's really guys to gentlemen. That's, he's trying to
>
> get us from getting to guys, to like other people, like say, like dropouts and stuff.
>
> They trying to get us to be gentlemen…to have good grades, good backgrounds,
>
> good everything, so if I want a job, I can be able to get one."

Based on this description and Jay's comments, it appears that many of the topics

discussed during G's to Gents meetings reinforce what he has heard from his school

counselor. Here he provides a general overview of the program as well as some of the

most salient things he has learned:

> "Because, like I learned in G's to Gents, it, it, you shouldn't believe in what other
>
> people think because if you do that then you gone end up following behind they
>
> tracks and stooping down to they level. Because if they do that that means they at
>
> a low level of where they can't really get their self straight too. And that mean
>
> you going down to they level…So I just brush it off walk away from the situation
>
> or just laugh it off."

According to Jay, the school counselor has also engaged in him the local chapter of 100

Black Men. 100 Black Men, as described by Jay, endeavors to accomplish, among other

things, the following objectives:

> "well 100 Black Men is where we get kids from different schools to come in one.
>
> They ask us topic questions like, like gang violence what should we do about, to,
>
> disc…, like to get it away from everybody or we'll talk about how it's affecting us
>
> or how it's affecting other people, or things we can do to be a better male in life.
>
> Yea, he, he, helps us, cause after we come from 100 Black Men he'll have a talk
>
> with us, or he'll help us come and be more related to what we talked to at 100
>
> Black Men."

The 100 Black Men of Greater State website, describes the organization thusly:

> "We are one of over 100 chapters throughout the United States, the Caribbean and
>
> England that are committed to making a difference in our communities. Our

primary task is the mentoring of youth by helping equip them for successful

living. For nearly 50 years men under the umbrella of the 100 Black Men of

America, Inc. have positively influenced young minds."

The website of national chapter of the 100 Black Men of America goes into greater detail

about its mission, vision and values in this manner:

Mission:

The mission of the 100 Black Men of America, Inc. is to improve the quality of

life within our communities and enhance educational and economic opportunities

for all African Americans.

Vision:

100 Black Men of America, Inc. seeks to serve as a beacon of leadership by

utilizing our diverse talents to create environments where our children are

motivated to achieve, and to empower our people to become self-sufficient

shareholders in the economic and social fabric of the communities we serve.

Values:

100 Black Men of America, Inc. is committed to the intellectual development of

youth and the economic empowerment of the African American community based

on the following precepts: respect for family, spirituality, justice, and integrity.

For Jay, G's to Gents serves a dual purpose. G's to Gents is advantageous to students

because "it's a program to get to, really get us better in life... help us in life." Secondly,

G's to Gents provides a mechanism that helps create build a positive counselor/student

relationship because the program:

"helps him [school counselor] know more things about us cause they'll come and get us and ask, tell us, to answer questions they ask and that'll get more things so he [school counselor] can get to know us better... to get us know us better and see if what, what, we say so he [school counselor] can see how, how we are. So if he know how we are, he'll know how to, he'll know how to say something to us, or he'll know how to speak to us and how to act with us."

Jay expounds on this here:

"So basically Gs to Gents help us if we have problems, it help us, it, he probably might not have time one day but that we already know how to handle a situation already and to get, and that helps him out because he don't have to just go to every student and have a little period of time alone with them and have a talk with them to see what is the problem. He can tell them ok this is how you supposed to handle this situation, this how you supposed to handle this situation and go get everything done."

Theme Two: Effective and Ineffective Performance of the School Counseling Roles

In describing their experiences with and perceptions of their school counselors, participants differentiated between what they considered the effective and ineffective performance of the school counselor role. The differentiation happened as participants provided a collage of characteristics and scenarios which exemplified the effective and ineffective performance of school counselor duties. In this way, by articulating the characteristics of the effective school counselor, participants were also able to identify a model of school counseling effectiveness and the antithetical ineffective school counselor.

Effective School Counselor

Numerous attributes were associated with the work of effective school counselors. Participants mentioned these attributes periodically throughout the initial and follow-up interviews, and provided stories to illustrate how these attributes appeared in practice. Jay distinguished effective counselors from their ineffective counterparts by saying the former, "the real good ones", "they'll get to know all the kids, they'll know what's they problems, they'll know they records, and they'll get to know, know'em exactly as much as they get to know." For Hines effective school counselors work to remain unbiased when resolving a dilemma by hearing "both sides, and like, they hear like, like, cause you know how counselors are, they, they hear like two sides of the story to make sure they got it correct."

Jay stated this when discussing the things his school counselor does which he finds beneficial: "it's like he'll [school counselor] be there for you. If he [school counselor] knows it's a situation that you really didn't do that you go caught up in, he'll be right there with you." One of the most important things school counselors can do, according to Vernon, is to "be out more." Being out more means school counselor are accessible and available for referrals about student concerns:

"she [school counselor] should, well, she should visit more and like ask if anything's going on, cause if some kids moping around in the hallways and stuff and a lot of the teachers come over ask what's wrong and I think some of the teachers report that to the guidance counselor, the guidance, the counselor calls the person in and talks about it so, yea, just think she needs to gain her information about bullying and what not from the students…huh, I would say,

well, like I said earlier, like cause, you know, teachers report things to the

guidance counselor something's wrong with the student so, she should do that and

I guess, I wouldn't say necessarily go around asking but she should like just keep

her eye out for stuff like that."

While obviously not the same as being visible, Jay spoke about how a school counselor's

availability and accessibility is inseparable from the school counselor's effectiveness:

"I told myself said since he's a counselor, he posed [sic] to be the person who

helps you with problems, if he's a counselor he supposed to have, he supposed to

be there with you for anything you go through, if he's there he supposed to help

you between any situation if it's big or small, he supposed to be there. So if I have

a problem with home or something he should be there too because if it's affecting

my school or my grades or anything he should be there to help me to get better so

I can strive better in life."

Trusting, inspiring motivating, instill confidence, positive, and friendly

Participants discussed the type of support effective school counselors provide.

According to participants, effective school counselors are a source of motivation and

support for students who are pursuing their academic and professional endeavors. Here

Jay talks about how vital this support is in becoming the person he wants to become:

"I expect them [school counselors] to always trust and believe, and believe in all

their patients, or in their students, and always have faith in them, and to always, to

always, we'll have they back or be with them…he would have my back say if he

know, he know I did something bad, he wouldn't end the conflict, he will come

and help me get out of it… They can go to the point to where I should be able to

tell him and then he supposed to be the counselor that's one reason why I'm not

afraid or I didn't have to built [sic] up the courage to tell him because he should

be the school counselor, that's what he there for so."

Jay goes on to talk about how his school counselor's support helps him pursue the most

sublime goals by assessing his strengths and areas of improvement:

"to to be better, to exceed the parts where I can exceed. To see if, where my, my

weakness and strengths are. If I have a problem to get better at that problem, to

make that problem disappear. To get the solution of it or to get where I can, to get

to where I can strive so much, I can strive so much where I can't strive no more,

to get to the highest I can be. If I can get to a, if I can be a superstar, get higher

than a superstar, to try to strive better. Or get higher than Oprah Winfrey."

Hines utilizes a sports analogy to illustrate how his school counselor's motivation helps

him remain confident in his ability to eventually accomplish his desires even when the

stakes and expectations are there highest:

"they're [school counselor] loving and supportive but at the same time they're

here to hear about your feelings, what do you care about and stuff like that…

they're motivating you… cause you see, I like sports a lot and so you like, you

have pressure to win, like Cam Newton, he was in college, he had pressure to win,

like, so are, like you're on the big stage, like heard of stories about Babe Ruth he

was on the big stage, he had to perform all the time, but he had people motivating

him behind him to do right, to make, to do the right thing. To be the best player

on the field, the MVP, that's what counselors do. They motivate you, they tell

you that you're the best player, you're the best person in the world, you know,

they help you to make you feel better about yourself and stuff like that. Like my

counselors, they help motivate me, like I want to play baseball, counselor just like

my friend, like, people pick on my cause of my size, like I'm small."

For Hines, the motivation received from his school counselor to participate in sports is

particularly helpful because of his diminutive stature and the skepticism it creates:

"like, I'm small and like people tell me you can play baseball, you can't play

football, you can't play, you can't play, well, I don't do soccer, cause you know,

but like they tell me that I'm too short and my counselor, he was like, he was like,

man it doesn't matter about your height, it doesn't matter if you're small, little,

you have to get it in your head what you want to do… If you want to be the best

player, if you want to, if you want to better your opportunities, better your future,

it don't matter what people say. You have to get in your mind that you want to be

something, that you want to be either a baseball player or football player or a

basketball player. If you want to do it, it's up to you, it doesn't matter. You can do

it if you put your mind to it, that's what my dad says to me. You have to want it,

you have to go out there, you have to go out there to get it."

The effective school counselor was also seen as someone possessing a positive

and warm disposition that flourishes as they conduct business within the school counselor

role. Participants talked about the effective school counselor who is a pleasant person

who exhibits quintessential counseling behaviors. Jay talks about the importance of

expressiveness and reliability here:

"I want someone to express their emotions but be good with it too, positive

attitude with it. Cause a teacher she can go anyway with it, she can go her way or

she or she can get mad or she can get or she can get happy with it. But I want a

person who can get happy with it and get me to strive better. To be my, like my

best friend, basically like, like my friend that always stick up for me. Who always

help me through thick and thin."

Hines offered his opinion about the attributes demonstrated by the effective school

counselor:

"I expect my school counselor, not to act as my friend, but to help me, like act as,

like somebody who, who can help you… you know, not your buddy, like, but

like, friend and stuff like that, I mean he's older than you but like to act as your

friend… be there when you need him or her."

The school counselor/student relationship resembles other familiar relationships

for many of the study participants. Additionally, the school counselor/student

relationship was often depicted as something that should look like other existing

relationships, relationships in which participants feel comfortable:

Nathan:

"she's like, ah, I can say Ms. Norris is like a friend…so like um yea she's like a

friend; like, like for my friends, my friends, me and my friends we don't have no

problems, we like real cool, like, so that's what, that's what we, that's what kind

of connection I have with my counselor, we're like very cool, we, she's like a, on

the same level, and same path as, she knows what I'm, she knows what I'm, what

I'm talking about, know what I'm, she understands."

"I'm like, like best friend type. Like, like, say like cause he [school counselor]

probably say he's just a teacher. I don't want him to be a teacher, I want him to be

my buddy, my pal or my comrade."

"I'm trying to like, trying to say like, instead of like, I know like feeling at home,

but like saying feeling where I know some place where I'm safe; where, I know

won't, I won't be harmed there."

Jay:

"he can be my, sorta, kinda like my friend…how school counselor supposed to be

and how they are, really they like my best friend to me, so they really good how

they are… to be like my friend and he won't be my enemy, he, he, he'll be

somewhere I can feel like I'm at home with or who I feel at ease… basically, to

have faith, basically, to really have trustworthiness in me, to basically really

believe in me."

While a bond that is reminiscent, to some extent, of friendship seemed important

to some participants, the notion of friendly school counselor/student relationship should

not preclude school counselors from also maintaining high expectations. In fact, Nathan

expects his school counselors to be demanding when it comes to what he should be doing

to maximize his potential and become the person he envisions. Here Nathan juxtaposes

one of his school counselors, Ms. Norris, with the other, Mr. Tyler, to illustrate why Mr.

Tyler's strategy is preferable to Ms. Norris' approach. Nathan mentions the way he is

coached athletically and why he would appreciate his school counselors' emulating this

approach:

"I would like, I would just, like, I would like for Ms. Norris to be more, to be more, hard on us… I have another personal trainer, my real personal trainer, his name is, um, his name is Thomas but people call him Tom, T-Tom, so, and Corey, he, and Corey and Thomas, my trainer Thomas, they like to push me, they like me, they want me to go hard, every time Corey, every time Corey, he give me all these things like elite socks, shoes, basketball shoes, he gives me elbow pads, he said Nathan, he said Nathan, now this not all for show now, but he said Norm, I want you to go hard, I want you to do, I just want you to do everything in your possibility to get at least 20 points and every time that's all I think, go hard Nathan, go hard, and all I think and usually, and then I used to play when I used play for the, um, AAU, for the Wildcats, every time Corey told me to go hard, in the back of my head, I was thinking Nathan, every time I used to play that, that PG position, it was over, 20 points or over, and then all the time I used to cross up people but then I never shot it, because I ain't want to show off and then miss, so I always used to make a good pass and get an assist, so also, Corey told me it's not always about scoring cause you can score the most points you want, but you still can lose you; can't play by yourself, you got to have a team that needs to be, that needs to be also aggressive on the boards, and got a good shot, but it's not all, it's about your team, so that's what I want Ms., Ms. Norris to become, a harder, a harder counselor that makes me want to push harder in my, in my, um, academics and let me get a better education and let me be a top of of Dent's, and um, and Dent because Dent is not really a good, uh, it's not really a, I wouldn't say a poor

academic school but it's like in the middle pretty much, yea. So that's what I want

Ms. Norris to do, she should be more harder."

Ineffective School Counselor

Participants were forthcoming in their discussing what attributes and

characteristics help increase school counselor's effectiveness. Participants were also able

to identify those attributes and characteristics which interfered with a school counselor's

ability to be effective within the school. Perhaps none of these attributes was more

noticeable than a school counselor who appears disinterested in interacting with students,

inaccessible and virtually invisible within the school. Jay paints a portrait here of this

ineffective school counselor, who is the opposite of his current school counselor, and

how their duties are inadequately performed:

> "doesn't interact with the kids, he [school counselor] doesn't know nothing about
>
> the kids, if there's a problem he really won't be there for them, he'll probably be
>
> there for half of them or he'll tell them I can't really help you right now and just
>
> walk off and do something else or he'll help one child but don't help the other…
>
> The bad ones they probably get to know'em but act like they they homeboy or
>
> homegirl, just play with'em and then when they come to the problem they won't
>
> really care about it cause they know how he is."

The lack of visibility for school counselors was problematic because without

being visible it is practically impossible for school counselors to get the pulse of the

school. Hines expressed his displeasure with his 7th grade school counselor who could

frequently be found in her office rather than mingling with students:

"she was barely on the 7th grade hallway, you barely saw her… I want them

[school counselors] to be like, more, like, there."

By being more visible, Hines affirmed, "I mean he'll [school counselor] know what's

going on, more." Obviously having some conception and familiarity with the invisible

school counselor, Keyshawn discusses what school counselors may be doing when they

are not out and about engaging students:

"some counselors they don't be out, they don't be out in the hallways, they just sit

there in their office all day, they don't come to class, they just sit there in the

office, they sit there in the office all day be on the computer or something."

Theme Three: Factors Contributing to a Positive School Counselor/Student Dynamic

This theme focuses on the variables which contribute to a positive school

counselor/student dynamic. Here participants speak about what they believed helped

forge the existing alliance with their school counselor and how this alliance is cultivated

and preserved.

How relationship is created and nurtured

For obvious reasons, simply having the opportunity to interact on a consistent

basis is instrumental in forging a strong school counselor/student relationship. Jay has

the opportunity to interact with his school counselor during school and activities

occurring outside the school day:

"because we have interactions with each other and he [school counselor] finds out

through 100 Black Men and G's to Gents and he goes through, he goes through,

he goes through activities with me, he, class groups, group sessions and all that.

He talks about bullying and other things. I come to him about my work, I can't do

it and how how he can help me and he tells me to go to the teacher and do it and

me just having spending time with him, just him being around."

Similarly, Keyshawn indicated that he has more consistent contact with his school

counselor and other adults within the school by volunteering to assist them:

"um we have like Eagle express helpers where like we can go there and help out

teachers and stuff during our related arts, like go help out our regular teachers and

then help her out with like classwork, like organize papers and stuff, and you get

to do that during the year then, after, after you do that at the end of the year you

can have, you have a celebration."

While Jay mentioned the frequency of interaction as an important variable in facilitating

his relationship with his school counselor, Vernon's existing relationship with his school

counselor is a product of their initial encounter two years ago and the comfort he felt then

and during subsequent interactions. Despite the fact his school assigns school counselors

by grade level, he continues to speak with his 7th grade counselor:

"since about 6th grade…ah, like each grade level it changes but I still go to the

same person because I prefer her [school counselor]… well, in 7th grade there

was a, I guess a bullying problem and I was asked questions about it and I was not

nervous or anything when I was talking to her I was just comfortable so when I

had another problem I asked to go see her and, yea, that's how it happened I

guess, the first encounter I felt comfortable rather than (inaudible)…I didn't feel

like pressured to say anything I didn't feel like I was like, like, can't find the

word, like, bashed. I didn't feel I was bashed to answer like, it wasn't like answer

> this or else it was more of a ask me a question I could choose not to answer it or (inaudible)."

Keyshawn ascribes part of the success of his relationship with his school counselor to the orientation he attended prior to entering his middle school. Keyshawn discusses when this orientation occurred and what he learned about his school counselor during the orientation:

> "the first day I went to Allen, the first year cause we had, all us had to go to the guidance counselor, guidance counselor tell us how the school runs, how, what they do, and, and, and um who, which person will deal with jobs, and which person will deal with like regular counseling… I, when I first went to Allen in 6th grade, last year like, like, what they do, and who going to be doing what job, and if you need to come to them and, if you need to come to them and like ask them "do you need any help" or volunteer for something you just come, you come to them and ask them."

Like other relationships, the school counselor/student dynamic is strengthened when the school counselor and student share similarities and interests. For Hines, no shared interest exceeds his enjoyment of sports, football in particular. When his school counselor shares his interest in football, Hines is more inclined to trust this person:

> "Cause of course, he's [school counselor] a, he was an Oakland Raiders fan and you know if you're a Pittsburg Steelers fan of course you hate the Oakland Raiders so we have, so we would have this like rivalry going on and stuff like that… it made me trust him… and like my counselor he likes South Carolina cause he lives in south Carolina. So I trust people, cause it goes by sports. Sports

helps me trust people, like, if you don't, like, know people, like, it helps me get to know people. it help me connect with him on a certain level… like, on a level one to ten, it's like a nine because he likes sports, I like sports, we have things in common. So like, of course, I can trust him because we have things in common. I'm going to tell you something, every year, like 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade I always had a rivalry going on with the teachers, this year it's a, it's a female teacher cause she like, she likes Georgia Southern and like of course Georgia Southern is a small college and I like Alabama and like, like our whole class is like a sports station. We got LSU fans, Alabama fans, stuff like that. You know, sports helps me connect with the teachers and counselors."

The presence of trust and faith are also important components in the development of a healthy school counselor/student dynamic. For Jay, "confidentiality", "trustworthiness", and the trust and faith his school counselor exhibits in him are instrumental to their relationship. Here Jay talks about how his school counselor has demonstrated this trust and faith, and how these things reflect the school counselor's confidence that Jay will do what he is supposed to do:

"I, say if I go speak to my counselor, he, he would, he will trust me to either hold something of his, or hold some of his belongings; he'll trust me to, he'll trust me to tell him what happened over a situation or something like; he know that I didn't do nothing wrong in it or he'll help me if I have a problem."

"Because, because, if a counselor don't I probably can get in a situation where I didn't do my work, he'll end up say 'yea cause he don't do his work anyway.' But really I probably did do my work but he won't have faith in me so if anytime

comes to a situation to where that happen he won't be able to help me cause won't have faith in me or believe that I can do it."

"he got trust in me and faith in me, I shouldn't let him down by doing something wrong or going out in the street and acting bad because that, then he'll have a second thought about me and then lose his hope on me."

"that comes from the trust in both of the persons, the trust, the confidence… his trust in me interacts with the person relationship between each other."

Jay's school counselor's trust, faith and confidence in him are important to their relationship. Furthermore, this trust, faith and confidence enables the school counselor to advocate on Jay's behalf if, for instance, he was accused of not doing his work. Also, because the school counselor maintains this trust, faith and confidence in Jay, the school counselor will, more than likely, "have my back to say he will be there when I really need him; he's, he's there, and he's, he'll help you through anything." Because his school counselor has invested his trust, faith and confidence in Jay, Jay feels compelled to reciprocate the effort to "be better and have a better relationship with him." As a result, Jay does not entertain the idea of engaging in inappropriate behaviors or activities (e.g., "I'm doing good in school, but once I get outside, I'm in a gang and all that,") because Jay does not:

"want him [school counselor] to get a bad aspect of me, or, or, um perception of me... like I won't, like I won't really, do nothing really wrong, to trust me that I will do my best that I can do to trust me to do my work and to trust me to, to, to get, do, do the hardest I can. To don't have a doubt about me."

So, because Jay perceives that his school counselor trusts him and is invested in him as a person and student, he avoids negativity because negativity would compromise, or threaten outright, the quality and integrity of the relationship he has worked to cultivate with his school counselor.

When asked to elaborate on the nature of his relationship with his school counselor with Ms. Norris, Nathan talked about how he appreciates her listening to him without interrupting, which makes him feel like her equal:

> "she is a very, I like the way she, cause she, I like the ways she talk to me, at, pretty much, cause she, she likes to tell me, she likes to listen…So that's what I mean, like, that's how she's equal because saying thing, like, she's a child, but, I can say she's like a young adult and so, well, when I say like a young adult she like, like very, like I was saying like uh she's a very good listener, she likes to listen to me before, she doesn't like stop me when I'm talking, she doesn't do all, she just let me finish, and then after I'm finish, she tells me if I'm finished then she keep, keep on telling me what to do and then that's what I like about my counselor, Ms. Norris… my counselor talks to me, it's like I'm another, like she's my equal, like, I'm a kid, like I'm a, she's a kid too."

While some participants express a desire for their relationship with their school counselor to resemble a friendship, Hines articulated a slightly different desire. He sees the school counselor/student dynamic as a synthesis of the parent/child and student/student friendship dynamics:

> "…like, like a parent and a friend at the same time; if you're, say if your father or somebody dies in your family, I mean, they're there to help you. I mean to help

you get through it, I mean some counselors, they go, you know, they go see about

your family, like personal visits and stuff like that, and like… a counselor is a

counselor but a parent is a parent, they're two, they're two different things and

they're the same thing."

In those instances when the school counselor/student relationship had been

effectively established and cultivated, participants described how this reinforces the

relationship in a cyclical manner. Jay said that he and his school counselor have an

understanding of one another that is a function of their willingness to be honest and open

and to engage in disclosure:

"I can open him [school counselor] and read him where I know about him and I, I

know how he is and so where I can tell how he's going to react on some things."

In fact, Jay talks about how his relationship with his school counselor has grown to such

an extent that it is almost as if the school counselor knows what Jay might do in a

situation before it actually occurs:

"A person who's, he's [school counselor] there, he knows me, he knows how I

am, he knows how I'll be, he knows, he knows me before I do things. If I'm in a

situation he already knows how I'm going to respond or act in that situation, he

helps me calm down that situation or that problem. And, if I am, or I am getting or

going to get in a problem he helps me get out of it... like a journal...It somebody

[school counselor] I can talk to, somebody like, like a journal. He like journal

basically if I talk to him with it, I can really express my feelings and let my

feelings go and I can keep, just keep that he's like, where I can tell him stuff it

won't get out. He's like where I can tell him a lot of stuff and it stays right there

with him, it won't go out into the public and everybody know my business. It stays right there with him. He's like a journal because it's where I can open."

As participants discussed the positive aspects of their relationships with their school counselors, they also acknowledged that the things their school counselors contribute to their lives makes them feel special and important:

Nathan:

"it [school counselor's listening without interrupting] makes me feel important pretty much, a lot of, like a lot of um, people don't even like to let me finish."

Keyshawn:

"to me it [listening and interacting] feels like he's [school counselor] being helpful and not being mean and not being just somebody that don't want to interact, he actually wants to interact with you, you can feel like that he's not lying, or nothing he actually want to interact with you, he's not just mean, he's nice, and that's it."

Keyshawn's description did not stop here. He talked at length, almost in astonishment, about how his school counselor is willing to "*actually work with me*"[3] rather than simply verbalizing a desire to interact with him. Below Keyshawn describes how his school counselor's interest and commitment is evidenced in the way he works with him especially when it comes to facilitating career exploration activities:

"he's actually working with me and he's not none of the nother [sic], other counselors that just say you want to be a lawyer ok, you going to take the classes

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[3] Emphasis expressed by Keyshawn as he provided this quote.

in high school, they actually sit there and make sure that's what you want to be and don't change your mind and they don't just throw you off and not just speak to you and they actually interact, he actually interacts with me; like, he doesn't, he interacts with you, he's not like some other counselor that just sit there and say 'yea you want to be a lawyer ok that's what you going to be so we not, we not going to talk about it no more until you like actually in the 8th grade then don't actually put you off and just say we not going to talk about this no more till the 8th grade we know you want to be a lawyer so that's what you want be, so that's what you going to do in high school and we not going to talk it no more until the 8th grade and when you want to come to me don't talk about the job fairs, don't talk about jobs, the jobs talk to me about something else and stuff like that; he actually asks you, he actually asks you when is the best time for you to talk about it, and like, like, like he asks you want to you to be at the beginning of the year and then at the, like in the middle of the year he come to get you and he'll say you want to be so and so, so we going to help you around with this and make sure you don't change your mind if you want to do this, and then if they see, if plenty if a lot of people like want to be a lawyer take, they take, they will take you on a field trip and I like, I like, I like, I like for him, I would like for him to take us on a field trip and see what actually a lawyer would do..."

Gender Similarities

Gender similarities help facilitate a strong school counselor/student relationship according to two participants. While participants' statements about gender do not appear malicious or wantonly disrespectful, they do seem to reflect antiquated conceptions of

gender wherein men and women are presupposed to possess mutually exclusive

characteristics because of their biological composition. Not only do Hines and Nathan

both believe men are best equipped to counsel and mentor male students, but they

attribute male counselors' effectiveness with men students to either characteristics they

possess because of their maleness or having had to navigate life as a male:

Hines:

"you know, she, she's a female. Men, male counselors are more effective than

female counselors…like, I'm a man, so, well, I'm not a man, but I'm a boy so like

I want to talk about like boys things and like you know, men counselors, they

been, they been there, they did it and so, so, you can't like, women do women

things, men, boys do boy things, men do men things…you know, you know how

if your father's there to talk to you about the birds and the bees and stuff like that,

yea, that's what my, well he don't talk to me about that, but like, he's there to

like, talk to me about sports and stuff like that, academics (inaudible), he

understands me because he's a boy, well he's a man, he understands me cause I'm

a boy."

Nathan:

"like I was saying, a man pushes you harder than a woman… cause a man is, you

know, is pretty much like we are when we was little, like if Mr. Tyler was me and

I was Mr. Tyler [male school counselor] and we had switched places he would

probably under, well you know, give me the most higher you know rank than my

Ms. Norris [female school counselor] cause I'm, he's, I'm a man that knows what

he's going through cause I I once well, he once was me, he understood what, you

know, what was I was basically saying and basically knew what I was talking about… that's why I would rather have a man tell me, well I would rather have a woman too but I rather have a man you know just, you know, like I was saying push me harder... that's what Mr. Tyler is, but Ms. Norris, if you, I mean, like I was saying, she can be mean sometimes like the mean that, like Mr. Tyler is, but she doesn't have that cause she's a lady, but Mr., see I have a mom, but I don't, I have a dad too, I have a, I have a, I have a dad but I think a man is more you know, got a, like more of a strong tone than Ms. Norris does, that's why like, I don't want no, I mean, I'm not saying I don't want no girl but I just want to say for Ms. Norris sake, she isn't, she isn't the right, the right, the right, she's not counselor material… that's why Mr. Tyler man, I like that man to death…"

As Hines put it cogently, "she was, she was, she was a woman, like I'm, I'm a boy, so I'm comfort…of course I'm comfortable with men counselors more than women counselors."

Counselor Disposition

Something gleaned from the participants' statements about their school counselors was that their school counselors' effectiveness had a lot to do with the disposition of the person occupying the role "school counselor." Thus, the participants suggested that it was necessary for a school counselor to possess the proper disposition and project a certain persona if they are to be effective within the school. Perhaps no aspect of this proper disposition and persona is as important as being consistently nice, as Nathan indicates here:

"anytime I come to her [Ms. Norris], she always be the nicest lady she can be, and

she never be mean, she always, like I was saying, she always listens, she always,

she always, uh, let me finish the things that I need to say and that's what, uh,

that's what pretty much, that's what's it, that's, that's all I think I know about

Ms., about my, about Ms. Norris."

While being "the nicest lady" is something Nathan acknowledges and appreciates from

his counselor Ms. Norris, there is another characteristic which he attributes to his male

counselor Mr. Tyler that he finds appealing:

"pretty much, like I was saying, he [Mr. Tyler] a cool cat but when, when you on

that bad man side I'm telling you he, I'm telling you man, a demon. So, yea,

that's what I think Mr. Tyler is to me… pretty much, he have his own swag."

So whether it is possessing "swag", a colloquial term for swagger or confidence, or a nice

attitude, certain characteristics are essential for the person functioning in the capacity as

school counselor. Jay conveys this sentiment here:

"it really is the person, it's how the person is because I can get a person to be a

school counselor but he probably might not, he probably might not have good

understanding with the kids and he might get frustrated and just tell the kids no

I'm not helping you no more or just, or I'm not gonna help you with that. So you

need a counselor who just says, ok, yea, I'll help you, I'll be there for you."

In other words, anyone can occupy the role "school counselor"; however, not everyone

possesses the personality and attributes to effectively perform the duties inherent to the

position. Jay indicated that he is more inclined to "feel at ease" depending on "how his

[school counselor] attitude is, how, his appearance…" Jay continued his discussion of

the appropriate disposition and persona of the effective school counselor thusly:

> "I say like, if you have a man in an all, like a suit that has a good attitude, he talks
>
> to you correctly, he doesn't, he doesn't make no funny face, he doesn't do nothing
>
> wrong… calm; a wealthy man. He's, he, ain't got a lot of money or he don't got a
>
> little bit of money, he's just right. He comes to work dressed up, dressed nicely,
>
> he, he's, he got positive attitude, always has a positive attitude and ready to ask
>
> somebody if they need help or not."

Not only are these factors and characteristics indicative of the school counselors with

whom they interact, they recognize that these things go far in helping to endear the school

counselors to students and engendering a positive relationship. Conversely, as stated here

by Jay, the absence of these things can have negative implications for students:

> "yea because if you don't have that relationship it will be hard for him [school
>
> counselor] to have to come together and and fix a conflict."

However when the relationship is intact and comprised of two invested individuals, that

relationship is functioning optimally; when functioning optimally communication is

efficient and effective, so much so the counselor can, as Jay says:

> "go to any any student or child and go like 'what's the problem' and they can tell
>
> me the problem but I won't know how to do it in their way. He need, he, he, he
>
> can, if he know me, he can get it in both way."

In other words, when the relationship is being maximized a school counselor can

approach a student, inquire about the nature of her or his problem and conceptualize that

students' problem in a manner that respects that students' worldview, vision, and perspective.

Theme Four: Personal and Social Factors Encouraging or Deterring Interactions with the School Counselor

As much of a resource as the school counselor appears to be, participants acknowledged the existence of personal and social variables which can either increase or decrease students' willingness to access school counselors to take advantage of their presence in the middle school.

Deterring: Holding it in

With regard to the types of social variables which may inhibit students from speaking with school counselors, several participants talked about fear of repercussions especially if they were revealing something sensitive like bullying incidents. Jay said that to "hold your feelings in basically that's saying like you can't really tell the world how you is [sic]." Jay described a situation when he observed when a fellow student endured bullying and how he encouraged her to seek the school counselors' assistance:

> "because, you have people that, when they, when they be bullied, I seen it one
> time when a little girl was being bullied she got to the point when she said she's
> not gone come back to school no more. And I told her I said tell the teacher, tell a
> parent, or tell a guardian. And she said she will but she said she scared because if
> you tell and they get on him, and he comes back and bother her again he might be
> worser [sic] and I told her I said just tell them what he be doing and he might, he
> not gone do it again. And she went and told and they got on the student and the
> student never came back and she said, and she just came in and told me thank you
> for helping me because he used to come and beat on her, hit her and just come

everyday at school and tease her. He be in the hallway say 'ha ha ha ha' and like that and she start crying and saying she not coming back to school and things like that."

Jay went on to discuss the adverse consequences students endure when they make the conscious decision not to disclose their concerns with their school counselors:

"when you hold that feelings in it gets to the point where you have anxiety or any other things where it, it can lead to suicide or where it can lead to just drop out, dropping out of school. Like bullying, I, I probably might not tell even tell nobody but it keep going on everyday and you got people where they kill themself because the person bother them so hard and you just dropout."

Vernon echoed this position and revealed that when bullying in his school happens "some people in my school they don't, they don't do the right thing, they don't go and tell, they just let it happen."

So, although school counselors serve as resources, fear prompts students to hold in their concerns rather discussing something sensitive like bullying with their school counselors.

Deterring: Lack of rapport

Protocol often dictates that school counselors are assigned to grades or students alphabetically, which means students can have the same counselor throughout middle school or interact with a different school counselor as they are promoted each year. According to his school's counseling webpage, school counselors are assigned to each grade; this means that as an eighth grader, Vernon is expected to discuss his issues with a particular counselor. However, despite this administrative dictate, Vernon has chosen to

utilize his preexisting relationship with his 7th grade counselor rather than communicate with the 8th grade counselor he has been assigned:

> "well I've seen her [8th grade counselor] in the hall, I've said hi but I haven't talked to her about any of my problems… yea she's available, I just don't feel good with her cause I guess I'm not used to her."

Encouraging: Endorsement of school counselor(s) from other students and family

Participants' receptiveness to the idea of initiating contact with their school counselor to confront a particular problem was attributable to an endorsement of counseling or the counselor from one or more individuals. Jay overheard about school counselors when students converse with one another:

> "I hear when they [students] tell other kids, like you need to go talk to a counselor about this or if you having problems or something go talk to a counselor where it came to me…I, I been hearing it."

He continued by discussing a specific scenario he experienced vicariously which suggested that the school counselor may be equipped to help students in effectively resolving their concerns:

> "when a girl, she had a problem and she went to the guidance counselor and she kept saying I got a problem, I got a problem and everybody kept telling her 'go to the counselor, go to the counselor, he can help you with problems.' And she really went and the next day she came, she said my problem solved. She said all my problems are solved, I'm good I don't need, I don't need nobody else no more. Everything is done and over now, I'm real good now and she said she was done."

Similarly Vernon spoke about how he was instructed directly by his peers to seek the assistance of his school counselor:

"well I have a few friends who have gone to her [school counselor] for reasons and the comfortable thing and then I got, sorta like recommendations from my friends... like my friends suggest me to her and stuff."

Family members also provided endorsements for participants who were contemplating a visit to their school counselor. The only disapproval of meeting with the school counselor is if that visit was prompted by misbehavior; otherwise, parents and other members of participants' immediate and extended families generally support the decision to speak with the school counselor:

Jay:

"she [mother] says it's good too because if I'm not really be, well be able to go to her, I should be able to go to somebody else wit [sic] it. Or if the problem is what she can't handle it I should be able to go to somebody else with it too. Well to, well to somebody who I can speak to. And I won't, cause I won't be able to go to other people cause certain people you can tell your situation to because they might take it the wrong way… well they [grandparents] say, cause since I rarely/really just come to spend the night over their house or come to their house I won't be a, most probably won't be able to come to them just right away. And I might end up forgetting about the problem or and I might, I should be able to talk to a counselor or if I want to be able to talk to my momma, because its, I can't talk to her right away."

Hines:

"they [family members] would be like it's a good thing; they would say that's a

good thing, at least you talked to somebody about your problem but they would

want me to talk about the problem with them first and then, like, if the problem,

like, they give you advice to help you better understand the problem and then like

if you want to take it to the counselor, then, then you go see the counselor."

Encouraging: Previous experiences with a counselor

Aside from endorsements received from other students and members of their

families, participants indicated that previous encounters with school counselors

encouraged them to consider future school counselors as resources as well. In Nathan's

case, he was able to meet one of his current school counselors while she was employed at

the elementary school he attended:

"I think fourth or third grade, fourth for fifth, I think and I was going to St.

Stephens that's when I first met Ms. Norris and then so yea, she was, you know,

this was actually my first year going to St. Stephens and um you know I was

getting to know everybody, got to met, meet the counselor Ms. Norris, the

principal, Ms. Joseph, I got to meet everybody no Ms. Norris, Ms. Norris was

actually working at at St. Stephens before she went to Destiny that's when I first

met Ms. Norris and that's how, why, how we got so close because I knew her for

so long at Dent. So and um and yea actually I had, I had met a another uh

principal from Condor, Ms. Brewster, I had met her, she had you know, that her

first year coming to St. Stephens and then yea I was all excited and stuff getting to

know, getting to see my old principal again."

In addition to the familiarity he had with Ms. Norris, Nathan had also worked previously with a counselor who assisted him with managing his emotions more effectively. Nathan discussed his participation in therapy with a counselor who was not affiliated with his school and how this person engaged him in activities to alleviate stress:

"she not a school counselor, she's like, let's say a uh, what's them little people called that go um, uh yea pretty much but, yea she told me every time you get mad, just get, she gave me this stress ball and every time, every time I didn't feel so right I used to squeeze it, squeeze it, real, squeeze it real hard, where you squeeze it, and squeeze it, until I didn't feel that stress anymore."

Theme Five: Students' Professional Aspirations

Tentative Professional Interests/Aspirations

Although participants were not questioned during the interviews about their tentative and long-term academic and professional aspirations, these things were often discussed regardless. Participants with undefined academic and professional ambitions spoke generally about simply wanting to be better, while others revealed explicitly what they desired to do with their lives as adults. In his comments Jay, who would clearly fall in the undefined category, illustrates that even though his academic and career aspirations have not yet have crystalized, this does not negate his desire to pursue something greater:

"I don't wanna, I wanna be where I know I can I can exceed. Where I know I can get better in life. I wanna strive higher now, I wanna strive where I know cannot do nothing else to get better. Where I know I'm at the peak of better, I'm higher than better, I wanna get awesome, extravagant, or extraordinary, I wanna get way higher, I wanna go high where I can't go higher no more. I want to get to the point

> where I'm so good at stuff where I can't go no gooder [sic]. Where if I, say if I was really, the smartest person in the world, I'm going to try to exceed the smartest person in the world to the smartest person in the galaxy, just for instance."

Initially, Hines appears to have what could best be described as a very generic sense of what he would like his future to entail when he offers this:

> "he's [President Barack Obama] in the heat of the moment, like he's the most important person now, that's what I want to be, I want to be the most important person, I want to be the most important person in the future."

However, as he continued, he revealed a burgeoning academic plan for the future and what he needs to do to get there:

> "So like the college I want to go to, like a division one school, and like I think you have to have a high PSAT/SAT score to, to go to a division one school… And like, to me, a division one school means everything, cause, I mean, you know, scholarships mean everything to me too, but a division one school is a big school. I don't want to go to a little college, I want to go to a big college to me like different people, stuff like that, so counselors help you with that."

Despite only being a sixth grader, Nathan articulates here a very detailed academic and professional plan which entails participation in intercollegiate athletics:

> "that's what, all I want to do when I get older is I want to go to college, I want to get my Master's degree in coaching and I want to be on the basketball team and I want to play a position, I want to play point guard and that's what I want to do for the rest of my life, on and on, but if, if that basketball career doesn't, you know,

go too well, I would just, you know, become a doctor and also get my Master's degree in you know um, probably, I think, I think, in medical, I might even go, uh, the school called um uh what's that school, I forgot, I think it was somewhere in North Carolina that people you know what I'm saying, I think it's a medical school and um… yea, yea that's what I want to become a doctor too."

Nathan expresses a sense of accountability because although he believes firmly that school counselors are an asset to be utilized to accomplish his academic and career goals, he recognizes his goals are unattainable if he does not commit the necessary effort:

"like, no, I mean, I really, I really can't but I can but it is, but pretty much it's not all up to him it's it's to me and to me doing and uh, and it's all about me doing what I supposed to do to push me harder… So I don't really need him to, you know, push me hard to get to the next level I can do myself to push myself to that, you know, the next, the next level."

Participants expressed their intention to achieve their goals no matter the cost or sacrifice. While not articulating an interest in a particular academic discipline or profession, Jay did identify pop culture icons who inspire him, icons who he believes he can one day eclipse in terms of significance and acclaim. Hines has ambitions to attend The University of Alabama because of the university's high profile and insanely successful varsity football team. Hines is intrigued by the possibility of attending a large university and verbalized confidence in his ability to eventually become a student there. Professional basketball and a career in medicine were both identified by Nathan as part of his long-range plan. Far from naïve, Nathan is aware of the improbability of becoming a professional athlete but is resolute about his ability to do what others perceive is

unattainable. Moreover, he intends to take full advantage of his athleticism by acquiring a scholarship to some of the most reputable and rigorous colleges and universities.

Summary

In this section the findings of this study were presented. Data was presented to achieve a better understanding of how a sample of five middle school African American adolescent men perceive and describe their experiences with school counselors. From the participants comments the researcher created five over-arching themes which encompassed a myriad of aspects of the phenomenon of school counseling including the counselor's perceived roles, how the school counselor/student dynamic is created and nurtured, a differentiation between effective and ineffective school counseling, personal characteristics/dispositions associated with effective school counseling, and the variables which interfere or encourage the utilization of school counseling. In addition, the participants connected their futures to their collaborating with the school counselor about various academic and professional strategies and exercises. In the following section, a discussion of the findings will be presented. Implications for these finding for the participants' schools and the counselor education profession are provided. Finally, the limitations for the study and areas of future research will also be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Current school counseling literature often discusses the comprehensive manner in which the role of school counselor role should be ideally performed and how this role is perceived by students (Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008; Kuhn, 2004; Leviton, 1977; Pellegreno & Engen, 1975; Wells & Ritter, 1979). In this literature there are many conceptualizations and operational definitions about the purpose of school counseling and what duties and responsibilities comprise the school counselor role. Most often these descriptions are put forth by school counselor educators or school counselors themselves; unfortunately, notable exceptions aside (Bryan & Gallant, 2012; Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008; Owens, Simmons, Bryant, & Henfield, 2011), K-12 students, middle school African American adolescent men especially, are often omitted from the discourse on the purpose of school counseling. After analyzing the data in this study, a rendering of a highly effective middle school counselor and attendant themes came into sharp relief.

First, the participants' discussion of the purpose of school counseling is, in many ways, consistent with current literature regarding the holistic foci (e.g., personal/social, academic, career) guiding school counselors work with K-12 students (ASCA, 2003; Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). Unlike the unitary focus on career exploration that was present at the profession's inception, 21st century school counselors are expected to utilize culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate strategies to periodically address the personal and interpersonal, academic and occupation domains in a time efficient manner (ASCA, 2003; Gysbers & Henderson, 1988, 1994, 2001; Myrick, 1993). Participants in this study spoke candidly about the multifaceted nature of the school

counseling role, which included detailed discussion about the purposes of the school

counselor. When asked about what they believed the purpose of school counseling to be,

participants offered a variety of explanations which, to one degree or another, reflected

the purpose of school counseling put forth by various organizations or seminal

contributors to the school counseling profession.

All participants discussed the fact they saw the school counselor as being

responsible for supporting them in becoming better students and classmates (academic,

personal/social) and exploring various careers or assisting them in pursuing a preliminary

career preference if one already exists. Whether asserting a crystalized sense of one's

future professional aspirations (e.g., Keyshawn's interest in becoming a lawyer; Vernon's

desire to become an author; Nathan's interest in athletics, coaching and medicine) or an

interest in becoming something or someone significant (e.g., Jay speaking of

transcending Oprah Winfrey), participants clearly saw school counselors as resources

who were expected to facilitate career exploration and career attainment.

Participants' grade classification appears to influence the level of importance

associated with the career exploration activities provided by school counselors. The

prioritization of career choices is not surprising because in the schools included in this

study, the 8th grade school counselor is instrumental in devising Individual Graduation

Plans (IGPs), which guides students' high school course selection. The IGP is designed

to be a guiding framework for not only advancing students towards graduation, but also

an aid in strategic course selection that facilitates college admission and provides an

adequate foundation upon which future post-secondary academic and professional

aspirations can be built (Hines & Lemons, 2011; Stipanovic, 2010). Keyshawn indicated

that this was expressed to him repeatedly by his school counselor at Allen Middle School,

which explains his recurrent mentioning of career exploration as a primary purpose of the

school counselor. Similarly, the career related activities initiated by Vernon's counselor

at Destiny Middle during his 8th grade year is part of the school's expression mission to

assist students in transitioning smoothly into high school and beyond; this desire to assist

students in this way was articulated in the April 2013 Destiny Middle parent newsletter,

that promoted its "IGP/high school registration for 8th grade students." Students and

parents were made aware of the pre-registration dates for the four district high schools

and given career related information for parents on career clusters and how they [parents]

can "get more involved in your child's career planning." The emphasis participants

placed on the role school counselors can play in regards to career exploration is

significant because research has found many adults to be dissatisfied with the quality of

career exploration services they received at the high school level (Johnson & Rochkind,

2010).

The reason for this prioritization of career exploration can, perhaps, be

attributable to the confluence of different factors as well. First, participants' reiterating

the importance of career exploration and then connecting this to their future aspirations

(e.g., eclipsing Oprah Winfrey, comparisons to President Obama, etc.) or wealth

attainment (e.g., Vernon's envisioning a lifestyle that would require a salary of

approximately $400,000 per year) could also be a function of the participants' awareness

of the current employment and economic climate where African American men,

particularly those men from poor and working class backgrounds, have rates of

underemployment and unemployment significantly higher than national averages

(Howard, 2013; Wilson, 2009). Lastly, in this era of rising globalization and consumerism, a preponderance of technology allows corporations to inundate young people with advertisements for products and an accompanying lifestyle which signify importance, power, and prestige (Giroux, 1996; Steinberg, 2011). To obtain these things, however, requires at minimum, a steady stream of income and financial capital. Because this confluence of variables reflect the interconnected web of ecosystems in which middle school African American adolescent men exist simultaneous, it stands to reasons they also shape why certain roles, in this example career exploration, are emphasized more than others.

Both middle schools' counseling/guidance services departments make specific reference to the various functions and purposes they serve and how these are connected to various student outcomes. These references are made in various artifacts found on each school's home webpage. With respect to career exploration, for instance, one of the two school counselors at Allen Middle School is assigned career exploration and career day responsibilities. Additionally, the school's counseling program emphasis on career exploration with regard to total student development in evidenced in the following excerpts from the counseling departments mission statement and description:

> "The Counseling Department of Allen Middle School is dedicated to providing academic, personal, social and career counseling through a system designed to assist all students with developing and attaining their educational, career, and personal goals… All students at Allen Middle School will develop educational objectives consistent with their interests, personality, skills, career values, and

goals…All students at Allen Middle School will develop career objectives consistent with their interests, personality, skills, career values, and goals. While promoted differently on its home webpage, Destiny Middle School expresses a similar commitment to career development/exploration exercises, particularly for rising 8th graders. In addition to other important dates and reminders, the April 2013 Destiny Middle parent newsletter, advertised its "IGP/high school registration for 8th grade students." The pre-registration dates for the four surrounding district high schools are provided as well as information for parents on career clusters and how they [parents] can "get more involved in your child's career planning."

Participants also discussed the importance of the academic-related counseling services they receive from their school counselors. Again, the roles and techniques they discussed were consistent with expectations of school counselors from within the school counseling profession (ASCA, 2003; Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2007; Franklin & Pack-Brown, 2001). Participants discussed how their school counselor has reiterated the importance of educational success and attainment while also discouraging them from engaging in behaviors that would interfere with their academic success. Jay and Nathan mentioned how their school counselors had emphasized how important it was for them to be serious in class, to avoid distractions, and to request assistance when necessary. For African American male students, managing and maintaining a sense of connectivity to one's peer group while also achieving academically has been a point emphasized by counselor educators within the school counseling literature. Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005) contend that part of the professional school counseling role with adolescent African American men is assisting as the young men attempt to successfully

traverse simultaneously the school setting with its expectations and cultural patterns and the African American subculture (e.g., cool persona) especially when these two variables seem irreconcilable (Majors & Billson, 1992). This is precisely what is observed when Jay's school counselor discourages him from certain counterproductive behaviors within the classroom:

"Or to not, to not sit there and just act like you a cool guy and just sit in the back of the class and don't nothing at all. Or to rather play than do work or don't do nothing at all just sit there and just look cause I can't get it, and, yea… yea, to not just sit and do nothing at all… yes sir, be active, be active in extra, extracurricular work or school."

In addition, given the fact school aged African American men are often overrepresented among students most likely to receive the harshest consequences (e.g., in-school and out of school suspensions, expulsions) for behavior deemed inappropriate by school personnel (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010) these implorations from school counselors could be viewed as a way of helping to ensure Jay and Nathan avoid these type of penalties and remain engaged in their schoolwork.

The depiction of the school counselor/student dynamic provided by participants is complex. This dynamic includes the school counselors' dispositions, personal attributes, characteristics and idiosyncrasies; how the school counselors' disposition, personal attributes and characteristics undergird and pervade their execution of their school counselor roles and duties; how these school counselor and student attributes reinforce the integrity of the counseling dynamic. In addition, data reveals that participants' perceptions and cognitions about school counseling cannot be fully understood without

understanding how institutional variables (e.g., school orientation that provides some manner of role induction for students, school counselor assignment strategies etc.) and significant others in the participants' lives (e.g., relatives, friends, classmates) foreground their perceptions about whether school counseling and school counselors are a resource. In this section, this composite and symbolic representation of "a/the" school counselor and the nexus of attendant variables are presented.

It seems that no combination of variables is as integral to the execution of the school counselor role as personal attributes (e.g., niceness, hardness, trustworthiness, etc.), availability, accessibility, and a willingness to nurture the school counselor/student relationship. As they communicated about some of their experiences with their school counselors, participants indicated that the aforementioned school counselor characteristics represent the epicenter from which all other aspects of the school counselor/student dynamic, whether good or bad, emanate. Whether it is being present or visible in the hallway, being available when students are most in need of assistance or appearing genuinely invested in students holistically when speaking with them; participants ascribed much importance to these characteristics when they are demonstrated by the school counselor. To this point, Brown (1999) believes school counselors should assist in the creation of schools where adults "…know students names, recognize their efforts, and provide academic support" because "those who do not care, fail to listen, and refuse to recognize individual differences in achievement potential contribute to the alienation of students" (p. 1).

With regard to how the school counselor/student relationship is cultivated, a number of different strategies were identified. Participants appreciate when school

counselors express trust in them and are trustworthy themselves (e.g., confidential); when they exhibit confidence in students' abilities; and when school counselor motivate and inspire students to pursue their goals despite how daunting those goals may appear to others. The significance participants attached to these ways of being reflect previous research findings where school aged students discussed how the presence of certain attributes, a sense of caring for example, contributed to their decision to seek out certain adult based professionals over others (Baylis, Collins, & Coleman, 2011; Lindsey & Kalafat, 1998; West & Kayser, 1991; Saunders & Saunders, 2001). In addition, it seems that when participants sensed their school counselor was truly invested in their development and the integrity of the counseling relationship, they felt more empowered to pursue their aspirations.

When participants discussed their future post-secondary and career endeavors, they frequently acknowledged the role their school counselor had played in providing positive affirmations. It is believed school counselors can play a key contributing role in supporting the vision students—including minority and low-income students—have for themselves educationally and occupationally (Carey & Martin, 2007; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006) . Literature on students' possible selves states these images provide school counselors and other school based adults insight into how students foresee their futures, and this insight can be harnessed and integrated practically to motivate and encourage those students' pursuits (Clark, Lee, Goodman, & Yacco, 2008; Clark, Flower, Walton, & Oakley, 2008). Also, the emphasis participants' school counselors placed on their abilities, rather than their perceived weakness, is a strengths-based approach that is the antithesis to the deficit-oriented conceptualization which has been used overwhelming

to describe and depict African American men socially and educationally (Brown, 2011; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Howard, 2013).

While this combination of characteristics was mentioned in some manner or another by all participants, other important characteristics that participants mentioned reflected their personal idiosyncrasies. For instance, Nathan and Hines believe gender similarities were relevant to the relationships they have been able to forge with their male school counselors. Operating from an biological perspective on gender with assumptions about men and women's fundamental attributes, these two participants believe that male school counselors are best equipped biologically and socioculturally to provide a stern and harsh counseling style adolescent men need and model behavior for them to emulate. In much the same way that male therapists have been perceived elsewhere (Gehert & Lyle, 2001), Nathan and Hines perceived their male school counselors to be more firm and less sensitive than their female counterparts. Furthermore, Nathan stated explicitly that part of his affinity and preference for his male counselor is because he [the school counselor] was once an adolescent male himself; therefore, he, as opposed to the female counselors, is best suited to discuss certain sensitive subjects (e.g., girls, sex or sexuality). Interestingly, this point is consonant with Wintersteen, Mensinger and Diamond (2005) position that "clinical lore drives many assumptions that these elements [gender and race] affect therapy beyond the actual intervention" including the "…a common belief that boys will demonstrate greater improvement with male therapists and girls with female therapists" (p. 400). While, the preferences for male counselors expressed by Nathan and Hines seem inconsistent with some research which has either illustrated no male preferences by male clients (Pikus & Heavey, 1996) or that gender differences appear

inconsequential to the counseling relationship (Goldberg & Tidwell, 1990), the oft cited

underrepresentation of adult African American men in key educational positions (Brown,

2009) may have precipitated Nathan and Hines' expressed preference for male

counselors. It should also be noted that Nathan and Hines' conversations about why they

gravitate towards their male school counselor is rooted in an appreciation and enjoyment

of sports, which reflects a "high action orientation" (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010, p.

277) discussed frequently within the counseling literature as a male-friendly way to

connect with male clients (Kiselica, 2003).

Gender and race are particularly relevant to the educational pursuits of African

American adolescent men. Counselor educators and educational researchers have written

extensively about how African American adolescent men's pursuit of educational

attainment can be threatened by, among other things, adults within and outside the

educational setting who perceive them in a stereotypical fashion (Brown, 2011; Brown &

Donnor, 2011; Ferguson, 2001; Howard, 2013; Jenkins, 2006), and why it is vital for

school counselors to design interventions specifically for this group. Because research on

the demographic makeup of the current teacher (Aud, et al., 2011) and school counseling

workforce (Bemak & Chung, 2004; Muller, 2002; White & Rayle, 2007) reveals these

workforces consist, primarily, of a professionals much less diverse than the student

populations they now encounter, programs such as G's to Gents and 100 Black Men

provide a context to discuss salient issues that affect African American men

academically, but also contact with a mentor with whom African American male students

share similarities (Brown, 2009; Muller, 2002). So, despite the perceived flaws

underpinning oversimplified and reductionists endorsements of Black male teachers'

mentorship of urban Black male students' (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010), gender similarity was salient for two male participants in this study.

Based on how adequately and consistently the aforementioned counseling characteristics are demonstrated or performed, participants seem to develop confidence in the school counselor's ability to produce some tangible positive impact for their lives personally, socially, academically, and professionally. Additionally, participants consistently identified these personal/social, academic and professional domains as the most basic and fundamental school counselor responsibilities. Obviously, academic success is important for middle school students. Therefore, any assistance students receive from adults within the school can be advantageous. Moreover, it seems the counseling relationship and working alliance is most rewarding when participants sense their school counselors has an earnest and sincere desire to help rather than merely verbalizing a desire to help.

When asked about the purpose of school counseling participants often spoke in general terms about the various responsibilities school counselors assume and should ideally perform. On two occasions, (Keyshawn and Jay), the provision of personal hygiene products and other relevant educational materials (e.g., book bags, professional attire) were considered aspects of non-traditional counseling roles not typically discussed within the contemporary conceptualization of what school counselors are charged to do. Keyshawn and Jay indicated that by providing these things to students, school counselors were doing much more than simply dispersing bars of soap and sticks of deodorant; instead these school counselors were helping to create an academic climate where students who did not have these items could navigate the school uninhibitedly without

fear of ridicule for body odor. The provision of these items reflects an apparent need of students in both schools and this study. A large percentage of both schools' student population currently receives free/reduced lunch. Additionally, Allen Middle School publicized in its parent newsletter the existence of a food pantry to assist "families experiencing a temporary crisis." Lastly, though unrelated directly to the financial circumstances perpetuating the utilization of school counselors' non-traditional duties, a conversation with Jay during the study revealed how limited some participants' financial situation actually is. When discussing the $10 GameStop card compensation for participation in this study, Jay indicated he intended to use the honorarium to purchase the AV cord rather than a game. He rationalized his position by stating it was easier and made more sense to supplement the $10 to secure that component than it would to supplement the $10 to actually purchase a game.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

Given the ecological framework used in this study, the implications of the findings for this study correspond to the nested and dynamic ecosystems in which middle school African American adolescent men are immersed and interact.

Within the Schools

Much of the information gained over the course of this study is immediately applicable within the schools where these participants currently attend, and may assist in maximizing the way in which school counseling services are rendered there. For instance, despite school counseling literature to the contrary, an administrative duty like hallway assignments seems to provide school counselors consistent access to students which, apparently, helps facilitate a relationship. Therefore, when soliciting volunteers

for hall monitoring duties; school counselors in these two schools should seriously

consider volunteering because it appears that it can be advantageous to their attempts to

connect with and serve students.

The non-traditional counseling services issues put forth by Keyshawn and Jay

reflect economic inequality and constitute ongoing systemic social justice issues. For

quite some time school counselor educators have spoken about systemic inequality and

the negative social and academic impact persistent inequality can have on poor and

working class, racial and ethnic minority students (Hipilito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). Both

Jay and Keyshawn mentioned that part of school counselors' responsibilities at their

school includes giving basic hygiene items to students whose families may not be

equipped financially to provide these things consistently. Although Keyshawn and Jay

did not indicate that their school counselors were actively engaging in activities

indicative of social justice advocacy, these school counselors could perhaps utilize their

awareness to create responsive programs to address economic trials and tribulations

experienced by poor and working class families around the school.

Although none of the participants provided any evidence that their school

counselors actively engage in social justice orientation work within or outside the school,

Jay stated that his school counselor's decision to enroll him and his peers in clubs and

organizations like G's to Gents and 100 Black Men is to help them avoid threats to their

educational futures, namely in-school disciplinary action, gang participation, dropping

out of school, or potentially negative encounters with police officers. Thus, by

intentionally exposing him to organizations that focus on the disproportionate impact

these issues have on adolescent African American men, Jay's school counselor is

deliberately challenging him to think about these things moving forward, an important strategy for school based counseling professionals (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007).

To enlighten students, parents, faculty and staff about the multitude of services provided by school counselors, school administrators could consider inviting a representative from the counseling and guidance services departments to make presentations during student orientation periods. These presentations can be used as opportunities for students and parents to become aware of the purpose of the school counseling program and how this purpose connects to students' overall growth. Since familiarity with the current school counselor and previous experience with counseling in general were mentioned as factors encouraging the utilization of counseling services, this orientation may foster connections with the counseling department. Additionally, during this presentation, students can learn about how school counselors will be assigned in the school (e.g., grade or alphabetic assignment). Finally, school administrators and school counselors should consider how these assignment strategies can impact students' willingness to access school counseling services.

Outside the School with Parents/Guardians

Participants in this study received endorsements from their parents about being proactive in initiating contact with their school counselors if the need arose. Participants indicated these endorsements were a function of parents'/relatives' beliefs that school counselors, like other adults within the school, were there to assist them. Participants only expressed hesitation about parents' knowledge of their interactions with school counselors if and when these interactions were the result of their having misbehaved at

school (e.g., Keyshawn, Nathan). Otherwise, parents and members of participants'

extended families were supportive of their decisions to seek the school counselor for

assistance.

For this reason school counselors should be proactive in establishing contact and

rapport with parents/guardians to discuss their role within the school and how their

services can help students accomplish their immediate and long-term personal/social,

academic and career related goals (Alliman-Brissett, Turner, & Skovholt, 2004; Bradley,

Johnson, & Rawls, 2005; Colbert, 1991; Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). This

collaboration could entail, for instance, school counselors expressing to parents the

importance of various educational opportunities (e.g., in parent newsletters; PSAT) and

then connecting these services to African American adolescent men's future academic

and career aspirations (Moore, 2006). By engaging is such activities proactively, African

American parents are more inclined to endorse the school counselor as a viable resource

within the school setting. Operating from the ecological perspective which grounded this

study, parents were assumed to wield a tremendous amount of influence in regard to how

participants perceived school counselors and the utility of the services they render.

School Counselor Education

Portions of this study's research data are applicable to the school counselor

education profession; in particular, the way pre-service school counseling students are

prepared to render services to middle school students. What participants had to say about

their expectations of school counselors, school counselor characteristics, and personal,

social and institutional variables impacting the school counselor/student dynamic can be

especially useful to how pre-service school counselors are prepared. For instance,

participants in this study talked frequently about how the term/role "school counselor" is simply a vessel/avenue through which an adult's personal attributes are manifested as they perform the duties/responsibilities expected of the school counselor. In this study those attributes included things like being "nice" and "hard", and possessing "swag" among others. School counselor educators can address this issue by emphasizing and reiterating to pre-service school counselors the importance of self-inventory and assessing their attributes and disposition because these factors are perceived by the students with whom they will eventually work (Guindon, 2010). Didactic (e.g., assigned reading, in-class instruction, etc.) and experiential activities (e.g., role playing, etc.) are, perhaps, two pathways school counselor educators can use to reinforce the importance of self-awareness to pre-service school counselors as well as how this type of awareness can be instrumental in establishing relationships with youth and adolescents.

The ways in which participants described their relationships with their school counselor warrants school counselor educators' consideration. Participants either expressed how they had ideally envisioned these relationships or spoke about them as they currently existed. Overwhelmingly, these relationships resembled the parent/child or friend/friend dynamic. Accordingly, future pre-service school counselors, who will presumably work with middle school African American adolescent men, can be engaged in dialogue about how to forge relationships that reflect the relationships valued by adolescent African American adolescent men in a professional and ethical manner.

Additionally, because middle school African American adolescent men's opinions and perspectives on education and school counseling in particular are rarely solicited, this study provides some insight into what African American adolescent men expect of school

counselors. As indicated in this study, participants are, not surprisingly, more likely to be satisfied with their school counselor when most or all of their expectations are satisfied. Participants in this study expressed expectations that are virtually identical to those put forth within school counseling literature and by certifying educational and counseling organizations (e.g., ASCA; State Departments of Education; CACREP) at the state and national levels. This means participants want their school counselor to dedicate their time, effort and energies to assist them in becoming better students (academic), who relate effectively to others (social) and confidently pursue the professions they have identified (professional). Hence, this study validates strategies school counselor educators employ which encourage pre-service school counselors to take seriously their role in promoting students' development in these domains and how to facilitate that development while also managing ancillary responsibilities.

One can infer from the participants in this study that considerable time and effort is required of both student and school counselor if this counseling dyad is to be maximized to its full potential. Participants discussed how they felt when their school counselors inspired them and expressed confidence in their abilities. Therefore, stimulating dialogue with pre-service school counselors that prompts serious consideration about how to effectively nurture the school counselor/student dynamic remains a priority for school counselor educators. So, for instance, by communicating to pre-service school counselor the salience some students attach to a school counselors' presence and visibility within the school, pre-service school counselors can envisage strategies that help them to establish a pattern of visibility that does not compromise other aspects of the position.

The importance some participants in this study attached with gender similarity with their male school counselors is something the school counselor education should consider seriously. For two participants male school counselors were seen as uniquely equipped, because of their own 'adolescent maleness', to aid male students in managing and traversing personal, social, and academic domains effectively. Given the fact that school counselors are overwhelming female (Muller, 2002), school counselor education programs should consider the implications of gender dissimilarity between male students and women school counselors and strategies to address this dissimilarity effectively. One such strategy may entail some manner of recruitment meant to make the idea of pursuing school counseling more enticing to male undergraduate human services/social science students. Comparable recruitment efforts have been utilized to promote an increase in the racial and ethnic representation of the counseling profession (Brooks & Steen, 2010) and may be relevant to the recruitment of prospective male school counselors.

Perhaps nothing is more critical for pre-service school counselors and their eventual work with adolescent African American men in middle school settings than engaging these pre-service professionals in conversation about how they have been socialized to perceive non-whites (Katz, 1985), African American young men included (Howard, 2013; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012; Toporek, 2013). For counseling professionals this entails, as Dale and Daniels (2013) poignantly state her, a recognition that:

> most of us in the United States (both White persons and individuals who belong to
> ethnic minority groups) were socialized to view Black male adolescents and
> adults as inferior and dangerous, stereotypes that have negative and in some cases

deadly consequences for Black male adolescents and adults and other ethnic

minorities (p. 39-40).

Acknowledging this socialization is significant because it is thought to have a tangible

positive impact on how counseling professionals are able view and conceptualize

ethnically diverse clients' concerns within a social context (Dale & Dixon, 2013) and can

strengthen to counselor-client relationship (Day-Vines et al., 2007). Moreover, by

thinking about the sociopolitical realities that precipitated the way they see themselves

and ethnically diverse students, pre-service school counselors take essential steps towards

becoming the social justice oriented school counselors endorsed by members of the

counseling profession (Griffin & Steen, 2011; Hatch & Lewis, 2011). As Shin and his

colleagues (2010) suggest, this orientation is important for students of color because it

empowers and equips these students with the critical lens to interrogate and contest the

unique sociopolitical forces (e.g., reduction in the funding of public education, zero

tolerance school disciplinary policies, presence of resource officers in schools,

redlining/educational gerrymandering, etc.) that often constrain their educational

opportunities (Caton, 2012; O'Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009; Whiting, 2009).

In addition to broaching discussion with pre-service school counselors about how

it behooves them to operate from a social justice orientation when attempting to

understand the variables impacting how they work with adolescent African American

men in middle school settings, it is also important for counselor educators to converse

with pre-service students about rapport building with this population. Findings from this

study revealed that rapport building with middle school African American youths

depends greatly upon school counselors' ability to avoid viewing adolescent African

American men through deficit-oriented lenses (Herr & Erford, 2011; Dale & Daniel, 2013).

Post Master's Training

Findings from this study suggest it is important for practicing school counselors to engage in post-Master's training, training that is often acquired through membership in professional organization and attendance at professional conferences (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2011). With respect to counseling interactions and interventions with middle school African American adolescent men, post-Master's training provides an avenue through which school counselors can remain abreast of innovative culturally relevant counseling approaches, strategies and techniques that are shown to pay tangible dividends with this student group (Harper, Terry, & Twiggs, 2009). In addition to the presentations provided at national and regional conferences, professional membership and conference attendance can be beneficial for professional school counselors' work with adolescent African American men because it provides the opportunity to foster collaboration and consultation opportunities (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2011). Because promoting the success of ethnically diverse students often entails broaching difficult conversations that can engender negative personal and professional implications (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010), collaborating with others can not only stimulate ideas but also mitigate negative repercussions.

School Counselor Professional Advocacy

Findings from this study can also be integrated into professional advocacy efforts by members of the school counseling profession. First, what participants in this study had to say with respect to a sense of connectedness to professional school counselors can

be utilized by members of the profession to demand that existing counselor/student ratios be seriously reconsidered. By requesting that the leadership of the school counseling profession seriously reconsider guidelines for counselor/student ratios, acting school counselors are acknowledging that current ratios make it difficult to establish a genuine sense of connectedness with a vast majority of their student population. If, as this study suggests, a genuine sense of connectedness hinges on consistent and intimate contact between a young person and counseling professional, making counselor/student ratios more manageable would be in the best interest of the school counseling profession and, most importantly, the students being served.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

Future research can build on the findings of this study by probing various topics more deeply. Researchers could question middle school African American adolescent men about several topics including how they perceive themselves as students, the terms these students use to express the benefits received from utilizing school counseling, whether they usually self-refer to counseling or if their contact is prompted by others. Follow up research exploring similar questions with middle school African American adolescent men should include a more academically diverse sample. For instance, future research should seek to deliberately include the perceptions and thoughts of adolescent African American men who have demonstrated both high and low levels (e.g., high and low GPAs) of academic performance and achievement. Future research could also be undertaken to explore in greater detail exactly how middle school African American adolescent men's preliminary or long-standing career interest develop.

Replicating qualitative studies, including grounded and ethnographic qualitative methodologies, could also question school counselors themselves about their interactions with middle school African American adolescent men to examine points of convergence and divergence. Future research on this topic that includes professional school counselors should also inquire about whether the ASCA (2003) comprehensive school counseling model existed at the time of their graduate school matriculation. Some in-service professional school counselors may not have received their graduate counseling degrees prior to the widespread endorsement and implementation of comprehensive school counseling models which could inform the manner in which they perform their school counseling duties. Investigating any substantive curriculum differences in the graduate school counseling experiences of professional school counseling may facilitate important discoveries about how these educational experiences impact how middle school African American adolescent men perceive school counselor services.

Researchers investigating middle school African American adolescent men perceptions of school counselors could also quantitative methodologies to examine the relationship between African American adolescent men's socioeconomic status and parental variables, how school counseling services are perceived and which school counseling services are prioritized and deemed most important. Additionally, quantitative methodology could be utilized to discern variables which may impact African American adolescent men's perceptions of their school counselors (e.g., racial identity, conformity/adherence to masculine gender norms, acculturation, etc.) or how these variables interact with one another. Involving such quantitative data may reveal useful information about African American adolescent men's perceptions of their school

counselor, and how these perceptions can be altered to improve the accessibility of school counselors for middle school African American adolescent men.

To increase the generalizability of findings on how middle school African American perceive and interact with school counselors, future research should employ quantitative research methodology with a larger sample size. Also, future research can be conducted to grasp the impact of various aspects of the forging of the school counselor/student relationship found in this study (e.g., counselor assignment strategy, school counselor orientation v. no school counselor orientation). Future research might also assess which of the school counselor relationship building attributes or ways of being middle school African American young men find most significant. Lastly, research may also prove useful in determining the nature and frequency of school counseling services/modalities (e.g., group counseling, individual counseling, classroom guidance) middle school African American adolescent men believe are most effective for providing the personal/social, academic and career related counseling services they desire.

Limitations

There were limitations in this study which represent opportunities for further research into the experiences of middle school African American men in general and, specifically, how they perceive and interact with their professional school counselors. First, the entire spectrum of academic performance (e.g., 0.0—4.0 GPA) was not present in the sample of participants in this study. One might assume that the perceptions, thoughts and experiences with the professional school counselor would differ depending on how well one performs academically. Therefore, the findings from this study may not

be applicable to the experiences of middle school adolescent African American men with different levels of academic performance.

Another limitation was the failure to consistently follow-up participants' comments about themselves, the colloquial terms they (e.g., Hines' "students like me" statement) used to describe the benefits of utilizing counseling services (e.g., Jay's "getting off my chest), how often they were self-referred as opposed to those times they were referred by someone else, how preliminary or long-standing career interest developed, or what they suspected school counselors were doing when they were not seen in the hallways interacting with students. Additionally, the impression held by some participants about regulations they believed interfered with their teachers' ability to provide items to students (e.g., deodorant) that their school counselors provided regularly were not explored.

Because this study utilized phenomenological qualitative methodology, there are some inherent limitations to this study. First, unlike other qualitative methodologies where direct observation is possible, the researcher was unable to witness exactly how counseling interactions between the participants and their school counselors unfolded. Thus, it was impossible to assess the degree to which the participants' perceptions and experiences with their school counselors reflect their actual interactions with these professionals. Secondly, because the primary focus of this phenomenological study focused on how the participants perceived and described their experiences with school counseling, the school counselors themselves were not consulted about the nature of the services they deliver or how they believed those services are perceived or assessed by participants in this study. Third, supplementary sources of data, most notably teachers,

administrators and parents were not questioned for the purpose of this study. Fourth, the school counselors at the schools where participants attend were not questioned about their perceptions of the African American adolescent men participants in this study.

Final Thoughts

The adolescent African American men in this study spoke about their school counselors and through their stories, provided compelling support for the continuation of professional school counseling services. Phenomenological qualitative research that operated from an ecological perspective provided a platform for these participants to detail how they perceived their school counselors and which aspects of the counseling relationship had left the most salient impression. All of the participants expressed their satisfaction for the services they had been provided and provided tangible recommendations for how these services could be improved to benefit their classmates as well as future students.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Questionnaire and Research Survey

Instructions:

Please check the response which best answers the following questions.

Name: _____

STUDY NAME: _____
                           (This line will be completed by the researcher.)

Date:

Age:_____

School Name:_____

Grade Level:_____

In general, how would you describe your current level of school performance:

☐   A
☐   B
☐   C
☐   D
☐   F

Do you enjoy school? Explain why or why not:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

_____

_____

How many times would you say you have worked with the school counselor this past academic year? _____

How many times would you say you have worked with the school counselor in the previous academic year?_____

What types of things do you usually discuss with the school counselor? Check all that apply:

- ☐ Academic or school issues
- ☐ Personal issues
- ☐ Social issues (making friends, bullying, family concerns)
- ☐ Job or Career issues (interest surveys, job shadowing)
- ☐ Other _____

How would you describe your interactions with your school counselor?

- ☐ Helpful
- ☐ Extremely helpful
- ☐ Not helpful at all

What factors may influence whether or not you will speak with your school counselor about an issue?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX B

Research and Interview Questions

1. (Research Question) How do African American male middle school students describe the purpose of school counseling?
    a. (Interview Question) Tell me what you believe is the purpose of school counseling?

2. (RQ) How do African American male middle school students describe their expectations of their school counselor(s)?
    a. (IQ) Tell me what you want or expect out of your school counselor?

3. (RQ) How do African American male middle school students describe their experiences with the school counselor(s)?
    a. (IQ) What experiences have you had working with your school counselor?
    b. (IQ) What were those experiences working with your school counselor like?

4. (RQ) How do African American men evaluate their school counselors' performance?
    a. (IQ) How would you rate your school counselor?
    b. (IQ) What does that rating mean to you?

5. (RQ) How do African American men' believe their decision to speak with their school counselor would be perceived by their peer group?
    a. (IQ) What types of issues do you discuss with your school counselor?
    b. (IQ) What do you believe your friends would think about your decision to speak with your school counselor about those issues?

6. How do African American men' believe their decision to speak with their school counselor would be perceived by their family?
    a. (IQ) What do you believe your family members would think about your decision to speak with your school counselor about those issues?

APPENDIX C

School Profiles

Allen Middle School	Destiny Middle School
Total Students=376	Total Students=1295
Students served by gifted and talented program=N/AV	Students served by gifted and talented program=N/AV
School website mentions an Extended Program entitled:	School website mentions the following academic related special programs:
Saturday STEM Academy (Robotics, SIM City and Sustainable Gardening)	• The Learning Collaborative (TLC) "serves high-achieving and highly motivated students by immersing them in a rigorous, intellectually stimulating academic environment."
	• Two Academies, a single gender program providing unique educational opportunities through community partnerships.
	• The AVID program, which is meant to "to provide students with authentic learning experiences that will both enhance their performance in content area classes (math, science, social

studies, language and literacy) and set

the stage for successful high school and

college experiences."

Teachers with advanced degrees=87.1%	Teachers with advanced degrees=66.3%
Number and percentage of students on free and reduced lunch=359 (92%)	Number and percentage of students on free and reduced lunch=577 (80.0%)
School counselor assignment policy: School counselor assigned by last name: One counselor grades 6-8 and last names A-L; one counselor grades 6-8 and last names M-Z	School counselor assignment policy: School counselor assigned by grade: One counselor per grade
Student to counselor ratio: 188:1	Student to counselor ratio: 431:1
2011-2012 Student Population Racial Makeup:	2011-2012 Student Population Racial Makeup:
Black: 89%	African American: 62%
White: 1%	White: 23%
Other: 10%	Asian: 5%
	Hispanic: 6%
	Other: 3%
Suspension Rate: 46%	2010-2011 In-School Suspension

Days:438

2010-2011 Out-School Suspend Events:

521

Expulsions: 5

2012 Absolute Rating: Below Average   2012 Absolute Rating: Good