

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR HIGH SCHOOL
CAREER COUNSELING EXPERIENCES

by

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Dedication

I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13.

This is dedicated to my baby Byrds: Cameron, Justin, and Sydney. I did this as much for you as I did for myself. I want you to see what you can accomplish in life if you believe in yourself as I believe in you. Work hard to make this world a better place. I cannot wait to see who you become and all the great things you will do along the way.

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ABSTRACT

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR HIGH SCHOOL CAREER COUNSELING EXPERIENCES

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George Mason University, 2013

Dissertation Director: Dr. Penelope Earley

This study examined the perceptions of 10 African American 12th-grade students from one suburban high school regarding their high school career counseling experiences. The purpose was to better understand how students perceive their career counseling interactions and to ascertain what factors were relevant in the counseling relationship. An individual, in-person interview was conducted with each participant. An analysis of the individual interviews was conducted which yielded a number of themes that were relevant to each participant. A further analysis of all 10 student cases collectively identified eight themes that emerged as common amongst multiple participants. The common themes were: (a) counselors need to be a useful resource, (b) counselors need to emotionally connect with students, (c) counselors need to be personable, (d) students did not seek career development assistance, (e) students judged counselors based on observations of work ethic (f) college-bound students reported similar counseling needs,

(g) male students reported generally favorable experiences, and (h) counselor demographics not mentioned. These themes identify characteristics of the counseling relationship that the participants found significant to them.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

All students need effective career counseling; however, it would be naïve to believe that all students receive information in the same manner. African American students have unique needs in this current society that have earned them the right to be studied separately from the majority population. There is still a disparity in educational attainment and income between African American people and the majority population (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; King & Madsen, 2007). According to 2011 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, 94 percent of White students and 88 percent of African American students were shown to attain a high school diploma or the equivalency (NCES, 2012). As the education level increases, so does the gap between White students and African American students in their academic achievement. Approximately 30 percent of White people and only 19 percent of African American people go on to obtain any type of college degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In addition, the 2010 Census data show that Caucasian households earned an average of \$54,620 per year whereas African American households earned \$32,068 annually. Further, less than 10% of Caucasian families lived in poverty as opposed to over 27% of African American families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

The most important disparity in opportunity may occur before young people enter the labor market; in the provision of schooling and other resources that influence

skill-building and the socialization of youths...Interventions to strengthen schools, families, and other institutions that prepare children for adulthood must be the highest priority in responding to the economic disparities that remain among young adults (Ferguson, 2007, p. 36.)

Today's school counselors have been called upon to advocate for minority students, especially to help close the achievement gap between ethnic minority and Caucasian students (American School Counselor Association (ASCA), 1999). It is important that school counselors are aware of the aforementioned statistics so they can advise their African American students appropriately. Counselors must have an understanding of how to recognize discrimination and other barriers to equal educational opportunity so they can take the appropriate steps to address these barriers, enabling all students to develop to their fullest (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). In career decision-making, African American students need to consider all aspects of their society including economic, cultural, and sociopolitical factors which often function to privilege certain groups in society to the detriment of others (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). Counselors should be equipped and willing to help their African American students think through these issues.

High school counselors should be seen as a strong support for African American students in their career planning process. Thus, national and state certification requirements for school counselors have been modified to require multicultural competency so counselors can effectively work with all populations (Herring, 1998). This change was designed to provide better assistance to minority populations who have

special needs in this current society. Multicultural counseling competence is shown when a counselor is able to actively develop and practice appropriate intervention strategies needed for work with culturally different clients (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Looking at counseling through the eyes of the student will help to better ascertain how well these strategies are working. This study gathers information from African American 12th-grade high school students about their perceptions, experiences, and interactions with their school counselors regarding high school career counseling.

Background of the Problem

The role of the school counselor. School counselors are often considered vital members of the education team (ASCA 2010; National Governors Association, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 1991, 2009). The National Governors Association's Education, Early Childhood & Workforce Committee (2011) published a policy position paper in which seven principles for high school reform were listed, including federal support for guidance and counseling services for students that includes early college planning and preparation. The U.S. Department of Education (2009) has appropriated funds to provide grants to local education agencies to help support, establish, and expand elementary school and secondary school counseling programs. ASCA (2010), a professional organization that represents school counselors, asserted that school counselors are critical in helping all students in the areas of academic achievement, personal/social development, and career development, ensuring today's students become the productive, well-adjusted adults of tomorrow. Every state has specific requirements that school counselors must meet in order to practice counseling in the public school

system (ASCA, 2012a). On its website, ASCA states that most public school systems require counselors have an advanced degree which includes providing proficiency through coursework on the following subjects:

- human growth and development,
- theories,
- individual counseling,
- group counseling,
- social and cultural foundations,
- testing/appraisal,
- research and program evaluation,
- professional orientation,
- career development,
- supervised practicum, and
- supervised internship.

This collection of courses is intended to prepare counselors for work in the field of school counseling education including career counseling with individual students as well as groups. There are 217 school counselor education programs endorsed by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2012).

CACREP began requiring a multicultural counseling training component in 1994 and added a social and cultural foundation requirement to the core curricula; however, there is no evidence that a multicultural component was required to complete most counselor preparation programs before that time.

Career counseling. In many states a set of standards for school counseling programs include three domains: academic, career, and personal/social (Maryland State Board of Education, 2011; Virginia Department of Education, 2011a). Other school systems have instituted standards such as those published by the District of Columbia Public Schools (2011), that maintains their “standards are based to a large extent on those established by ASCA” (p.8) (Dahir, Burnman, & Stone, 2009; Florida Department of Education, 2010; North Carolina Public Schools, 2008). As such, ASCA’s (2010) guidance states that career counseling should be one of the major components of the school counselor’s job that also includes academic and personal/social counseling. Further, ASCA (2004) published its own set of standards, ASCA National Standards for Students, a portion of which is devoted to career counseling stating that “school counseling programs will provide the foundation for the acquisition of skills, attitudes and knowledge that enable students to make a successful transition from school to the world of work, and from job to job across the life span” (p. 5). This includes helping students develop career awareness and employment readiness skills, acquire career information, and identify appropriate work goals. ASCA does not give specific guidance as to how this career counseling should be conducted; presumably leaving the implementation procedures to the local education agencies.

Although all of the aforementioned state policies acknowledge that school counselors are the primary conduit through which career exploration and planning information is passed along to students, the scope of the counselor’s work appears to be increasing. In Virginia, school counselors are now being tasked to work with students to

develop the newly created Academic and Career Plan, or ACP, (Virginia Board of Education, 2009). The ACP is a document intended for use by school personnel and families to assist students in their academic and post-secondary career planning beginning in the 2012-2013 academic year (Virginia Board of Education, 2009).

Guidelines for using the ACP are outlined by the Virginia Board of Education:

The ACP is designed to be a working document that maximizes student achievement by having the student accomplish goals in middle and high school that lead to postsecondary and career readiness. The ACP should be student-driven and maintained by school professionals working cooperatively to assist the student in reaching his or her goals in the most logical academic and career path.

(p. 1)

Thus, school counselors must work with students in career planning and also document the individual student plans using a standard model. As a result, the activities that school counselors must accomplish in assisting students with career planning are increasing in scope, accountability, and visibility.

Although the Virginia Board of Education (2011) stated “there is nothing that prohibits a school division from implementing the Academic and Career Plan prior to the 2012-2013 school year,” (“Academic and Career Plan,” para 2) it did not provide evidence that any educational system has already implemented the ACP. However, based on school division website information, it appears to be common practice across the Commonwealth of Virginia for the staff of school counseling offices to focus their efforts on assisting students with academic and career planning. Virginia Beach City Public

Schools' (2011) website stated that their school counseling program was designed to help students with academic planning, career awareness, and career/vocational preparation.

Prince William County Public Schools' (2010) website stated that each school shall establish a comprehensive school guidance and counseling program that includes academic counseling and career counseling. This counseling is intended to help students acquire information and take actions relative to work, jobs, apprenticeships, and post-secondary educational and career opportunities. Fairfax County Public Schools (2011) had a mission statement published on its website regarding its school counseling program which stated that their goal was to

provide a comprehensive model which empowers students to become independent and productive individuals through a developmentally age-appropriate program addressing academic, social, emotional, and career counseling services while preparing students to become lifelong learners and productive members in global society. (para. 1)

Virginia Beach, Prince William, and Fairfax Counties are the three largest school districts in the Commonwealth according to 2010-2011 fall data published by the Virginia Department of Education (2011b). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume this is practice across the Commonwealth.

Virginia is not the first state to create an academic and career planning tool for use in schools. In 2006, a representative of the National Conference of State Legislatures reported that 13 states had implemented legislation to require development of graduation and post-high school documented plans for all students (Shreve, 2006). Thus, the creation

of the ACP in Virginia is in line with other states' efforts to increase career planning initiatives for students. In most states school counselors are designated as the primary resource to assist students in this planning; therefore, the onus to thoughtfully and effectively do this falls squarely on their shoulders.

Statement of the Problem

Counselor concerns. Though career planning is part of school counselors' jobs, it is only one of many responsibilities. With decreased state and local funding for K-12 education, a smaller staff of counselors is expected to assume heavier caseloads and more responsibilities. Many counselors are simply overburdened by increased caseloads and responsibilities. The National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) published a report in 2009 showing that nearly half of the public schools surveyed reported rising counselor caseloads with the average increase exceeding 53 students (NACAC, 2010). Managing a substantial caseload of students with various issues and needs has always been a challenging part of the school counselor's job. Maintaining a caseload over the recommended size makes the task more difficult. In addition to large caseloads, counselors also reported increased work demands in other areas. According to NACAC, counselors stated they often are called upon to be school test coordinators, schedulers, registration counselors, department liaisons, and cafeteria monitors, to name a few odd jobs.

The strain of trying to manage all of the facets of the school counseling role can be a heavy burden. A national survey of school counselors was conducted by Hart Research Association, a survey research firm, for the College Board National Office of

School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) in 2011. Approximately 5,300 counselors were given online interviews with a three to one ratio of high school to middle school counselors, respectively (College Board, 2011). The results showed that most counselors felt they were not able to do their job appropriately due to overwhelming obligations that pulled them away from what they considered their primary responsibilities. One area of the survey asked counselors to state how they felt they would best be used in their school. The number one response from counselors was that they would like to spend more time on targeted activities promoting student success, including career counseling and exploration. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed responded that they spend “far too little” or “somewhat too little time” on this aspect of their work. In another portion of the survey, 71% of the counselors rated academic planning for college and career readiness as very important. However only 34% of the counselors said their school is successful in this area (College Board, 2011). Counselors identified career preparation as an important part of their jobs, yet many were not finding the support needed to allow them to focus on this area appropriately.

Although many of the findings in this survey showed how counselors perceive the support they receive in their school building, some questions focused on how prepared counselors felt in working with students on career readiness initiatives. Although the majority of counselors surveyed held a Master’s degree, only 16% responded that they felt very well trained for their jobs (indicated by choosing a 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale). Twenty-eight percent believed their training did not prepare them well at all (College Board, 2011).

There are some limitations to this survey. NOSCA is an advocacy group; therefore, additional findings from impartial researchers would be useful to support this study. Also, the survey did not allow the counselors to identify exactly what areas they felt ill-prepared in, nor were these data disaggregated to show whether the preponderance of negative responses were based in one particular counselor sub-group (such as, middle school or high school counselors; rural or urban settings). Those details would facilitate a better understanding of how counselors feel they can be better equipped. Although this information was not provided, the survey did show that 68% of the counselors have sought out additional training in targeted areas to learn more about college and career counseling. This was the third highest training topic behind academic achievement and technology use instruction (College Board, 2011). Again, due to the nature of the survey, it is unclear whether the trainings were taken solely because of perceived need or for other reasons such as recertification requirements. On a final note regarding training and education, the NOSCA summarized their findings by stating that:

Counselors indicate that their preservice training, while somewhat satisfactory, does not adequately prepare them for the realities they are facing in schools.

Counselor training programs, including graduate and doctoral work, should be tightly aligned with the needs counselors are meeting in schools. (p. 8)

The NOSCA survey showed that counselors were not completely satisfied with how they were performing their jobs in regard to career planning with their students. This online survey was given to counselors whose names were obtained through a list provider. Multiple email and mail invitations were required to receive an overall 6.3%

response rate. The online interviews were conducted over a 6-month period and responses from 5,300 counselors in the United States were used in the study, which is 19% of the approximately 28,000 total school counselors in the world (ASCA, 2012a). This is a large number of counselor participants so the findings should be deemed generalizable.

Students' concerns. A study of students' level of satisfaction with their high school counselor and school counseling services was conducted by Public Agenda (2009) for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, non-profit, public opinion research and public engagement organization founded in 1975 (Public Agenda, 2011). This project analyzed responses from more than 600 young adults who, at the time, had begun some form of higher education. When asked how they would rate their high school guidance counselor in terms of helping them choose the right college and career and assisting with financial aid and the application process, 6 out of 10 students rated their counselor as fair or poor. In the focus group portion of this study, “young people often characterized their meetings with counselors as dispiriting and unhelpful, especially if the student happened to be one who didn't stand out as ‘college material’” (Public Agenda, 2009). These same students gave higher ratings to teachers and coaches as people who motivated them and encouraged them to go to college.

Although these findings are thought-provoking, further research on counselor effectiveness from the perspective of the student is needed. Students are the ones for whom the counseling is intended and are the most greatly affected; therefore, their voices should be heard. Data gathered from such studies may be valuable information that could,

in turn, benefit counselors practice. McDonough (2005), a UCLA college professor and author of several books and articles on school counseling, college access and minority youth, was commissioned by the NACAC to write a report on counseling and college counseling in America's high schools. In the conclusion she stated:

Counselors, high school counseling, and college-related counseling are not the foci of adequate, nationally representative quantitative or qualitative data collection. Organizations such as the College Board, NACAC and The National Center for Educational Statistics all collect data on counselors but these efforts are incomplete. Moreover, counseling is off the radar in virtually all accountability schemas. Helping students prepare for college or assisting students in enrolling in college is not written into any existing accountability system, any leadership performance evaluation, or any K-12 job description. Yet, most of the American public, journalists, and policymakers assume that adequate numbers and adequately trained high school counselors are doing this job. (McDonough, 2005, p. 31)

African American students' needs. The career counseling process appears to be an area of frustration for many counselors and students. Adding the element of multicultural needs makes counseling interactions even more complex and challenging. There is no consensus on the proper way to approach career counseling in a culturally competent manner. Hundreds of studies and theories have emerged examining various aspects of racial identity within the African American population (Grantham & Ford, 2003). These studies have looked at race from an ecological perspective, a cultural

formulation process, and even outlined stages of African American racial identity development (Byars-Winston, 2010; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Rowley, & Sellers, 1998). According to Grantham and Ford (2003), most researchers have found that African Americans have unique counseling needs due to their collective history, culture, and minority status. Yet, differences, such as their living environment, gender, cultural sensitivities, and socioeconomic status, make each person unique within the race. Understandably, there is no single prescribed way to work with African American students, thus making multicultural competence all the more critical.

Purpose of the Study

This study is of the perceptions of suburban African American students regarding their high school career counseling experiences. The purpose of the study was to provide a way to better understand how African American students perceive the career counseling given to them by their high school counselors. Assumptions may be made that assessing career counseling programs through the lenses of the counselor or school might be adequate for understanding what services are being provided. However, understanding how the services are received by the intended audience is a critical part of assessing program effectiveness. This study adds to the body of research regarding how African American students perceive the career counseling they are receiving. It should be used to assist counselors and those connected with counselor development in devising appropriate strategies for working with African American students on career counseling endeavors.

Research Questions

The goals of this study are to ascertain how African American students perceive the experiences they have with their school counselors with regard to career counseling and advisement. The data gathered and analyzed revealed how the counseling was received and absorbed by the intended student target. The following three research questions are central to the study to divulge this pertinent information. Specifically, this study will attempt to find out:

- Q1. How do selected African American students perceive the career counseling they receive from their school counselor?
- Q2. What particular factors did they perceive made the counseling interactions helpful?
- Q3. What particular factors did they perceive made the counseling interactions not helpful?

Significance of the Study

Working to close the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American people is an obligation we all share. Although providing African American high school students with high-quality career counseling will not by itself close the gap, it is one of many factors that can help lessen the disparity. Appropriate high school career counseling services can assist students in making sound, well-informed choices for their future. Those choices can eventually help to decrease the gap in educational attainment, wage earnings, and unemployment statistics (Freeman, 1997). Examining career counseling services from the perspective of the African American student can help counseling

professionals improve their practices to better serve their students. There has been research on motivation factors of the majority population and the underrepresented poor, but research on factors that influence and motivate African American students is sorely lacking (Freeman, 1997). The procedures and results of this study may be used to inform the career counseling practice, provide data to counselor advocates, and assist curriculum developers who create courses for counselor development programs and continuing education courses.

Design of the Study

In this study a qualitative research design was used to examine the perceptions selected African American high school students have regarding their career counseling interactions. A case study approach was employed to best understand these experiences. A case study is an in-depth exploration of a particular subject based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2008). Using a case study approach allowed valuable insight into how and why the African American students being studied perceived their experiences the way they did. The study used multiple individual interviews to gain knowledge about the students' perspectives on their counseling experiences. The use of interviews allowed the subjects to speak directly about what they believe is going on in the situation (Yin, 2009). In addition, relevant documentation was collected to provide a better understanding of the students' academic and social status, as well as career goals and plans.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap. Refers to the disparity on a number of educational measures between groups of students.

African American. Citizens or residents of the United States who have or believe they have ancestry from Africa.

Black. A race designation used by the US Census Bureau to identify people who have or believe they have ancestry from Africa. With the exception of direct quotes Black has been replaced with African American throughout this dissertation.

Career counseling. Helping students acquire information and a plan of action about work, jobs, apprenticeships, and post-secondary educational and career opportunities (ASCA, 2010).

Caucasian also referred to as White. A race designation used by the US Census Bureau to identify people who have or believe they have ancestry from Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

Comprehensive school counseling program. A program driven by student data and based on standards in academic, career, and personal/social development that promotes and enhances the learning process for all students (ASCA, 2005).

Ethnicity. Relates to cultural factors such as nationality, culture, ancestry, language, and beliefs.

Grade Point Average (GPA). A calculated average of the letter grades you earn in school following a 0 to 4.0 or 5.0 scale.

Multicultural. Denotes the diversity of racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage, socioeconomic status, age, gender, sexual orientation, and religious and spiritual beliefs, as well as physical, emotional, and mental abilities (CACREP, 2009).

Race. Relates to a person's appearance—mainly the color of their skin. It is determined biologically, and is a result of genetic traits, as are skin color, hair, eye color, and so forth.

School Counseling. Working with students in a school setting to assist them with academic, career and personal/social needs. It is a collaborative effort benefiting students, parents, teachers, administrators and the overall community (ASCA, 2010).

School counselor. Professional educator who typically holds a Master's degree in school counseling and works in a school to assist students in the areas of academic achievement, personal/social development, and career development.

White also referred to as **Caucasian.** A race designation used by the US Census Bureau to identify people who have or believe they have ancestry from Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

Assumptions and Limitations

For this study, the counseling experiences of African American high school students who attend a public school in Northern Virginia were studied. It is assumed that the schools they attended followed the counseling program mandates outlined by the Commonwealth of Virginia and the county in which they operate. It is also assumed that the selected students are truthful in their interview responses to the best of their

knowledge. The data collected were from the students used in this study. The findings of the study cannot be generalized to all African American students in Northern Virginia. Further research will be needed on students who have different socioeconomic statuses, academic records, educational backgrounds, and so forth, from those examined in this study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 is a literature review in which the relevant literature pertaining to high school career counseling, African American students' perceptions and experiences with counseling, contextual research, and an evaluation of relevant study designs are all summarized. Chapter 3 is the methods section in which a description of the research design, the participants and setting, data collection and analysis procedures, validity issues, and limitations of the study are detailed. Chapter 4 contains the data analysis and results from each individual participant interview as well as an analysis of themes relevant across cases. Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the research and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature on career counseling and African American youth substantiates the need for further exploration from a deeper, qualitative perspective drawing from the voice of African American students themselves. This chapter is separated into three major sections, each of which includes subsections containing relevant literature on this topic. The first section is used to examine contemporary school counseling. In order to examine how African American students perceive their school counseling experiences, it is prudent to explain the dynamics of the counseling environment. This provides the context in which the students are being served and how it may influence their perceptions. This section is broken into three subsections to cover the current practices of school counselors in the United States. Subsection one contains a review and analysis of literature on the current comprehensive school counseling model commonly in use today (ASCA, 2012a), as well as studies that examined the perceptions of school counselors and other educators regarding the current field of school counseling. Subsection two contains reviews of the theories and tools that school counselors use in their practice. Subsection three shows an analysis of the multicultural competency movement in school counseling which will support the need for studying African American youth. The second section contains student perceptions of education and also consists of three subsections. Coming from the same perspective of this study, this section examines studies that sought

to gain a better understanding of education topics as viewed through the lens of the student. The first subsection is an analysis of studies that examined students' perceptions of school career counseling services. Section two is a review of literature on African American students' perceptions of various education topics that have been studied. Section three identifies studies on African American students' perceptions of counseling and career decision-making that are the most closely aligned with this study. This section documents the lack of studies that have been conducted to better understand African American students' perspective on their high school career counseling experiences. This review reveals obvious gaps in the literature that this study fills. The third section is the summary discussion section. It provides a summary of findings as well as a specific argument for the need to conduct additional research in this area.

Contemporary School Counseling

Current counseling practices and perceptions. Since the 1970s the vision for the school counseling profession has been to develop and implement comprehensive guidance and counseling programs (Gysbers, 2001). School counseling programs still vary from site to site and district to district such that there is little consistency or predictability in programs and services (Hatch, 2008). To address this lack of consistency in the profession, ASCA, as a professional school counseling organization, supported the creation of ASCA National Standards and the ASCA national model (Hatch, 2008). The national model is comprised of four quadrants: foundations, delivery, management, and accountability. Those counseling programs that follow this model are considered comprehensive counseling programs (ASCA, 2008a). In 2005, a study

conducted by Rowley, Stroh, and Sink showed that school counseling departments operating within the comprehensive guidance and counseling program framework use a variety of guidance curricula in their practice. Of the 86 counselors surveyed from 102 school districts across 12 states, 94 different guidance curricula were noted by respondents as being used in their practice. All respondents stated that they do use a guidance curriculum, yet only four curricula were reported as being used by more than two respondents: (a) The Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program ($n = 48$), (b) Here's Looking at You ($n = 10$), (c) Second Step ($n = 6$), and (d) Talking about Touching ($n = 4$). The most commonly reported counseling objectives addressed by curricula at the high school level were in the career/vocational developmental domain. Although the study was successful in obtaining self-reported data from counselors regarding their use of guidance curriculum, the study did not examine how the curricula were being implemented. Conducting program evaluations would have been beneficial to ascertain whether or not the curriculum being used was effectively helping the student population.

A qualitative study by Scarborough and Luke (2008) was conducted to explore the personal attributes of school counselors who indicated they were having success implementing a comprehensive, developmental school counseling program (CDSCP). Scarborough and Luke used a grounded theory approach intending to better understand the personal beliefs, characteristics, competencies, and processes of school counselors engaging in CDSCP implementation. One notable finding from the eight individual participant interviews was that the counselors described an intentional, active, and

reciprocal process in which they tailored the CDSCP and its implementation to meet the specific needs of the students, the school, and the community in which it was delivered. Scarborough and Luke also found that the participants believed in the importance of a CDSCP and in their abilities to implement it.

“Believing in the program” is an attribute that was also found to be important in another counselor study conducted by Sink and Yillik-Downer (2001 p. 9). Based on their study results they concluded that there is a relationship between the counselors’ stated value of a comprehensive guidance counseling program and their level of engagement toward implementing it. Meaning, the more valuable the counselor stated having a comprehensive counseling program was to them, the more engaged they were in implementing the program in their school. Sink and Yillik-Downer’s findings came from a survey of 1,033 counselors from eight states across the United States.

Both the Scarborough and Luke (2008) and the Sink and Yillik-Downer (2001) studies were able to gather some data to try to profile counselors who were implementing comprehensive counseling programs. However, several important factors were omitted from both studies. Neither study collected data on how long the new program had been in place, or what specific improvements the counselors’ perceived the new program would make compared to the old one. It would have been helpful to understand how the counselors believed that implementing the new program would better meet the needs of the student population they serviced. In addition, feedback from the students would have been useful to ascertain the relevance of implementing a new curriculum.

In another study, 1,244 Alabama counselors at the elementary and secondary levels were surveyed to assess their readiness and/or progress toward implementing a comprehensive school counseling program as outlined by the ASCA national model (Dahir et al., 2009). The study was designed to analyze school counselor beliefs, practices, and priorities around key counseling attributes identified in the Alabama State Plan. A 56-question survey was given to 461 (37%) elementary school counselors, 224 (18%) middle/junior high counselors, 312 (25%) high school counselors, 74 (6%) K-12 school counselors, and 171 (14%) who classified themselves as *other*. The study found that high school counselors perceived themselves as much more aligned to the ASCA national model regarding career and postsecondary development than middle or elementary school counselors. However, elementary school counselors' ideals were more closely aligned with the components of the ASCA national model on personal-social and academic development than middle or high school counselors. In addition, high school counselors in this study indicated they were more closely aligned to the career and postsecondary component of the ASCA national model than they were to the personal-social or academic development components. The alignment of high school counselors in this study with the ASCA national model's career and postsecondary component might indicate that these counselors place a strong emphasis on working with students on postsecondary planning. Thus, it is important that more research is gathered to assess how counselors are implementing their career counseling programs and how students are responding to them.

A major component of a viable counseling program in the 21st century is the ability to gather and analyze data, and implement changes based on this information (U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). Not only are school counselors being asked to disclose what they do, they also are being asked to demonstrate how what they do makes a difference in the lives of students (Gysbers, 2004). One way for counseling departments to show they are conducting their program in a way deemed appropriate by ASCA, and arguably by the education community, is to apply to become a recognized ASCA model program known as RAMP (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). Schools that use a comprehensive counseling model, as identified by ASCA, may apply for this RAMP distinction by submitting 12-part documentation indicating that they are offering counseling services that are in line with the four quadrants of the ASCA national model (ASCA, 2008b). Approximately 400 U.S. elementary, middle, and high schools are currently designated as RAMP programs (ASCA, 2008c).

A study on the use of data in schools was conducted to ascertain how and for what purposes RAMP school counselors used data. Young and Kaffenberger (2011) received responses from an online survey of 114 (42 elementary, 23 middle school, and 49 high school) counselors using one counselor per school. The purpose of administering the 33-item survey was to understand the school counselors' personal motivations for, and perceptions of, using data in their jobs. The findings showed that RAMP school counselors reported a high level of ability in collecting and using data to inform practices. Nearly all ($n=113$) counselors agreed or strongly agreed that they had increased their use of data since becoming a RAMP program. In a free-response portion of the survey,

participants stated they primarily used data (a) to address student needs (31%), (b) to advocate for the counseling profession (27%), (c) as a form of program evaluation (24%), and (d) to address accountability expectations (18%). Although the results of this study could be used to answer the questions addressed, it would have been interesting to have more specific information on the type of data the counselors collected and examples of how they used it in practice. In addition, a comparison of RAMP versus non-RAMP counselor data use would have been helpful to see the impact RAMP had on their practices.

Besides being valuable assets for data gathering and analysis, counselors have a myriad of other roles they may be expected to play. Many school counselors are given non-counseling tasks such as bus or cafeteria duty, test administration, or attendance monitors (Bemak, 2000; NACAC, 2010; Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004; Scarborough & Luke, 2008). According to Bemak and Cornely (2002), with training in understanding at-risk youth behavior and identifying family issues that affect achievement, school counselors are positioned to play a key role in bridging the gap between school and home, especially for marginalized students.

Many urban schools have a larger population of students at-risk for failing or dropping out than other schools in different settings (Green, Conley, & Barnett, 2005). Holcolmb-McCoy and Mitchell (2005) conducted a study to find out if urban school counselors practice in the same manner as counselors in suburban or rural areas. One hundred and two counselors (27% high school, 17% middle school, 32% high school, 22% other) from six U.S. east coast urban cities responded to a mail survey for this study.

The purpose of the study was to explore the roles, functions, and perceptions of urban school counselors. The results showed that only 85 of the 102 counselors stated they spent time in student counseling. The average overall percentage of time counselors spent in counseling was $M = 36.42$, $SD = 21.45$. Other activities the counselors indicated they were involved in included administrative/clerical work ($M = 13.21\%$, $SD = 16.35\%$), consultation ($M = 10\%$, $SD = 13.55\%$), coordination ($M = 10\%$, $SD = 10.97\%$), advising ($M = 4.59\%$, $SD = 8.8\%$), scheduling ($M = 4.56\%$, $SD = 8.25\%$) and administering tests ($M = 3.19\%$, $SD = 5.99\%$). Although these participants felt they were taking on many tasks in their school, 81% of them still believed they were effective school counselors. Five percent of the respondents believed they were not effective and 14% did not respond.

This study attempted to better understand the practice of counseling in an urban school setting but several issues made the study findings unclear. In regard to the selection of participants, the authors appear to assume that counselors who work in different types of schools set in an urban location (public, private, charter, other) practice in a similar manner. There is no evidence that this is correct. Therefore, grouping their responses all together might be faulty. Next, the large percentage of counselors (22%) who listed themselves as *other* when asked to indicate what grade level of student they work with is also problematic. Without better understanding those counselors' roles, it is difficult to make the assumption they are held to the same standards of practice as the traditional counselors surveyed. Despite this, the fact that only 85 (83%) of the counselors indicated they spent any time in counseling is of concern. Further studies of

counselor practices would be useful to better understand how urban counselors perceive their role and how they are specifically servicing students. Conversely, urban student perception studies would also be beneficial to assess whether or not students believe their needs are being met in this area.

In another study, urban counselors were found to have higher burnout rates than counselors working in suburban or rural settings (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Butler and Constantine explored the relationships between dimensions of collective self-esteem and components of burnout. The survey was given to 533 school counselors with varying years of service and from different school settings. Of note was the finding that urban school counselors reported significantly higher emotional exhaustion scores and higher feelings of depersonalization than school counselors in suburban or rural schools. No significant differences were found in the scores for male and female counselors and minimal differences for counselors based on their years of service. It would be useful to be able to understand how these rates of counselor burnout affect the students they serve.

Butler and Constantine (2005) posited that part of the cause of burnout or stress for the professional school counselor might be the myriad of tasks they have or the unpredictability of the job. Counselors are often not in control of how their time will be spent. Most counselors have state, district, and individual school guidelines directing how they should work within their school. A study of principals by Perusse et al. (2004) was conducted to see how school leadership perceived the role of the school counselor. Specifically, the goal of the study was to learn whether or not counselors and principals are alike in their perceptions about what tasks are appropriate for school counselors.

Perusse et al. found that a majority of high school principals deemed the following non-counseling tasks as appropriate for counselors: handling discipline and attendance issues, addressing school dress code violations, maintaining student records, and analyzing cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests.

In another study of school personnel (Clark & Amatea, 2004) 23 teachers in different schools were individually interviewed to discuss their perceptions of the school counselor's role. The findings revealed teachers' perceptions of the counselor's role are in line with ASCA's national model. The assumption that emerged most often was that counselors are supposed to be involved in communication and collaboration with other school personnel. Direct services to students, such as social counseling, and counselors being visible and involved in school-wide activities were other themes that were identified as parts of the counselors' jobs. Although these two studies are useful, more studies by other stakeholders, especially students, are necessary to help understand how counselors can best serve in the education environment.

Career counseling tools and theories. Historically, school counseling programs have not been perceived as having a specific set of rules that govern the practices of the school counselor. Few guidance programs operate with clear formal structures, program definitions, or clear priorities (Gysbers, 2001; Hatch, 2008). Thus, several researchers have conducted studies in attempts to assess what tools and theories school counselors use most often to assist students with their career-planning needs and to ascertain how effective those tools were.

Osborn and Baggerly (2004) conducted a study to evaluate school counselors' preferences, priorities, and predictors of career counseling and career testing. Specifically, the study looked at the types of theories counselors preferred and the amount of time spent on career counseling at each school level. The researchers surveyed 1,280 Florida public school counselors who were diverse in age, ethnicity, and gender. Sixty-three percent of the respondents practiced at the elementary school level, 20% at the middle school, and 17% in high school. Preferences for the type of career theory used included Holland's RIASEC theory (33%), cognitive information processing theory (19%), person-environment-correspondence theory (13%), Super's theory (11%), and social constructivism (2%). Twenty-two percent of the respondents answered *other* and did not list a particular theory other than eclectic/varies. See Appendix A for a description of the theories.

Counselors reported the amount of time they spent in career counseling increased as the age of the student population increased. Seventy-nine percent of the elementary school counselors responded that career counseling occupied *very little* time in their day, whereas 59% of middle school counselors and only 31% of high school counselors indicated the same. This coincided with the amount of time the participants indicated they would like to spend in career counseling and career testing at each level.

Although Osborn and Baggerly (2004) found that many high school counselors in their survey acknowledged the need and desire to work with students in career counseling and testing, the study went on to show that only 17% reported spending *much/most* of their time in career counseling and 37% indicated they wanted to spend *very little* time on

this. In addition, 22% of the respondents did not list a career theory upon which they based their practice. This study showed that most counselors surveyed do see career counseling as a part of their job, but that a surprising percentage did not want to spend time on such counseling. A limitation of the study was that the data were not disaggregated completely by counselor demographics, and not all findings were shown in the report.

In a study by Tang, Pan, and Newmeyer (2008) high school students' career development processes were investigated by applying the social cognitive career theory model (SCCT, see Appendix A) to examine the relationship between learning experience, gender, career self-efficacy, outcome expectation, vocational interests, and career aspirations. These researchers made use of Holland's RIASEC model (see Appendix A) which Osborn and Baggerly (2004) found was the number one theory chosen for use by school counselors in their study. Tang et al. (2008) studied 141 ninth and tenth grade students, chosen by their school counselor, in a Midwestern, suburban high school. The population was categorized as middle to upper-middle class and participants were predominately Caucasian, with only 4.3% of them self-identified as African American. The study sought to answer the following questions: (a) is the SCCT an appropriate model for explaining high school students' career aspirations; (b) do learning experiences impact career choices among adolescents through their influence on career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career interests; and (c) are the interrelationships different across gender?

To answer these questions the researchers had participants fill out a demographic questionnaire and administered Holland's RIASEC model to gather information about the participants' career interests and career self-efficacy. Structural equation modeling (SEM) revealed that SCCT does appear to explain the interrelationships among variables, but the impact of learning experiences on the other variables showed no trend by gender or other variables. This study was useful to demonstrate to counselors a particular method to use in their career counseling sessions. Although the study was small and may only be generalizable reasonably to other middle-class Caucasian students, it does appear that both the SCCT theory and Holland's RIASEC model are useful tools counselors can use to better assist their students with career development. Replicating this study methodology with different populations would be helpful to ascertain if similar findings would emerge.

The Holland RIASEC theory has informed several other studies at the post-secondary and middle school levels. Porter and Umbach (2006) used the Holland RIASEC model to provide a comprehensive understanding of college student's choices of majors. The study showed that the personality interests, as represented in the Holland categories, were predictive of a student's choice of major. In another study, Miller et al. (2008) sought to find out if the Holland model would show consistent results if given to the same participants using a paper and pencil method as compared to computer use. They tested 30 college students and found 25.8 of the tests were congruent. Osborn and Reardon (2006) also worked with a group of predominately African American, low socioeconomic status, middle school students to assess the functionality of the Holland

model with that particular group. They found that the group responded well to the test administration and there were trends in personality interests for boys versus girls. Dik, Strife, & Hansen (2010) conducted a study of 334 adults to understand the relationship between the adults' reported Holland types, the Holland code of their current occupations, and their levels of job satisfaction. Results from the sample were mixed and trends could not be found. Based on their study results, Dik et al. (2010) warned counselors about the importance of incorporating other sources of information beyond interests into the counseling process, such as abilities, needs, values, and personality.

Few other studies were found that assessed the use of interest inventories or career assessment tools other than the Holland RIASEC model; however, some school counselors created their own ways of assisting students with career exploration based on their perceptions of the needs of their students or requirements of their states (Deemer & Ostrowski, 2010; Gysbers, 2001; Hatch, 2008). Deemer and Ostrowski (2010) conducted a study on The Graduation Project, which was a tool used to help counselors in one Pennsylvania school assist their students with career planning. This instrument was created to try to better prepare students for their post-secondary careers using counselors as central advisors in the process. The researchers wanted to ascertain how effective the school was in using The Graduation Project with their students and how the students perceived the project as benefitting them in their career planning. The specific goals of the study were to understand (a) the students' current behaviors and achievement goals, (b) whether or not students focus on truly finding a meaningful and appropriate career or

educational path, and (c) in what ways engaging in the graduation project related to students' achievement goals and sense of school belongingness.

Deemer and Ostrowski's (2010) findings are from the first wave of a longitudinal study of 157 sophomore students who demographically represented the tenth grade class and total school demographics of a suburban Pennsylvania high school. The researchers used a survey to ask students to consider their current career exploration activities as well as to assess the students' adaptive learning, sense of school membership, and completion rate of the Graduation Project assignments. In addition to survey questions, a focus group was convened to gather data about the students' perceptions of the Graduation Project. In this study it was found that students did engage in various aspects of the graduation project and the highest rates were found by students completing an interest inventory at 88% and students talking with other people about their career goals at 83%. Engaging in career research with a counselor had the lowest rate of completion; only 33% of the students responded that this had occurred. Almost all of the students indicated that they had a post-secondary plan ($M = 3.91$ on a 4.0 scale) yet it was unclear how the Graduation Project influenced this decision.

Focus group findings showed that students felt the Graduation Project was well-intentioned but that they needed more explanation and support (Deemer & Ostrowski, 2010). Specific quotes or transcriptions were not available for review but some reasonable assumptions can still be drawn from the summary of the focus groups along with the questionnaire results. Apparently, students in the study lacked the connections with the school counselor or appropriate personnel that would have allowed them to

attain a better understanding of how the Graduation Project was able to assist them in their career-planning endeavors. This is evident from the low percentage of students who responded that they worked with a counselor on career research and the sense of confusion among focus group participants regarding the particular goals of the project. A career planning program of this nature might be well-intentioned but direct and appropriate communication is necessary to successfully meet the needs of the students.

Some counselors use specific tools and programs when working with students and others work under their own philosophy of practice. A few studies were conducted to better understand those philosophies. Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) interviewed five counselors at a predominately African American public charter school in which half of the families lived below the poverty level. The school was chosen because of its current success in helping students get accepted into college and to better understand the role of the counselor in the school's college preparatory framework.

Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) found that these particular counselors seemed to model the typical role of the school counselor by providing assistance with academic, personal/social, and career planning guidance. Additionally, however, the counselors sought to convince students, who were first-generation college attendees, that they could attend college. They found that these counselors provided concrete support by "using organized college tours, college preparatory classes and individualized support through the college search process. Their role in providing a balance of academic guidance and social support was deemed essential to serve their student population well" (p. 114). Although the counselors attributed these supports as instrumental in increasing the

students' college aspirations, they did not survey the students to verify these suppositions. Interviewing students would also allow the researchers to see what other factors the students believed were instrumental in developing their college aspirations. Further, because these students were enrolled in an optional charter school, it would be interesting to find out what influence their families played in their educational aspirations.

In another study, Barker (2000) sought to better understand the perceptions of school counselors regarding workplace skills and career development competency requirements for work- and college-bound students. This study extended a study by Bloch (1996) that examined the congruence between workforce preparation, career development policy, and secondary school practice. Bloch collected mailed-in survey data from school administrators and counselors and found that school personnel gave less attention to those students who are work-bound versus those who are college-bound. The study also showed that one fifth of the schools did not provide organized programs to help students locate, evaluate, and act upon information about occupations. Although these survey findings indicate that the participants did not focus as much on work-bound students as they did on college-bound students, more data are necessary to draw that conclusion. In addition, the researchers assumed that organized programs would be beneficial to work-bound students but evidence of those benefits was not supplied in the study; nor was student input on their perceptions of such programs.

Barker's later study (2000) found that counselors worked differently with students who they believed were college-bound versus those they believed were work-bound. Counselors believed that it was most important for work-bound students to have the skills

needed to seek and obtain jobs and it was most important for college-bound students to be able to access further education and use computers to process information. Barker's survey was mailed to 151 counselors in one state. Although the findings showed that counselors appeared to value all types of students and provided them with specialized counseling the study neglected to show exactly how the counselors worked differently with college-bound versus work-bound students and did not identify how the counselors distinguished which students fell into each category.

Assuming that all counselors who successfully graduate from a counselor program and are hired in a school system feel comfortable doing their job is naïve. In 2011 Lara, Kline, and Paulson conducted a qualitative study of six counselors enrolled in three different CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. The study was designed to determine the perceptions and experiences of master's-level counseling students regarding career counseling. Participants believed that although they had learned the concepts and skills they were not competent to conduct career counseling. The participants emphasized a need for additional training and supervised practical experience. The consensus of the counselors interviewed for the study was that they believed they were taught theoretical information yet lacked the ability to perform career counseling on their own. In addition, participants who stated they had no previous career counseling experience felt they lacked a framework for even understanding the purpose or value of career counseling. These findings came from students in a career counseling course and could be a reflection of the students' inadequate training or simply the students' fears. The study findings do not take into account any counselor training that

might take place with a school system once the counselor is hired. Follow-up interviews would be useful to see if the participants felt more equipped over time and what factors influenced their feelings.

In summary, there is no apparent consensus on the types of tools, theories, or practices that counselors operate within and there was not a plethora of research found that shows what methods are being used or what should be recommended for use. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be an urgent need to investigate students' counseling experiences or counselors' practices. In general, school counseling as a practice, and career counseling specifically, is an area that has not traditionally been examined as thoroughly as it should be (Gysbers, 2004; Hatch, 2008; McDonough, 2005).

Multicultural counseling. According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2010) data (see Table 3), total public elementary and secondary school enrollment has increased by more than two million students from the 2000-2001 to 2007-2008 school years. Furthermore, the population of Caucasian students has decreased by more than 5%, whereas all minority groups have shown increased enrollment or stayed the same. The trend of increased minority enrollment has been ongoing for the past several decades (Lee, 2001).

Although multicultural education and training is now required and seen as an important part of counselor preparation (CACREP, 2009), many people still question whether counselors are effectively working with diverse populations. In response to concerns about counselors being culturally competent, several counselor advocates

published their own guidelines to help advance the field in this regard. In 2001, Courtland Lee, an education consultant, past President of the American Counseling Association, and current college professor, wrote an article published in a 2001 edition of the ASCA journal that identified the 11 aspects that he found apparent in culturally responsive schools. The salient aspects that characterize a culturally responsive school are the following:

1. The school has adopted a "salad bowl" as opposed to a "melting pot" philosophy of education;
2. The school has been able to forge a sense of community out of cultural diversity;
3. The school has been able to capitalize on cultural diversity and maintain academic standard;
4. The school has a curriculum that is neither Eurocentric nor Afrocentric nor Asiancentric, but rather is Centered;
5. The school goes "beyond Black History Month";
6. The school provides students with forums outside of the classroom to communicate with, and learn about, their peers from diverse cultural backgrounds;
7. The school has mechanisms in place to deal with racial/cultural tensions;
8. The school has committed educators who engage in ongoing staff development and are not afraid to take risks or improvise when necessary;
9. The school actively attempts to recruit a diverse staff of educators;

10. The school has high levels of parental involvement and educators consider language and cultural customs in their interactions with parents; and
11. The school broadly defines cultural diversity to include people with disabilities, people with diverse sexual orientations, people with diverse religious traditions, and older people (p. 2).

Lee asserted that these aspects were apparent in schools that “have been successful in both meeting the challenges and seizing the opportunities associated with multiculturalism and diversity.” (p. 2). He encouraged school personnel to evaluate and assess their school based on the aspects that he believed were critical for multicultural success. He also stated that culturally responsive comprehensive guidance initiatives in schools were essential and should be based on two premises: all young people can and want to learn, and cultural differences are real and cannot be ignored. Lee’s checklist might be inspirational, but it is not measurable. Identifying more specific aspects of culturally-competent schools would be useful for other schools and would allow them to conduct better self-assessments.

Holcomb-McCoy (2004), also prepared a checklist published in the ASCA journal in 2004 to recommend areas of multicultural competence that she believed were essential for the school counseling practice. This 51-item checklist included (a) competence in multicultural counseling, (b) multicultural consultation, (c) understanding racism and student resistance, (d) multicultural assessment, (e) understanding racial identity development, (f) multicultural family counseling, (g) social advocacy, (h) developing school-family-community partnerships, and (i) understanding cross-cultural interpersonal

interactions. Holcomb-McCoy also implored school counselors to review and assess their own cultural competence based on the checklist. Both Lee (2001) and Holcomb-McCoy's (2004) articles were supported by ASCA and published in its journal which is available to all members. Holcomb-McCoy's checklist was more specific than the Lee checklist but still did not provide specific, measurable items with which schools could assess themselves.

In 2005, however, Holcomb-McCoy (2004) conducted her own study to try to find out to what extent practicing professional school counselors perceived themselves to be multiculturally competent. She received 209 responses from school counselors (37% elementary, 23% middle school, 31% high school) who completed a mail survey. The findings suggested that most counselors perceive themselves to be at least somewhat competent in multicultural awareness, terminology, and knowledge. Counselors who indicated that they had taken a course in multicultural counseling in their counselor preparation graduate program assessed themselves higher than those who did not. Although these findings are useful, the study did not investigate how the counselors used these skills in practice or whether their counselees felt the counselors were culturally competent or not.

Multicultural competency is necessary at every level of counseling. Marbley et al. (2007) published a reflection of counselors' experiences early in their careers dealing with African American clients. The case descriptions were of clients in school and private practice settings and included a case study summary and a personal reflection. The counselors acknowledged that early in the counseling process they should have addressed

the racial and cultural differences between themselves and their clients. They also stated they should have addressed clients' perceptions of African American culture and the African American experience in the United States even if those issues were not initially presented by the client. They posited that tackling those concepts early in the sessions would have helped to effectively facilitate greater success. The reflections of these counselors are insightful. Reflections of the counselees after counseling also would have been valuable though possibly unattainable.

Student Perceptions of Education

To better understand how a service impacts a person, it is prudent to draw data directly from that person or social group. Several researchers have investigated educational services from the perspective of the student to try to accomplish this goal. This section contains three subsections. The first subsection will review relevant literature and research that was published regarding student perceptions of school career counseling services. The second subsection covers African American students' perceptions of a variety of educational issues. The third subsection contains literature on African American students' perceptions of counseling and their own career-making decisions which is most closely aligned to this study.

Perceptions and outcomes of career counseling services. A comprehensive school counseling program is one that is driven by student data and based on standards of academic, career, and personal/social development that promote and enhance the learning process for all students (ASCA, 2005). The intent of these programs is to provide targeted services based on the needs of the particular students it serves. One particular program,

the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program (MCGP), is commonly used by several schools across the nation (Rowley et al., 2005). Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (1997) conducted a study to find out how the MCGP affected students in 236 Missouri high schools. The study was conducted using survey data from almost 23,000 high school students. Additionally, a measure of how successfully the MCGP was implemented was judged by school counselors at each school.

The findings of this study showed that in schools in which counselors indicated a more fully implemented MCGP was in place, the students indicated there was more college and career information available to them than students who were enrolled in schools with a lesser-implemented program or no program at all. These students also indicated at a higher rate than students at schools that had implemented programs to a lesser extent that they felt (a) the quality of their education adequately prepared them for their future, (b) they earned higher grades, and (c) the climate of their school was more positive. Also of note was that, on average, students in this study neither agreed nor disagreed that they liked school and this finding was consistent regardless of the type of counseling program in place. Further information would be useful to help understand why there was no correlation between students liking school and feeling that they were receiving a quality education in a positive setting. Additionally, more insight on student perceptions of the aforementioned school attributes would provide a better understanding of the value of the MCGP for students.

In another attempt to analyze the effects of school environment on student satisfaction, Farmer-Hinton and Holland (2008) conducted a study to see how the size of

the high school influenced the students' perceptions of their access to postsecondary information, conversations, and activities within the school. Survey data were collected from 9,723 Chicago public high school seniors from 70 high schools in April of the students' senior years. They were asked if they had been exposed to specific college preparation activities (12 questions), engaged in college discussions at their high school (9 questions), and if they found their counselor to be an advocate (6 questions). Data were recoded dichotomously (1 = *a lot*, 0 = *not at all*).

In the Farmer-Hinton and Holland (2008) study schools were grouped into the following four sizes: 0-600 students, 601-1000 students, 1001-1500 students, and more than 1500 students. The findings showed that counselors at schools in the smallest school size group (0-600) appeared to engage their students in more college preparation activities, more college talk, and provided more counselor advocacy than the larger school size groups did in these three categories. Also of note was that although smaller schools had higher scores, overall the ratings for each category were relatively low for all schools. On average, college preparation activities were conducted *a lot* only 63% of the time, *college talk* 28% of the time, and *counselor advocacy* 23% of the time. The study results do not show how the students felt about the amount of college activities and interactions they encountered, how helpful their current interactions were, or how the students intended to put the information to use.

Identifying the school attributes that appear to serve students well with regard to career counseling is one type of research that has been conducted. In addition, some researchers have also focused their efforts on trying to identify characteristics of students

who seek career counseling assistance to try to ascertain why some students tend to seek counseling services more than others. Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, and Day-Vines (2009) sought to find out the attributes of those students who were most likely to see the school counselor for college information. They surveyed 4,924 12th-grade students who attended U.S. public (90%), private (3%), and Catholic (7%) high schools across the country.

Based on a host of student and school variables (e.g., gender, ethnicity, student aspirations, mother's expectations, socioeconomic status, academic achievement, parental involvement, school size, number of school counselors, and counselor contact), Bryan et al. (2009) found that African American females reported they were more likely seek out their counselor for college advice than their male counterparts or students of other ethnicities. The location of the school (rural, urban, or suburban) showed no effect on help-seeking tendencies nor were there trends in schools based on the number of students eligible for free/reduced lunch. Students from schools with more than 2,000 students scored 8 to 12 percentage points lower than smaller schools for the percentage of students who reported seeking their counselor. In other words, this finding appears to affirm the findings of Farmer-Hinton and Holland (2008) that larger schools tend to have less counselor/student interactions regarding postsecondary assistance than smaller ones. Bryan et al. (2009) did not investigate the types of students who sought the counselor for academic or personal/social purposes to see if these students' profiles were general to all counseling services or if it is career counseling specific.

Another important finding of the Bryan et al. (2009) study was the students' perceptions of their counselors' postsecondary aspirations for them. When allowed to choose multiple answers, 85% of the students felt that their "counselor expects me to go to college" (p. 285). This answer was chosen most often by the students surveyed. However, 72% of the students also chose "I don't know what the counselor expects" (p.285) in regard to their college aspirations. This finding supports the need for more qualitative investigation into students' perceptions of their counselor's expectations and the relevance of those perceptions as they pertain to postsecondary decision-making.

In 2011, Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy conducted another study on high school career counseling and college planning. In this study they sought to profile the types of students who applied to college most often. Bryan, et al. used a national sample of high school sophomores and seniors ($n = 4,835$) from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS). The sample was nationally representative of high school students who attended U.S. public high schools. The results of the study showed that females were more likely than males to apply to college, African American and Asian students were more likely to apply than Caucasian students, and students from higher socioeconomic statuses were more likely to apply than those from lower socioeconomic statuses. The study also revealed that as school size increased, students were less likely to apply to college. Again, based on student perceptions, this study indicated that smaller schools appeared to help facilitate the college-going culture more than larger schools (Bryan et al., 2009; Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2008). What is not clear from this study is why this phenomenon appears to be true.

Looking at a slightly younger population, Gibbons, Borders, Wiles, Stephan, and Davis (2006) examined ninth grade students' perceptions of career and college planning. The purpose of their study was to determine the current educational and career plans of a group of high school students including factors the students considered useful planning resources. Gibbons et al. used stratified sampling to survey 222 ninth grade students throughout the state of North Carolina who were diverse in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, academic achievement, and reported post-secondary plans.

Gibbons et al. (2006) created a 101-question survey addressing the following four areas: demographic information, career exploration and planning, college knowledge, and academic planning and preparation. They also solicited input from parents on a separate survey. The student findings showed that over 73% of the students were interested in careers that required a 4-year college degree or graduate degree and 71% of the students planned to attend college after high school. The primary way that students reported learning about careers was through television (27.6%), parents (26.2%), and least was the school counselor (3.2%).

More than 70% of the participants responded that they chose careers based on whether they thought they would enjoy them and 16% based their decision on whether they felt they could do the job well (Gibbons et al., 2006). The students responded that money was 10% and prestige only 1% of the influence on why they chose a particular career path. Other noteworthy findings in this study were regarding the students' use, or lack thereof, of counselor guidance. When allowed to choose multiple answers, less than 30% of the respondents indicated they talked with a school counselor to prepare for their

postsecondary plans. This was tied with volunteer efforts and the lowest response was for writing a résumé. The top three responses were that 86% of the students talked with family, 77% conducted independent research, and 60% talked with someone in their career field of interest. When asked who helped with their career plans, parents were considered most helpful with an $M = 3.15$ on a 4 Likert scale. School counselors had the lowest helpfulness score at 2.08; this rating was less than internet sites, teachers, books, friends, newspapers/TV/media, and college brochures in respective order. When asked to select the one entity that was most helpful in their planning, only 6% of the students felt that school counselors were most helpful with future plans, and parents received the largest percentage (55%) of the total. Finally, when asked their opinion about which service would be most helpful regarding careers, students again ranked school counselors at the bottom of the list (only higher than résumé writing). A highlight of the results of this study was that students reveal career interest as their primary reason for choosing a particular career field. It also showed that more studies need to be conducted to ascertain what is lacking in the counselor/student relationship that causes students to seek other vehicles for career assistance and to see how students are using these other vehicles for information.

A similar study was conducted by Crampton, Walstrom, and Schambach (2006) to try to better understand how aware college business students were of career opportunities in various business disciplines by the time they completed high school. When asked to reflect on factors they believed were important in why they selected their college major, career factors such as personal interest in subject matter and long-term

salary prospects were ranked highest. On the 27-item survey, high school guidance counselor was rated 24th, above only university career services and university advisement center. Family members, college professors, high school teachers, and university advisors were other individuals who scored higher than counselors (in that order). What was not determined in this study is how any of these variables were used by the students in their career-making decisions and why the counselor role scored so low.

Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino (2004) took on a broader subject in their study of college students and counseling needs. They sought to better understand what people look for in a counseling relationship. This study investigated the factors that students value in the advising they receive in the college setting. They found that there are two prevailing advising approaches—developmental and prescriptive.

Developmental or growth oriented, activities include exploring the student's values and how they relate to career choice as well as helping the student with interpersonal problems or with improving interpersonal skills. Prescriptive or task-oriented activities . . . [are described] as discussing course selection, explaining degree requirements and registration procedures and making referrals to other resources on campus. (p. 48)

Although the study was designed to look at college level advising, the study can be associated with many of the same tasks that take place in a comprehensive high school counseling office as well (ASCA, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Mottarella et al. (2004) administered a survey to 468 students from a large southeastern university. The survey contained various counseling scenarios on a scaled-

score system and the participants were asked to rate each scenario based on how much they favored the particular counseling relationship. The factors used in this study were advisor gender, advisor type (peer, faculty, or professional), depth of relationship, approach, and emotional nature (counselor helpful, supportive, business-like, etc.). The results showed that the students valued the depth of the relationship and considered it the most important attribute of the counseling experience. In other words, students preferred to have a more established relationship with their advisor over all other factors.

Following that, the next findings were that students preferred a non-faculty advisor over a faculty advisor, they preferred a warm and supportive emotional relationship over a businesslike one, they preferred professional and faculty advisors over peer advisors, they preferred a prescriptive rather than a developmental approach, and least of all they preferred a female over a male counselor. The findings of the study are interesting but the use of hypothetical scenarios instead of real experiences is problematic. This study was used to show how significant students' desires to have deep advising relationships are over other factors that enter into the student counselor relationship. A better understanding of what a "deep advising relationship" is and how it benefits students would be useful.

Taylor-Dunlop and Norton (1997) also studied student needs in counseling using high school students. An in-depth ethnographic study using real counseling interactions was conducted with 11 at-risk adolescent girls in a middle-class New York high school. The purpose of the study was to find out more about the girls' views on school and their interactions with adults so school officials could try to build and sustain a caring school

community. Three primary themes emerged: their desire to have adults communicate with them in a non-hurtful way, for what they learned to be meaningful, and to be talked *with* instead of *at*. When discussing school employees, the girls noted specific people who they perceived as lacking maturity and creating fear in the students. They were also able to name several adults in their school, from a security guard to an assistant principal to a school counselor, who they felt were helpful and encouraging. Although themes created within this study were useful, more studies of this nature need to be conducted to try to gather more data about supportive adults in students' lives. Also, more specific examples of why the students found each person helpful and encouraging would be beneficial.

African American students' perceptions of education. Several researchers have conducted studies to try to understand how African American students navigate through the educational system and their perceptions of various aspects within it. In this section studies that investigated African American students' perspectives on their school environment, academic identity, teachers, college options, and personal aspirations are discussed. This section is important because it shows the type of studies that have been conducted in education research from the unique perspective of the African American student. In addition, the findings will serve as a base for understanding how African American students view different facets of their education experience.

Stewart (2006) used a sample from the National Longitudinal Study of 1988 and gathered data from 986 African American students in their 8th- and 12th-grade years. She found that there was a significant and direct relationship between students' perceptions of

the school environment and their 12th-grade academic achievement. The students who rated their school environment as very good or good had higher grades than those who rated the school environment as fair or poor. Stewart (2006) contended that, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or current academic standing, the school environment can make a difference in the students' later achievements. This study did not provide any qualitative data that might have shown why students with higher grades perceived the school environment as better than those with lower grades and how this perception affected achievement.

Another study on school environment and African American student success was conducted by Tucker, Herman, Pedersen, Vogel, and Reinke (2000) using high school ($n = 21$) and elementary ($n = 22$) school students. The purpose of the study was to collect data from African American students with an open-ended questionnaire to determine their perspectives regarding issues and solutions that affected their academic success. When asked about causes of academic behavior problems, students noted lack of self-control (33% high school, 10% elementary), peer pressure (17% high school, 26% elementary), and racism/discrimination (17% high school, 6% elementary) as their top perceived causes. Participants also responded to a question that asked them to state why they believed African American students dropped out more often than Caucasian students. High school students expressed the belief that they drop out because they "just give up" (31%), personal problems (21%), racism/discrimination (17%), lack of attention at home (14%), and peer pressure (10%). The single most important thing that students suggested teachers could do to help them make better grades was to check for learning

and provide further explanation when needed (40% high school, 55% elementary). Second, high school students also stated that teachers need to provide praise and encouragement (24%); teacher patience (12%) was the third most significant factor. This study was used to try to gain insight from students about how they believe students navigate through the educational system and what teacher interactions are meaningful to them. The students appeared to successfully address the questions, showing that other studies on student perceptions, in particular perceptions about student-counselor interactions, might also prove fruitful.

In an attempt to have students evaluate their own academic proficiency Howard (2003) interviewed 20 African American high school students at two urban high schools to discuss how they viewed their own academic abilities, potential, and performance. In a semi-structured individual interview (30-60 minutes) participants were asked to (a) describe their academic identity, (b) discuss who and what the most important influences on developing their academic identities were, and (c) describe how their school experiences shaped their academic identity. Howard (2003) noted several findings that are relevant to this study. First, parents were mentioned as being one of the more powerful influences, and their expectations were noted as being of particular importance to the students. Next, participants believed that teachers and counselors also contributed to their perceptions of themselves, but mostly in a negative way. Students made statements like “these teachers think that just because we’re black kids from the ghetto that we can’t learn anything” (p. 10). Another student stated:

I'm realizing that counselors and teachers have a lot of power around here. It's a lot of kids here thinking that they are smarter than they are or that they are dumber than they really are, just because the counselor put them in a certain class (p. 11).

Another student noted race was a factor with school personnel by stating "These counselors think that just because you are Caucasian or Asian you are smart. If you are Black or Mexican you not smart. And that sad part is that a lot of kids believe that stuff". Another student perceived school educators as prejudiced and stated that African American students need to convince themselves that they are better than the educators think they are. This study evoked strong reactions from the African American student participants about how the adults in their lives interacted with them. The African American students interviewed in this study had predominately negative experiences with adult educators in their lives. It would be useful to interview students who are not in an urban setting to see if their perceptions are similar. In addition, a more in-depth discussion with the students would help ascertain how they formulated these perceptions.

Another qualitative study was conducted by Pringle, Lyons, and Booker (2010) to ascertain African American students' perceptions of teacher expectations. This study was consistent with some of Howard's (2003) findings in that African American students in both studies believed that teachers had pre-conceived notions about them based on superficial attributes. Forty-eight students were chosen from two high schools: one predominately African American and one predominately Caucasian. The semi-structured individual interviews revealed several themes of note. First, although most participants

believed that their teachers expected them to graduate they felt that the teachers had already identified those they felt would be successful and those who would not. The students believed that the teachers would not spend extra effort to help those deemed unsuccessful. In addition, over three fourths of the students interviewed reported perceptions of lower expectations for them and their friends. Finally, over half of the students interviewed believed that race was a factor in the way their teachers viewed them. This race discrimination was another theme shared by students in Howard's (2003) study.

Banks (2005) conducted a similar qualitative study to try to understand African American students' perceptions of high school teachers on the specific subject of literacy preparation. The findings were generally consistent with both the Howard (2003) and Pringle et al. study (2010) in that most of the African American students believed that teachers had low expectations of them and did not try to challenge them. Banks' participants frequently mentioned that they believed race might have influenced the teachers' evaluations of their performance. One student noted "I do not think the teachers compared me to other students in my school. I think they compared me to other minorities at my high school" (Banks, 2005, p. 6). This reiterates the Pringle et al. (2010) study conclusions that students believed they were being evaluated by teachers based on a group in which they were perceived to fit.

Pitre (2007) conducted a study designed to determine students' aspirations beyond high school. The goals of the study were to gather information about (a) whether African American students were as likely as Caucasian students to aspire to college attendance,

(b) whether or not student's perceptions of the high school's ability to prepare them for college influenced their aspiration for college entrance, and (c) student academic achievement differences as a function of race. The data were from 127 ninth grade students from two suburban school districts in Maryland. Responses from the Maryland Bridge project survey were used and the researcher used six control variables to control for some of the factors reported in the literature as having an effect on students' predispositions for college attendance. The variables were parental encouragement, academic achievement, academic track, perception of preparation, socioeconomic status, and gender.

The findings showed that there was no significant difference in the likelihood that African American students would aspire to attend college when compared to Caucasian students with or without controlling for variables related to aspirations (Pitre, 2007). The study went on to show the differences in college aspirations between those who felt that high school was preparing them for college *extremely well*, *somewhat well*, *not well*, or *not sure*. Those who felt that high school was not preparing them well for college were 33% less likely to aspire to college than those who indicated the school was doing extremely well or somewhat well in preparing them. Those who were not sure were 29% less likely to aspire to attend than those who felt they were extremely or somewhat well prepared by high school. Without additional data, it is difficult to draw conclusions based on this finding alone. It would be useful to better understand the students' perceptions and motivations regarding high school coursework and college preparation in addition to the information provided. One other finding was that the African American and

Caucasian students surveyed showed a substantial difference in current academic achievement. On a scale created by Pitre to examine students' grade point averages (with 9.0 indicating a perfect score) Caucasian students averaged 6.24 and African American students only 5.28.

As Pitre (2007) mentioned in his discussion section, the aspirations of African American students are undoubtedly high early in their high school careers; however, the discrepancy between academic achievement in the two groups studied might indicate that African American students lack information related to college admissions criteria and general knowledge about the college choice process. An area that warrants further exploration is how academic achievement ties in to the previous question of how well students felt high school prepared them for college. Pitre did not disaggregate data for the second research question regarding college preparation by ethnicity, but doing so would be helpful to better understand the connections between the African American students' academic achievement and how well they felt high school prepared them for college.

An earlier qualitative study was conducted by Freeman (1997) to try to understand African American 10th- to 12th-grade students' perceptions of the value of higher education. Freeman gathered data from 70 students in 16 group interviews conducted in five different cities. When asked about their perceptions of barriers to African Americans' participation in higher education, Freeman was able to group the responses into two broad categories: (a) economic barriers, and (b) psychological barriers. Economic barriers included not being able to afford college and not getting a job that pays appropriately for the level of education required. Many students expressed

sentiments like “why am I going through all of this when I’m not going to get a job, so what’s the point?” (p. 536.) Other students stated they simply do not have the money to go to college.

Considering psychological barriers to participation in higher education, Freeman (1997) grouped the students’ responses into: (a) college was never an option, (b) loss of hope, and (c) the intimidation factor. Several students stated that college was never presented to them as an option after high school. One student said “Some parents say you’re not going to go to school” (p. 537); another student responded that “part of the problem is that you don’t have anybody to help you, to want you to excel, to inspire you that you need to get a higher education” (p. 537). The theme of loss of hope was characterized by Freeman as “the feeling that African Americans are missing a passion for pursuing higher education or that the benefits of college are not recognized”. The final theme, the intimidation factor, dealt with students’ views that the college atmosphere was intimidating and/or that being an African American student on a college campus was, in itself, intimidating. Students offered solutions about how to help increase African American participation in higher education. As in several other studies, students believed that students being accepted for who they were and having someone who encouraged them to maximize their potential would be most helpful (Banks, 2005; Howard, 2003; Pringle et.al, 2010). They also suggested that schools could improve their conditions by providing interesting teachers and active counselors. Replicating the Freeman, 1997 study would be beneficial to determine whether or not current students still value education and career options in the same way their counterparts did 15 years

ago. In addition, the study was used to assess students' perceptions of barriers, but whether or not those barriers did, in fact, hinder a student from pursuing or attaining certain goals was not determined.

Trying to ascertain which attributes of a job attract African American students, Daire, LaMothe, and Fuller (2007) conducted a study of college students to investigate the influence of future income, future status, and making a difference in society on the career decision-making of African American people. They chose 155 college students, 57% of whom were African American ($n = 88$), and 43% of whom were Caucasian ($n = 67$), from a large southeastern college in the United States to participate. Through administration of a questionnaire they collected demographic information and used a 5-point Likert scale for students to rate the level of influence that *future income*, *future status*, and *making a difference in society* had on their decisions to complete high school, to attend college, and their career choices. The findings showed that there was very little difference between African American and Caucasian students' decisions to complete high school or attend college based on the aforementioned influences. However, the study showed a significant difference in all three areas as it pertained to career choice. African American students reported that future income ($M = 4.26$ African American vs. $M = 3.74$ Caucasian) and future status ($M = 4.38$ African American vs. $M = 3.95$ Caucasian) impacted their career choice decisions at a higher rate than it did Caucasian students. However, Caucasian students reported that making a difference in society impacted their career decisions at a slightly higher rate than African American students ($M = 4.42$ Caucasian vs. $M = 4.15$ African American).

The Daire et al. (2007) study would have been more useful if some qualitative insight could have been gained in understanding why students rated each selection as they did and how each factor actually influenced the students' decisions. In addition, other influences were not offered (other than the three given) to ascertain what factors do have the greatest influence on student career decisions overall or to put into perspective how influential these given options were to the participants. Regardless, the fact that status, income, and making a difference in society seemed to be important factors to African American students' career choices implied that external factors did significantly play into their career decisions.

The fact that there was no significant difference in how these factors affected graduation and college entrance decisions is thought provoking as well. Perhaps these students, who were already attending college, felt that college was the next logical step in their education and did not attribute one of these particular factors to those decisions. This assumption is supported by the high rates of students graduating high school from both ethnicities. According to the US Census Bureau (2011) the 2010 data show that both Caucasian and African American students graduate from high school at nearly the same rates: 87% and 84% respectively.

African American students' perceptions of counseling. Understanding what draws African American students into a counseling relationship and how they are affected by the interaction is important in establishing appropriate and meaningful counseling contact. The few studies that have been published recently about African American students and counseling have been conducted in two different ways. The first

has been to try to profile students based on “help-seeking” attributes to ascertain how to better assist them with mental health services and academic planning in the college setting (Duncan & Johnson, 2007; Williams & Justice, 2010). The second was to try to identify key components of effective counseling relationships as seen through the eyes of a specific type of African American male high school student (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008; Owens, Simmons, Bryant, & Henfield, 2010). The sparse number of studies conducted with African American students and counseling using narrow groups of African American students exhibits the need for more study in this area. Following is a summary of the existing studies.

Williams and Justice (2010) surveyed 212 African American male graduate students at four colleges to try to understand their attitudes toward seeking counseling for mental, social, and psychological problems. The 29-item survey, The Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPH), was given in person to students at two historically Black universities (HBCU) and two predominately White institutions (PWI). This is a national instrument used to elicit perceptions of African American males as they relate to counseling in Texas (Williams & Justice, 2010). Participants indicated their attitudes toward seeking help using a Likert-type scale. The survey listed statements regarding the participants’ faith in mental health facilities, their beliefs about seeking help versus handling their own problems, and their feelings about sharing their personal lives with others. Although the specific details of the study findings were not published, the researchers found that African American male undergraduate students had negative attitudes toward counseling. Further, they found that the attitudes

of African American males regarding counseling were similar in those who attended HBCUs and those who attended PWIs. This study did not address the participants' perceptions of counseling such as why the students had these views, what their experiences had been with counseling, and what aspects of the counseling services they found objectionable. A more in-depth investigation of the students' experiences would be helpful to better understand why their views are negative and what particular aspects are disagreeable to them.

Assuming that race is a factor in whether or not students seek counseling, Duncan and Johnson (2007) conducted a study with African American college students to try to better understand how being African American affects students' willingness to seek counseling services and their preferences in a counselor. The purpose of the study was to investigate the theory that students with less mature developmental levels of racial identity tend to have lower self-esteem and prefer same-race counselors (Howard-Hamilton & Behar-Horenstein, 1995). In this study, Duncan and Johnson proposed and investigated two hypotheses: (a) African self-consciousness, socioeconomic status, gender, and cultural mistrust would predict attitudes toward counseling; and (b) those aforementioned attributes would correlate into a preference for an ethnically similar counselor. The researchers surveyed 315 middle class African American college students from two HBCUs and two PWIs in the Midwest and southern regions of the United States. Although the students ranged from freshmen to seniors, 78% of the sample reported no previous counseling experiences. The study used a variety of instruments, including the ATSPPH used in the Williams and Justice (2010) study. Other survey

questions were from the African Self Consciousness Scale, the Cultural Mistrust Inventory, and several questions created by Duncan and Johnson themselves. The survey was designed to assess the participants' levels of cultural mistrust, self-consciousness, attitudes toward seeking psychological help, and counselor preferences. Students were presented with scenarios regarding personal, vocational/educational, and environmental needs (racism, sexism, feelings of isolation, etc.) and were asked to score on a Likert-type scale the types of counselors they would seek.

In summary, a few noteworthy results emerged from the Duncan and Johnson (2007) study. The first addressed Hypothesis 1 and suggested that participants with lower income, less cultural mistrust, and those who were female tended to have more positive attitudes toward counseling in general. In regard to Hypothesis 2, African American self-consciousness and gender were the strongest predictors for students wanting the same race and gender counselor for environmental concerns. Low levels of African American self-consciousness and less cultural mistrust led those students to prefer Caucasian counselors for personal concerns. There were no statistically significant results to show any preferences African American students had for vocational/education counseling needs.

Trying to determine if African American high school students have preferences toward a particular type of counselor, a qualitative study was conducted by Moore et al. (2008). These researchers hoped to uncover the attitudes and perceptions that African American high school students had for their school counselors. They interviewed 10 African American male students (nine seniors, one junior) receiving special education

services in two different low-performing urban high schools. The intent of the study was to find out how these particular students perceived school counselors and the different services they provided and to ascertain to what degree these students were willing to use the school counseling services. The study included a biographical questionnaire and one 30- to 60-minute semi-structured, in-person individual interview. The researchers categorized the findings into three themes: (a) the perceived role of the school counselor, (b) actual experiences with the school counselor, and (c) comfort level with the school counselor. The investigators found that the students had positive and negative perceptions and comfort levels with school counselors. They also found that the students discussed many expectations they had of their counselors even though many expectations were often unfulfilled.

Regarding the perceived role of the counselor, participant responses focused mainly on academic and personal-social issues (Moore et al., 2007). The participants did not perceive career issues as one of the roles of the school counselor. The students said that they believed counselors should help students select the right courses they need to graduate and to help solve personal problems. In reference to their actual experiences with the school counselors, participants stated they never used their counselors' services. However, those who did seemed to have benefitted. Such assistance tended to focus on scheduling and academic planning. Exploring the third category, regarding the participants' comfort levels with the school counselors, revealed several issues. The issues were related to past school counselor experiences, family/school boundaries, school counselor time availability, and school counselor bias. One student said that "in

the past the counselor would ask me stuff and I told them and they [school counselors] would use it against me. And I got put away in a foster home” (p. 920). Another student stated he only talks with family about personal matters. Another student said that he believed that school counselors tend to focus on select students. He went on to say “They [school counselors] worry about certain people for so much, but they don’t worry about all of them...just ready to work with who they want” (p.920).

An interesting finding in Moore et al.’s (2007) study was that post-secondary and career counseling were not areas in which these students felt their school counselor provided assistance. It would have been helpful to better understand the counseling services provided at those particular schools to ascertain why students in their senior year did not recall receiving this type of assistance. It also would have been helpful to know whether the students identified other school personnel as providing career counseling or if this area was lacking altogether. Further, knowing more about these students’ post-secondary aspirations would possibly help readers understand how they sought their counselor for help and what areas they desired assistance in. Another limitation of the study was that the students were all urban male students receiving special education services. Changing the profile of the student participant group might have yielded different results.

Another qualitative study was conducted in 2010 with urban African American males by two researchers from the aforementioned study along with two other researchers (Owens et al., 2010). In this study, Owens et al. explored urban African American males’ perceptions of school counselors and the quality of school counseling services provided

to meet their needs. The 10 participants were from the same school and ranged from 14 to 17 years old. They were all serviced by female African American counselors. From their individual 50-minute in-person interviews, three primary themes emerged: (a) positive experiences and regard toward counselors, (b) academic support needed to navigate the educational process, and (c) suggestions for improving school counseling services.

Nine of the participants in Owens et al.'s (2010) study expressed positive perceptions of their school counselors, using statements like "she has done everything that I need her to do for me" and "anything that we need we just ask and she'll make sure that we get it" (p. 170). Theme (b) concerned the students' perceived academic supports, and students' responses included needing more information on topics like study/organizational skills, tutoring services, course selections, and scholarships. Theme (c), suggestions for improving school counseling services, was created because of student comments such as "there needs to be more school counselors in this building because there are not enough" (p. 171) and "she's cool but busy" (p. 171). Consistent with the perception that there was a need for more counselors was the desire for counselors to assist them with addressing non-academic problems such as peer pressure and home issues.

Although Owens et al.'s (2010) study was useful for gathering general perceptions from these urban African American males, more data would be helpful. First, though most participants found their counselor helpful, it would be valuable to better understand what type of services they actually sought and how, specifically, they received assistance. In addition, it would have been useful to determine what

characteristics of the counselors made them seem approachable and how the relationships were formed. An obvious limitation of the study was that the students were all urban male students from the same school. Using female students, students from suburban or rural schools, or students with different types of counselors might have yielded different results.

Summary Discussion

Examining the literature on contemporary school counseling revealed several noteworthy themes. First, school counseling, as a profession, is relatively new and evolving. ASCA appears to be the predominant association that provides counseling guidance to equip counselors and counseling programs with the support they need to perform their jobs. However, even though ASCA offers guidance, it does not provide specific directives and instructions on how to administer counseling were not given by ASCA. The task of implementing a comprehensive guidance program is left to the schools and local agencies to establish as they deem appropriate. This may cause some programs to inadequately service students.

Second, although career counseling is clearly recognized as part of a school counselor's job, there is no consensus on the types of tools or theories that counselors use in practice. Practices are not consistent; therefore, more research needs to be conducted to ascertain how counselors are working with students in this area and how it is affecting student career planning.

Finally, a review of counselor education, preparation, and practices revealed that today's school counselors are being trained in multicultural competencies during their

graduate school education. In addition, many counselor educators are continuing to impress upon counselors the need to be aware of the diverse needs of the students they serve. Although most counselors do appear to acknowledge adequate training, many still feel unprepared to interact appropriately with students from various cultures. This situation supports the conclusion that further research needs to be conducted to ascertain whether or not minority students feel they are being counseled effectively and what might be lacking in the counseling relationship.

The review of student perception studies also showed several areas in which further study is needed. First, several studies revealed that students perceived their educational experiences and achievement differently based on the types of schools they attended. Students from smaller schools or schools with a more comprehensive counseling program tended to view school services more positively than did those from larger schools or less comprehensive counseling programs. In addition, in a few studies it was found that African American females tended to be more likely to seek counseling assistance than their male or racially different counterparts. However, students often cited other resources as more helpful with assisting them in career planning than their school counselors.

Another finding from the literature was the perception by many of the African American students that school personnel tended to have low expectations of them, were prejudiced toward them, or were not as encouraging as the students believed they should have been. Specifically regarding counselors, some students felt that their counselors were not helpful to them, were not clear about their expectations of them, or were not

able to invest enough time to be strong resources for them. Other African American participants simply indicated an aversion or hesitation toward counseling in general. However, in other studies, students stated they wanted help with career planning. So, even though African American students desire assistance in career planning, many appear uncomfortable accessing the services of counselors who are trained to help them. This conundrum needs to be investigated and can be best understood by talking with African American students and exploring their feelings and experiences with counseling.

Although this review of the literature has uncovered various aspects of student/educator interactions, further studies are clearly needed. Multiple studies have been conducted focusing on the perceptions of urban students and students deemed at-risk or impoverished. However, not enough has been done to try to understand how middle-class, suburban African American high school students are being served or how male and female students specifically process the counseling messages they receive. To better understand these dynamics, a qualitative approach is necessary. This study used data from case studies of African American male and female students in a suburban setting to help reveal key components in the counselor/student relationship that students find helpful or harmful. This will add to the extant research by gathering more information on how to work successfully with the male and female African American high school population in career counseling in a way that is useful for them.

CHAPTER 3 METHOD

Research Design

The intent of this study was to better understand how suburban African American students perceive and process the career counseling interactions they have with their high school counselors. To gain insight into these experiences, the study used a qualitative research design of 10 individual participant case studies of suburban African American students. Using this approach enabled an in-depth exploration of each participant based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2008). Conducting multiple case studies allowed for the participants to be described individually and compared with each other to provide deeper insight into the issue of high school career counseling with the African American student (Creswell, 2008). The study data came from one in-depth individual interview with each student to gain knowledge about the students' perspectives on their counseling experiences. Using interviews allowed the subjects to speak directly about what they believed was going on in various situations (Yin, 2009). Additionally, the students' academic transcripts and attendance histories were collected to provide a better understanding of each student's academic and social standing. The documents not only provided valuable information about the cases themselves, but also helped stimulate thinking about important questions to ask during the interviews (Merriam, 1998).

Participants and Setting

Setting. A high school in Virginia was chosen for this study. A single site was chosen so that participants from one particular counseling program could be studied. The school chosen for this study, Canaan Valley High School (pseudonym) met the two requirements that were vital to the purpose of the study. The first stipulation was that the school needed to have a comprehensive counseling department that contained a career counseling component in its offered services. Counseling services vary from school to school (Hatch, 2008). Identifying and using a school that implemented a career counseling component was critical for this study. It was verified that the school district in which the high school is located contained a statement on their school system website that it adheres to a comprehensive guidance and counseling model including career counseling services (Prince William County Public Schools, 2010). The second stipulation was that the school needed to be a RAMP (recognized ASCA model program) school. A school employing a comprehensive counseling model, as identified by ASCA, may apply for a RAMP distinction by submitting extensive documentation that they are offering counseling services that are in line with the four quadrants of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2008b). RAMP counseling programs are acknowledged by ASCA, and arguably by the education community, as exemplary counseling programs (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). Selecting students who attended a school with a RAMP counseling program ensured that the students in this study were receiving high quality career counseling and therefore made their perceptions more meaningful.

Permission to conduct this study at Canaan Valley High School was approved by the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity and Assurance in October 2012. Permission was then granted by the school district in November, 2012 to conduct research at the school used in this study. Once initial contact was made with the school principal, all data collection needs were arranged through the school's Director of Counseling.

The interview setting. All participant contact was conducted in the Canaan Valley High School Career Center. The Career Center is located in the counseling office of the school. The room was private and contained basic office furniture including bookshelves, computers and several tables. Although the room was undergoing renovations, the interviews were conducted in a comfortable section in the back of the room with two chairs and a large desk separating the interviewer and participant. Students were not facing the door or any windows to help avoid any distractions.

Participants. This study contains findings from 10 individual participant interviews in which five male and five female African American 12th-grade students were studied. To best capture the lived experiences of African American high school students, participants in their 12th-grade year of high school were deemed most suitable for this study. Choosing 12th-grade students ensured that they had the opportunity to be exposed to the most career counseling during their time in school. Also, interviewing students while they were still in school was intended to maximize the possibility that the students would be able to accurately recall feelings and accounts that were current experiences for them.

The selection process. The aim in selecting participants for this study was to gather a sample of representatives who could together represent the population of concern (Weiss, 1994). In order to gain the most insight and understanding on the topic of African American students' perceptions of high school career counseling, a purposeful sample was used. Purposeful selection is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that cannot be obtained from other choices (Maxwell, 2005). The 12th-grade population at Canaan Valley High School was narrowed down using two levels of selection criteria in order to get to a smaller sample from which the 10 study participants were ultimately selected. The first level criteria were employed to omit students who may not be suitable for this study. The following criteria were used:

- School enrollment documentation and the student identified himself or herself as African American.
- Student was enrolled full-time at one public, suburban high school in Virginia.
- School personnel verified that the student was on track and had a plan to graduate within the timeframe considered average with a Standard or Advanced Studies diploma. Average timeframe meant the student would graduate no later than August of their fourth year in high school, and
- Student could recall participating in some form of individual career counseling discussions with their assigned school counselor.

Because the intention of the study was to better understand African American students' career counseling perceptions, it was necessary to identify students who identified themselves as African American and could recall participating in career counseling interactions. Additionally, it was thought that students who attended more than one high school at the time of the study may not have been the best participants because it would not have been clear whether their lack of time in one building attributed to their perceptions of school counseling. Also, students who were not graduating in the average timeframe were omitted due to the uncertainty of how their graduation needs may have influenced their perceptions. A school representative, the Director of Counseling, identified approximately 200 students who met the criteria above.

The next level of selection was used to try to identify a sample that would maximize range. Weiss (1994) suggests that choosing a sample to maximize range is done by purposively selecting participants to "obtain all the important dissimilar forms present in the larger population" (p. 36.) Thus, participants were selected who contrasted in gender, assigned counselor and a "post-secondary plan choice" criterion was created and used. Based on previous research findings, counselors may interact with students differently depending on the type of post-secondary plan the student has (Barker, 2000; Bloch, 1996). The following three classifications were created to ensure a significant variation in post-secondary plans:

- Student stated her/his plan after high school was to attend a 4-year college or university;

- Student stated her/his plan after high school was to attend a 2-year community college, junior college, or technical school; and
- Student stated her/his plan after high school was to attend the military or enter the workforce

The Director of Counseling was provided the matrix seen in Table 1 and requested that her counselors identify and categorize their own students into the following categories:

Table 1

African American Students by Counselor

Post-Secondary Plan	Counselor A	Counselor B	Counselor C	Counselor D
4-year College Male				
4-year College Female				
2-year/Tech Male				
2-year/Tech Female				
Work/Military Male				
Work/Military Female				

The original goal was to interview 12 students to include two students from each of the six rows. Once the researcher was given the matrix of names, the researcher planned to pick three students from each counselor and no more than one student per counselor from each row.

The counselors were able to identify the plans for approximately 40 of the approximately 200 eligible students. The students were listed alphabetically in each box above. Several of the categories contained none or only one student identified by a

particular counselor. In the categories in which multiple students were identified by the counselor, the first student listed alphabetically was chosen by the researcher for the study. Per the Director of Counseling's direction, only the first twelve students the researcher identified were asked to participate in the study. The Director of Counseling asked the students to participate in the study (see Appendix B). Once they consented, they were screened by the researcher (see Appendix C) and their agreement to participate in the study was confirmed. Six of the participants did not show up for their interview. Thus, six more participants were selected and asked participate by the Director of Counseling and then screened by the researcher. Two of those students did not show up for their interview. Ultimately, 10 students agreed to be interviewed and audio taped; they returned the parental consent forms, and were interviewed for the study. Although each of the four counselors had a caseload of approximately 400 students, the ten students in the study were not pulled equally from them. Based on the identification and availability of the students, four participants were from Ms. Jacobi's caseload, two from Mr. Roman, two from Ms. Brew and two from Ms. Solomon.

Data Collection

Data collection methods used in this study were interviews and collection of relevant documents. One semi-structured individual interview was conducted with each participant. An interview guide (see Appendix D) was designed to help better understand what the participants found helpful or not helpful about their career counseling experiences. Interview questions were piloted on various occasions in the spring and summer of 2012 with two students who were in high school and three who already

graduated and were in their first year of college. The purpose of using high school students was to try to anticipate the types of responses that the study participants would give and to ensure that the questions were logical and appropriate (Maxwell, 2005). The purpose of using students who already completed high school was to try to ascertain if there were factors about their counseling experiences that had not been included or anticipated as being prevalent. The pilot interviews were conducted to evaluate the strength of the interview questions and to capture the initial responses of the participants. The setting of the pilot interviews varied from a school office, the participants' home and two were phone interview. The interview guide was revised after the pilot interviews to contain fewer questions that were more broad in scope.

In addition to the interviews, each student's academic transcript and 12th-grade attendance record was provided by the school. All data collected were reviewed carefully prior to the interviews. The documents were used in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the selected African American students' and how their education history may affect their perceptions' of the career counseling they received from high school counselor.

The interviews. A semi-structured interview format was used. The interviews were extensive, used open-ended questions, and students were asked about matters discussed in the participants' counseling meetings, the nature of those sessions and the students' perceptions of the helpfulness of their counselors. The interviews ranged from 35 to 60 minutes in length with a mean of 44 minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to gather specific feedback on the participants' perceptions of what was positive and

negative about the counseling relationships, what the participant wanted from and received through the relationships as well as how the information impacted their decision-making. The interviews consisted of gathering basic information regarding the participants' future plans and then proceeded to more specific questions regarding the nature of their counseling relationships as they pertained to career counseling.

Documents. The school provided the student's academic transcript and 12th-grade attendance records. The transcripts contained a listing of each student's high school classes and end-of-the-year grades. It also included the 12th-grade courses and first quarter grades. The cumulative GPA and SAT or ACT test score data were also on the transcript. The attendance records showed the total number of absences students incurred during their senior year and whether or not the absences were deemed *excused* or *unexcused*. Both the transcripts and the attendance records were used to provide fuller profiles of each student to corroborate or clarify information the students themselves supplied.

Data Analysis

This study contained 10 individual case studies, therefore, two stages of analysis, within-case and cross-case, were used. As suggested by Merriam (1998), the first stage was within-case analysis in which each case was treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself. Once the analysis of each case was completed, cross-case analysis was conducted. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms to protect all parties involved. Memos were written after listening to the recorded interviews and used to capture initial feelings and overall impressions that might not have been captured in

the transcriptions. Next, the transcripts were read and meaningful phrases were highlighted and coded to make note of each relevant thought. The data were then entered into a matrix to help the researcher visualize the information and create suitable categories. The purpose of coding was to be able to break out the relevant "data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts." (Maxwell, 2005, p.96.) "Devising categories is a largely intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves." (Merriam, 1998, p. 179.) Thus, the coded data were then placed in organizational, substantive and theoretical categories as deemed appropriate (Maxwell, 2005). The organizational categories reflected the various topics investigated in the interviews and the substantive and theoretical categories signified participants' interpretations of events and their perceptions of their counselor (Maxwell, 2005.) The students' academic transcripts and attendance documents were used to add further description to each participant's profile and to provide data for developing themes across cases.

Validity

Several strategies to protect the validity of the conclusions of the study were used. First, rich data were gathered by conducting intensive interviews to tap into the participants' years of high school counseling. Participants were asked to discuss a variety of interactions and activities they experienced, or had hoped to experience, with their school counselors and describe what meaning those interactions had for them. The

students' academic transcripts and attendance records were used to verify and corroborate information given by the student. Respondent validation was used throughout the interviews so the participants were able to confirm that what was being said was not being misinterpreted (Maxwell, 2005). Student responses were restated during the interviews to ensure that the appropriate meanings were conveyed. Finally, using multiple sources of data, known as triangulation, helped to confirm emerging findings and enhance internal validity (Merriam, 1998). The study made use of the students' academic transcripts, attendance documents, and individual interview to help gather an accurate picture of the phenomena being studied.

One of my strengths as the investigator may also be considered a potential threat to validity. I am a high school counselor and have experience working with students in career counseling and post-secondary planning. Although I was trained to work with African American high school students in a counseling/interview type manner, and was vigilant in my efforts not to make assumptions about what was being said. I was continually mindful of my prior knowledge of the subject matter so as to approach the interview sessions in an unbiased manner. To specifically address this, students were asked to explain all counseling activities, school programs, education acronyms, and so forth so that the findings would be based on their understandings of these items and not my own. In addition, no participant was made aware of my employment background until after the interviews to ensure that they also did not make assumptions about my awareness, understanding or biases about events.

Limitations

It was assumed that the school they attended followed the counseling program mandates as outlined by the Commonwealth of Virginia and the county in which they operated. It is also assumed that the selected students were truthful in their interview responses to the best of their knowledge. The interview findings of the study cannot be generalized to all African American students in Northern Virginia. Further research will need to be conducted on other students who have a different socioeconomic status, academic record, ethnicity, educational background, and so forth, from those examined in this study.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

The central research question (Q1) that guided this study was: How do selected African American high school students perceive the career counseling they receive from their school counselor? The secondary questions to help answer this were: (Q2) What particular factors did they perceive made the interactions helpful? and (Q3) What particular factors did they perceive made the interactions not helpful? In Chapter 3 the methods that were used to investigate these questions were addressed. In Chapter 4 the relevant findings of this study are reported. Three sections are used in this chapter to (a) describe the Canaan Valley School Counseling program, (b) detail individual case findings, and (c) report relevant themes across the cases.

Canaan Valley High School Counseling Department

Canaan Valley High School contains nearly 1,600 students in grades 9-12. Approximately 43% of the senior class is African American (Virginia Department of Education, 2011b). The counseling office has four professional school counselors who manage approximately 400 students each. The students are in grades 9-12 and are divided equally among the counselors alphabetically by last name. Canaan Valley's Counseling Office is headed by a School Counseling Director and contains several support staff. The counselors are all in the 30- to 40-year-old age range, three are African American, and one is Caucasian. There is one male counselor. All counselors have been at Canaan

Valley for at least seven years, although this is Mr. Roman's first year with a full caseload containing 11th- and 12th-grade students in the school counselor position. He was formerly the school's career counselor and worked with all students until the job was dissolved by the county.

The counseling office reportedly offers multiple guidance lessons and counseling sessions to assist students in the area of post-secondary educational planning. The Director of School Counseling stated that the counselors conduct a guidance lesson in the classroom during the students' freshman, sophomore, and junior years to discuss matters regarding preparing and planning for life after high school. In addition, a senior breakfast is held for parents and senior students in the summer prior to the students' senior years to discuss the same matters. Finally, students are counseled individually in the fall of their senior year to discuss their individual plans for their future education and work endeavors.

The Study Participants

Table 2 shows profiles of the 10 participants interviewed in this study in the order in which they will be reported.

Table 2

Student Profiles

Student	Pseudonym	Counselor	Post High School Aspiration	Career Plan	Cumulative GPA
Student 1	Hannah	Ms. Brew	4-year college	Nursing	3.7
Student 2	Josh	Ms. Jacobi	4-year college	Culinary Arts/Business	1.0
Student 3	Paula	Ms. Solomon	Military	Navy	1.6
Student 4	Mark	Ms. Brew	4-year college	Computer Engineering	3.7
Student 5	Bethany	Ms. Solomon	Community College	Nursing	2.7
Student 6	Gene	Ms. Jacobi	4-year college	Sports Medicine	3.1
Student 7	Priscilla	Ms. Jacobi	Community College	Ultrasound Technician	0.9
Student 8	Reuben	Mr. Roman	Workforce	Culinary Arts	1.8
Student 9	Kora	Ms. Jacobi	4-year college	Physician	3.5
Student 10	Isaac	Mr. Roman	4-year/Community College	Communications	2.1

Note. GPA value is cumulative.

Individual Case Findings

Students were asked to think about their experiences with high school counseling with regard to the school programs and individual counseling that focused on career counseling and post-secondary school planning. The same interview guide (see Appendix

D) was used for each student. Relevant themes found within each individual participant interview are described in this section.

Student 1. Hannah is a 17 year-old female who has attended Canaan Valley HS her entire high school career. She said that she planned to attend a 4-year college and that she had already been accepted to two schools. She hoped to work in the medical field and was contemplating nursing as one of her options. Hannah considered participating in cheerleading in college but was not seeking scholarships in that area. Hannah had a 3.7 cumulative GPA and her counselor was Ms. Brew.

Hannah remembered some of the counseling efforts that the Canaan Valley Counseling Department conducted to help students prepare for life after high school. Although she found the information helpful in general, Hannah recalled the meetings with her counselor as the most meaningful. Hannah was able to provide detailed information about some of those individual counseling meetings and identified her perceptions on what was most helpful to her. She felt that at points in their relationship Ms. Brew became “motherly” and would encourage her to keep doing well academically and push her to finish her college applications. Though Hannah found that motherly attribute helpful, it was not as prevalent in the interview as her satisfaction with Ms. Brew's ability to provide her with valuable career planning information and her concerns with her being approachable.

Hannah found Ms. Brew’s vast knowledge and detailed information about career planning to be the most helpful part of her counseling experiences. “You know if she gives you information, she knows what she’s talking about....She has taught me a lot

because she is really organized,” and “she walked me through step-by-step” were phrases Hannah used to describe the kind of assistance that Ms. Brew provided. She felt confident in the information she was receiving because of the amount of detail that was given and how confident Ms. Brew appeared when saying it. Hannah felt that she could trust Ms. Brew’s information and found her opinion invaluable in her decision-making. Hannah noted that she chose her top choice school based on the information that Ms. Brew provided and that she “helped me know better about all the schools.” As an example of how Ms. Brew provided detailed information, Hannah recalled a meeting in which she asked her for help with a college application. “The advice she gave me on the first application really did help me so much that I didn’t need to go back to her and ask the same questions over and over.” Hannah said Ms. Brew was a useful resource for helping her choose her colleges, narrowing down her major, and the entire college application process.

Although Hannah said she felt comfortable with Ms. Brew, she reflected that Ms. Brew did not always seem approachable to her.

I used to feel like I was bothering her because I didn’t know her like that...you know how some people have that face like you’re bothering them but if you get to know her you realize you’re not bothering her and she’s there to help you. You just have to get on her good side.

This was one way that Hannah described how she thought Ms. Brew came across to students. Although she acknowledged that Ms. Brew did not appear to have a generally

friendly demeanor, she readily defended her counselor by stating “she’s not mean, her face just comes off like that.”

Hannah recalled her infrequent meetings with Ms. Brew in her earlier years as “weird” and “awkward” because of her impression of Ms. Brew’s disposition. When remembering a time in which Ms. Brew told her she was unable to take a particular course, she recalled that she felt Ms. Brew lacked empathy as she explained the situation to Hannah. She said her delivery was “not mean, it was just bland”. She recalled that she felt that Ms. Brew should have been “nicer” in how she delivered the information. Conversely, she stated that once you get to know Ms. Brew she is “nice and funny.” She thought that Ms. Brew would appear more friendly if she “chose her words a little more carefully.” In clarification of how she interpreted Ms. Brew's demeanor, Hannah said “sometimes she is warm and fuzzy but if she's having a bad day, you know about it.” Regardless, when asked whether it was more important for a counselor to be friendly or knowledgeable, Hannah said “I’d rather have someone know what they’re talking about and help me with my career because if someone is happy all the time and doesn’t know what they’re talking about, it might be annoying to me.”

Student 2. Josh is an 18 year-old male who has attended Canaan Valley HS his entire high school career. He said that he hoped to attend a 4-year college, although he was unable to correctly identify the names and locations of the schools to which he planned to apply. He hoped to be a cook and run his own restaurant. Josh had a 1.0 GPA and Ms. Jacobi was his counselor. Early in the interview, Josh mentioned that he used to be “a bad kid” and needed a lot of support to get through his first two high school years.

He was able to credit many school personnel for “staying on my butt” and helping him to stay out of trouble and stay in school. Josh seemed to have an especially strong and unique relationship with Ms. Jacobi. He mentioned that she counseled his older brothers and lived near one of his relatives. It was not clear, but those familial factors may have swayed Ms. Jacobi to act more fondly toward Josh than her other students. However, other than unexpectedly seeing her on occasion in her neighborhood, Josh did not mention any activities they were involved in together outside of school. In the interview, Josh stressed how privileged he felt that Ms. Jacobi took a personal interest in him, offered him valuable advice and motivated him to be successful in school.

“Ms. Jacobi is like a mother figure to me.” Josh repeated that phrase over and over as he discussed his relationship with Ms. Jacobi and talked about how she helped him with his academic and career planning. “I don’t really have a mother in my life that much so for her to be like that I know how it feels to have one so it helps me out a lot.” Being a mother figure to Josh allowed Ms. Jacobi to influence him to make academic decisions he ordinarily would not have chosen. At a point when he was failing several classes in his sophomore year she suggested he take the courses through an online program at no cost. His initial reaction was one of disappointment.

I felt like she was putting me in a predicament to be laughed at [by his peers] or put down....I thought she could do better than what she was doing...we were going back and forth for a while about it and then I finally understood that she wasn’t trying to hurt me.

Josh finally conceded because he said "I didn't want to argue with anybody that I'm really close with." He felt he was comfortable enough with Ms. Jacobi to question her ideas but trusted her enough to follow her lead. Josh felt that Ms. Jacobi established a helpful working relationship with him through the time and attention she offered him. He mentioned that she would joke around with him and share personal information with him about her life. "She would tell me things about her family and we have little inside jokes." This allowed him to feel connected to her and develop a trusting relationship.

In Josh's case, it appeared that an emotional connection needed to be established before he was able to accept the counseling advice and assistance that Ms. Jacobi offered him. However, Josh stated that he needed a lot of support to meet graduation requirements and help plan for life after high school because of his poor academic performance during high school. Josh eventually appreciated how Ms. Jacobi customized his course schedule to benefit his needs. He said he was able to go to her to express concerns about classes and that she would immediately resolve the issues. At one point during his freshman year, Josh remembered going to her in desperation because he was falling far behind in classes. "We sat there and looked at all my summaries in all my classes and that's when she started changing all my classes around to help me pass." In another instance in his junior year "when I told her what I wanted to do [for my career], she told me I should start taking classes at NOVA before I graduate." He recalled that she sat with him and created a plan for him to take college courses during the summer and fall. When asked when his relationship with Ms. Jacobi became strong, he said it was "when I started finding out she was giving me good advice and I started passing my

classes that she put me in. I knew she was helping me out.” Although Josh valued his close relationship with Ms. Jacobi, he said if he had to choose between having a friendly relationship or strong assistance from his counselor, he would choose assistance.

I would rather have someone guiding me because it’s not always going to be me and her because eventually it’s just going to be me. I will be gone and she will stay so if it came down to it, I would rather her guide me because it would help me guide myself when I go on to college and life...you can always get that love, or whatever you want to name it, later on so I would rather have help here.

Josh appeared to appreciate the encouragement that Ms. Jacobi offered him. He recalled “Keep your head up” and “Be a leader and not a follower because you’re a smart kid” as some of the advice Ms. Jacobi gave him. He said she often thanked him for doing what he was supposed to be doing in school and told him she was proud of him. When asked how those words made him feel, he said “I feel like I am doing a good deed like nobody can stop me.” Josh explained that Ms. Jacobi’s motivational expressions helped him persevere through school. He felt like she believed in his abilities and that he did not want to disappoint her.

Student 3. Paula is a 17 year-old female who attended Canaan Valley HS since the middle of her junior year. Prior to that she was enrolled in a private, religion-based school in another state. Paula had a 1.6 cumulative GPA and her counselor was Ms. Solomon. She planned to enlist in the Navy after graduation. She already had been in contact with a Navy Recruiter who she reportedly met with regularly. She stated that her

mother supported her decision to enlist in the Navy though she would have preferred that she attend college first.

On multiple occasions, Paula mentioned the need for Canaan Valley HS to offer more information on college options yet she claimed that she was “not ready for college” and wanted to enter military service like her mother. This conflict in plans and desires may have been due to her below-average academic performance in school. Although she did not readily discuss it, Paula’s academic history was probably prohibitive with respect to being accepted into a 4-year college straight out of high school. Her GPA was lower than the 2.0–2.5 minimum GPA that most Virginia colleges require (Access College Foundation, 2009) and she was missing several prerequisite courses such as Algebra II and a 2nd year of foreign language.

Paula spent much of the interview describing her feelings of resentment toward her counselor, Ms. Solomon. She believed that Ms. Solomon did not make enough of an effort to get to know her personally and she felt that she was not available to meet her emotional and advising needs. Paula also voiced strong opinions on the type of help she felt she needed and areas of improvement for the counseling department in general. Paula contrasted the way the Canaan Valley HS teachers interacted with their students versus the way the counselors interacted. She said “the teachers actually sit down and listen rather than just look at you and nod their heads and write down stuff. The teachers actually talk back and try to relate to you.” In describing her conversations with her counselor, Ms. Solomon, she said, “I don’t think she understands students,” it was more like “a business interaction,” and “she hears what we’re saying but she’s not really

getting what we're saying." Though Paula admittedly spent much more time with her teachers than her counselor, she was able to recall several counseling interactions that supported her beliefs. In one instance, she recalled Ms. Solomon calling her into the office to discuss her low grade in a class. Instead of having a conversation, Ms. Solomon had Paula write on a form why she believed she had the low grade. Paula thought many of the questions on the form were not applicable to her situation and the entire interaction was impersonal. She reflected "what's the point of the form....Why don't we just talk about it?" In another meeting, Paula remembered her counselor telling her a story about her own son's experiences in the military.

She figured because he had to go through the same process it would relate to me....All I could do was just sit there and listen and pretend it was interesting. I was just thinking what does that have to do with me?

Paula said Ms. Solomon "likes to go off into her own conversation." This lack of connection in the counseling relationship was a source of frustration for Paula and she felt it did not meet her counseling needs.

Paula felt that Ms. Solomon had not met most of her expectations in providing the support she believed a counselor should. Specifically, Paula appeared to be looking for two types of help: advising and assisting. First, Paula believed that a counselor should offer advice to students about how to prepare for their future. Paula said a counselor should give her

advice on what I should do, what I should ask my recruiters, what I should be prepared for and get prepared for, what I should expect while I am there [in the

military]...Even if they don't exactly agree with what you're saying, [counselors should] still try to tell you what's best for you.

Second, Paula felt that a counselor should assist students in practical matters dealing with postsecondary planning. She felt she needed a lot of help talking to her recruiter about her academic accomplishments and she felt that her counselor should have "actually talk to the recruiter and work things out with people that you're working with." Although she claimed to be comfortable with her decision to enlist, Paula also thought Ms. Solomon should have discussed all of the post-secondary options with her. Included in those meetings would have been to sit down with her and actually "look up information for schools and stuff, what you want to do, pointing you in the right direction with schools and programs."

Some of the strain Paula reported in her relationship with Ms. Solomon came from her perception that Ms. Solomon was not available to her. She mentioned "I don't even know if she is here half the time...I go to see her and nobody knows where she is." And when she did spend time with her, Paula said her answers were brief and that "she seems like she is always in a rush. She's not saying anything but it feels like she's rushing you to get your point across so she could get on to the next person and keep it moving." The lack of her presence and the hurried feeling Paula felt led her to believe that her counselor was not available to her as she needed. This lack of availability also meant that Paula did not have access to her counselor as a resource for advising and assistance as she desired.

Another important factor for Paula was the impression she had about the general personality of her counselor. She believed that a counselor being approachable and “personable” helped to foster a better working relationship. In particular, she found that Ms. Solomon was not personable. She believed that “if she were personable it would be easier to go to her about stuff because she wouldn’t seem so rigid and harsh...not harsh...but no emotion.” She later said, “I don’t really want to say she is robotic but she is not someone you would enjoy talking about stuff with.” She defined being personable as displaying positive emotions, whereas she identified some of the Canaan Valley HS counselors as “quiet, no emotion at all,” and “just blah.” This perception made it difficult for Paula to seek the services of the counselors in her school.

Although Paula had attended Canaan Valley HS for approximately 1 year, she was unable to identify many career planning programs or duties that the counseling office fulfilled. She attributed several activities to the administration team even though they were counselor-run activities. This included the senior breakfast and the dissemination of a senior-year counseling packet. She also said that her counselor was “not really here for career counseling,” and that “when I think of a counselor, I think of someone you go to and discuss personal issues.” The topic of career planning came up, and when asked who should lead those discussions in school, her response was that it should be led by English and government teachers who teach senior students. She did not identify career counseling as a function of the counseling department. In regard to counselor responsibilities, she said “I don’t really see what they do,” and “they’re not really people you go to about stuff.” Finally, when trying to explain her perception of the counselors at

Canaan Valley HS, she stated “they’re not really the people you hear about in school,” meaning they played little significance in the lives of the students.

Student 4. Mark is an 18 year-old male who has attended Canaan Valley HS his entire high school career. Mark reported that he had applied to several colleges and military academies and was still awaiting responses. He planned to major in computer engineering and was considering entering the military after college. Mark’s cumulative GPA was a 3.7 and Ms. Brew was his counselor.

During the interview, Mark mentioned that he did not like people making decisions for him but preferred deciding things for himself. This was evident in his recollection of how he started in the JROTC program at Canaan Valley HS.

My mom saw the JROTC program and read articles about it and thought it would be a good opportunity for me to learn some new things....Although I was stubborn about it my freshman year, she left me alone and told me it was my own choice and I decided to try it my sophomore year and found out I like it and I’m going through my senior year and maybe even college.

Though an independent thinker, Mark did appear open to listening to the advice of others. He named several people that he considered to be a resource to him with regard to career planning. He stated that his parents and uncles were helpful to him, as well as Ms. Brew and a mentor from the community. It appeared that Mark sought out those people to gain information and advice that he used as needed to help formulate ideas and plans on his own.

When asked what his favorite part of high school counseling was, Mark responded,

I don't really have a favorite part because a favorite part is pretty much a part that you would like because it benefits you the most. Of course getting information is very beneficial...but counseling is just one of those necessities.

Mark expressed that the necessary parts of counseling were those which allowed him to get specific information from his counselor regarding "college applications, scholarship applications, transcripts, the basics." He said he sought out Ms. Brew for specific information, as opposed to general advice, because "I have a plan and I know where I am going." He did not feel he needed her for foundational purposes but benefitted from her expertise in answering his precise questions. He thought she was a useful resource and felt comfortable going to her about college and career information. What he found most helpful was that

she is very organized. She knows a lot about different topics you ask her and she will pretty much give you as much information as she can and she rarely changes topics or jumps off the main topic so I am able to keep getting more information on what I am basically in need of.

Mark did not mention his counselor's personality as an important factor for a positive counseling relationship. He only stated that a counselor needs to be able to "communicate at the level of the student" so their knowledge can be understood.

Mark appeared to have concerns about accessing his resources to get the information he needed. Although he spoke highly of Ms. Brew's assistance, when

compared to his mentor in the community, Mark said he talked more often to Ms. Brew simply because it was more convenient. He commented, "she is here and he is a college counselor...and it is very hard to get moments with him." Nonetheless, when asked if there were areas of Ms. Brew's counseling that should be improved, he only mentioned her availability. He displayed some frustration when explaining that "while she's helpful with answering questions that I ask her, the main one that I need to see her about in the first place will be forgotten because of the long time it takes to see her." He mentioned that he thought the appropriate response time to meet with a student after they submit a request should be one day and it took her approximately a week. However, when asked if he would seek her out more often if she responded faster he said

I would like to see her when needed. Just because she's sending for me quicker doesn't mean I would send in more notes. I put notes in when I need help and I would like her to respond later that day or the next day but a week later is not helpful.

Student 5. Bethany is a 17 year-old female. She has attended Canaan Valley HS since her sophomore year and attended another high school in the same county during her freshman year. Bethany had a 2.7 cumulative GPA and planned to enroll at the local community college. She reported that she was accepted into the Pathway to the Baccalaureate program (Pathways) which is a support program for students as they transition from high school, through Northern Virginia Community College, to George Mason or another university (Pathway to the Baccalaureate, 2013). Bethany stated she

planned to study nursing at her mother's suggestion, although her passion was for modeling and photography. Ms. Solomon was her counselor.

It appeared difficult for Bethany to easily express her perceptions of her high school career counseling experiences in concrete terms. She was not able to provide many examples to support her feelings nor was she always sure of her opinions on different issues. She often responded to questions by using ambiguous statements and long pauses, including "maybe...some stuff...I guess...I don't really know", "some...a little...yes," and "I feel okay now...but not really." Though Bethany struggled with verbally articulating her perceptions, the sentiment of her feelings centered around her need to feel that her counselor cared for her and wanted to help her with her career planning needs.

Bethany was unable to recall specific programs or meetings offered by Canaan Valley HS that focused on career counseling. Bethany's main focus during the interview was on her perceptions of one-on-one interactions between adults and students. Bethany pointed to her perceptions of what other counselors were doing to identify things that she thought were helpful in the counseling relationship. She said other counselors would seek out their students "or their counselor would come get them and stuff like that" to check in with them. She also reiterated her point with another example about Ms. Solomon, "she doesn't do anything. I know like the other day other counselors were talking to everybody and she was just standing there and not doing anything." When asked what she would have done as the school counselor in that situation, she promptly responded "Talk to the students more. Ask them how their day is and what their plans are and what

is going on in their life.” As a result of these observations, Bethany felt that “other students can talk to them [their counselors] about anything and joke around and stuff like that but with her she’s kind of serious all the time.” She said she did not feel comfortable talking with her counselor “you don’t want to talk to her but you kind of have to.” Ideally, she would like to go to her counselor if she needed help; however, because she did not feel like she had a relationship with her, she said she went to her teachers instead. She stated, “I don’t really go to her as much, maybe for my SOLs and what I need to graduate but that’s about it.” Bethany seemed angry that her counselor was not offering her the support that she felt she needed from her.

Bethany was adamant that her counselor, Ms. Solomon, needed to do more for her than she was currently doing. She repeatedly stated “she doesn’t do much.” When probed about what areas needed improvement, her responses focused on her need for Ms. Solomon to connect with her and to offer her advice and information about career planning matters. Bethany appeared to want a connection with her counselor that was based on verbal communication. When asked whether she needed her counselor to do more for her or offer more advice to her she said “just tell me things.” She later said “just tell me...tell me about different colleges, why they’re great, tell me what kinds of programs they have in their colleges, activities, sports, or whatever...what you need to get in and stuff like that.” She also said “ask me about my teachers maybe...ask how class is going.” At another point, she said “some teachers help me...or give me good advice about stuff and I feel like she [Ms. Solomon] should do that. She is the counselor; she should help more...tell me to stay out of trouble and try to stay focused.”

Bethany appeared to be very receptive to counseling advice and inclined to follow an advisor. She mentioned agreeing to become part of the Pathways program simply because Ms. Solomon suggested it would be beneficial to her.

My counselor told me about it [Pathways]. I hadn't really heard about it before so she talked about it a little bit and I don't really remember what she said but I joined and will learn more about it today [at the Pathways meeting].

Similarly, she explained she would be pursuing a medical career simply because her mother thought it would be beneficial to her.

Student 6. Gene is a 17 year-old male student who has attended Canaan Valley HS his entire high school career. He planned to attend a 4-year college and pursue a career in sports medicine. Gene was also hoping to play soccer in college and said he was working with his coaches to see if that was a possibility. Gene had a 3.1 cumulative GPA and reported that he was already accepted to a private Virginia college, a private college out of state, and was awaiting responses from several other schools. His counselor was Ms. Jacobi.

Gene presented himself as a very polite, independent, and respectful young man. Ms. Jacobi was his counselor and he described her as one who “is very nice, never an attitude, always says hello when you see her in the hall, always happy” and one who “will get your stuff done.” Although Gene spoke favorably of his counselor’s demeanor, the main need that Gene expressed in the interview was for counseling resources to be readily available to him.

Gene appeared to be a very independent person who felt most comfortable receiving information from reliable sources to use as he deemed necessary. In addition to the counseling office services personnel, Gene mentioned other people who provided him with valuable information for his post-secondary planning. He referenced his soccer coach as a credible resource for college athletic information simply “because he has been coaching for a long time” and he sought out a college student for questions about college life. When asked how Canaan Valley prepared him for life after high school, Gene listed a myriad of services and presentations given by the counseling department throughout his high school career. He was able to describe his perception of the purpose and contents of the counseling packets given to him each year as well as the general agenda of the senior breakfast, right down to the meaning of an icebreaker game that was played. Gene commented that these resources were useful for him “since I am in the [college] application process now, it has helped a lot.” He mentioned attending all of the events he was aware of and even taking his mother to the senior breakfast. Afterwards, he also recalled, his mother called his counselor “to talk to her a bit about colleges.”

Gene appeared to use the information the counseling department provided him as a guide to forming his own ideas about how to plan for life after high school. He referred to the annual packets as “references that I will use when I have a question about something. I have looked at it once or twice already.” He recalled the time during a classroom guidance lesson when the counselors explained the junior year packet to his class. “I remember at the end of junior year I had to go to my counselor because I really didn’t know the college process, like if you have to do applications during the summer or

during senior year.” He recalled, after hearing the presentation, he went to his counselor to follow up with questions he came up with on his own.

Gene also found it helpful to discuss his specific college concerns with his counselor but said he would solicit her advice only as he felt the need. He described his senior interview meeting.

We talked about how I could get a scholarship for soccer and how that works in different colleges I was applying to and what I had to put on the college essays and was my GPA good enough to get into colleges.

Gene recalled some of the information she gave him and said “it answered a lot of my questions and it made me feel more comfortable knowing that I was on track.” Gene remembered going to Ms. Jacobi several times with questions about college applications and scholarships. When asked if she ever offered him advice or her opinion on his plans, he remembered “she said my choice of colleges were okay...it made me feel great because I didn't know that I was eligible for those colleges and she said looking at my grades that I should be okay.” Though he appeared pleased that she supported his college choices, he admits to not soliciting her opinion often. When asked why he did not mention to her what he planned to major in, he said that “it’s not a popular major and she might not know what it is.” When prodded more, he admitted “maybe I was afraid that she might tell me that the school I was going to didn’t have that major or might not have the best program for that.” He went further and said that he may have considered her concerns and discussed them with his parents “but I probably still would have applied

there.” Gene apparently felt it was helpful to get specific information from his counselor but not necessarily seek her help for all career planning issues.

Having access to counseling services in a timely manner was particularly important to Gene because he seemed to depend on the counseling department to provide him with information on college and career planning. After reflecting on his individual senior counseling interview, he remarked that

it was good how you could just have one-on-one attention with your counselor because you don't always get that because you're so busy and a lot of people are trying to see their counselor so to actually get this time to discuss things is what I liked about it.

He felt this experience was valuable because “I felt cared for. I was getting all of her attention and I just asked all of the questions.” Even though he might not seek her opinion on many matters, having time to discuss things relevant to him was helpful. He did mention that he thought the counseling department should reevaluate their processes regarding how students were able to meet with their counselor when they requested it. He said that “it is hard to go see your counselor sometimes because not everyone has the time to go between classes...and you have to make an appointment to see them and it takes a long time.” However, he did mention that he felt Ms. Jacobi would have been open to seeing students if they came by without an appointment.

Student 7. Priscilla is a 17 year-old female who has attended Canaan Valley HS her entire high school career. She planned to graduate the summer after her senior year

after completing an additional required math course. She had a 0.9 cumulative GPA and Ms. Jacobi was her counselor.

Priscilla stated that her low GPA and late graduation date were due to poor attendance during her junior year. She said her attendance had improved in her senior year and her attendance record showed she missed only five days during the first semester when the interview was conducted. Priscilla was an amiable young lady who was unable to clearly articulate her plans for life after high school. She said she planned to attend NOVA to become an ultrasound technician. However, she was unable to describe what the job was, what certifications were needed for the career, and she was uncertain whether or not NOVA offered that particular major.

Priscilla seemed disconnected from Canaan Valley HS in general and its career counseling support specifically. She was unable to recall any counseling department programs offered at the school including meetings, the senior breakfast, and classroom guidance lessons given by counselors. She said the school did not "do anything to talk about careers but just graduation. That's it." She mentioned a senior breakfast organized by her favorite teacher that she did not attend and being given forms to join the Pathways program at NOVA that she did not fill out.

Priscilla used the word "care" often when trying to describe her perceptions of positive interactions with adults. She stated that the only adult she sought out at Canaan Valley HS was her art teacher "because she cares." She went on to recall a time when her counselor, Ms. Jacobi, called her down to discuss her attendance. She said she was shocked "in a good way, because you know how some counselors don't care at all." She

later reflected that the experience was helpful because she said “I guess it seemed like she cared maybe a little.” Priscilla went on to describe why she believed her art teacher cared about her “she actually sits down and talks to you and has a full conversation. She won’t be like oh well you can talk to me another day. She will actually stop what she is doing to have a conversation.” This was in contrast to her recollection of a conversation with Ms. Jacobi. She remembered that Ms. Jacobi asked her questions about her career plans but did not offer her any advice or feedback on what she was sharing.

Priscilla felt a lack of connection to her counselor because she did not feel her counselor spent enough time helping her. She said that if her counselor checked in with her more often "that would probably make me want to go to her more often." She mentioned that it would have been helpful if her counselor asked her more about her plans and offered her help. She brought up several occasions in which Ms. Jacobi counseled her that Priscilla thought were helpful. However, it appeared that the instances occurred too infrequently for Priscilla to develop a relationship with her. She mentioned that in the meeting about her attendance in 11th grade, she said "If I would've never spoken to her, I'd probably be getting my GED or something." Soon after, she said of Ms. Jacobi "This year she hasn't really said anything helpful." Although she appeared to hold no ill-feelings toward Ms. Jacobi, She stated that she did not seek her for help because "I just don't go to her. I just think she has so much to do so I just let her do what she's doing." She stated that if she needed more career planning help "I would just go to my mom." She dismissed their lack of connection by stating that Ms. Jacobi was busy. “She is a guidance counselor and she has so many other people that she has to see and tell them

things.” She even acknowledged that other students had the connection with Ms. Jacobi that she felt was important. “I think other people and her have that relationship, like a bond. I see them walking in the hallway and having a conversation and laughing.” She believed the relationship developed “probably by them talking the whole four years.” Priscilla believed that if she had a better connection with Ms. Jacobi, she would probably seek her services more often; however, it was evident that Priscilla did not entirely know how Ms. Jacobi could have helped her in her post-secondary planning. She did not identify specific issues she needed help with or even express a strong desire to utilize Ms. Jacobi or other counseling resources.

Priscilla remembered a discussion with Ms. Jacobi in which she explained that Priscilla would need to take a class in the summer in order to graduate. She said Ms. Jacobi offered the information “in a calm way” but she would have preferred it differently.

I like to be pushed to do something so I would have made it more persuasive and I would push me to do it. I would have said that if you need help or something you can come to me. She didn’t say that but I would have said it.

Priscilla said she needed her counselor to be more outspoken, which she defined as “somebody telling you directly what you need to do” and not being evasive. She said Ms. Jacobi always seemed like she was hiding something from her. “She might not say everything she wants to say but I want to hear everything that’s on your mind.” She did recall several statements from Ms. Jacobi encouraging her to attend school regularly and stay focused. She felt those words were helpful to her and pushed her to try harder.

Though she admittedly did not ask Ms. Jacobi for much career planning assistance, Priscilla did believe that her counselor “could be telling me more about what I want to do and trying to help me out.” Priscilla felt that an "ideal counselor" would not only stay in touch with her students, but would also help them research information on colleges and careers. "They would call me down and just be like so you tell me what you want to do for your career and I just did some research for you." She thought that because of their weak emotional connection she was left to figure things out on her own. She felt ill-equipped for career planning but did not feel comfortable soliciting Ms. Jacobi for help either. She believed that Ms. Jacobi should have initiated meeting with her and provided the needed assistance at that time. The "ideal counselor" would "help you do your research on your career and when you are in college you can still come."

Student 8. Reuben is an 18 year-old male who has attended Canaan Valley HS his entire high school career. He planned to take a year off from school after high school to work and then attend the local community college or nearby art institute to continue his education. He was unsure what field he would work in after high school but ultimately hoped to become a chef. Reuben had a 1.8 cumulative GPA and Mr. Roman was his counselor. Reuben had strong opinions about how he perceived his counselor and the help he provided him. Yet, when prodded, he appeared to have difficulty providing specific details to support his perceptions. He often used phrases such as “he’s an amazing person...an awesome counselor,” and “he helps me every way he can” to describe Mr. Roman instead of providing tangible examples of what made his services so helpful. When asked to describe the most important attributes of a counselor, Reuben said

As much as I would like to say that I would prefer a caring counselor [over a knowledgeable one], that is not what I need. Because if they [counselors] don't know much about what I want to do, they are useless. I need people to sit there and tell me this is what you need to do...here are some pamphlets, or whatever, and this is what I suggest you do for your career.

Reuben felt that the primary role of a school counselor should be to provide useful advice to students. He gave the example of how Mr. Roman walked him through a “step-by-step plan” of how he could graduate, work, and go to college to learn culinary arts. He said Mr. Roman even provided him with an example of another student who followed the same pathway which Reuben found very helpful. Reuben felt like Mr. Roman was able to listen to the plans that he had and expound on them with practical advice. He credited Mr. Roman for helping to identify NOVA as a viable option where he could go to obtain his culinary arts degree. He said Mr. Roman believed it would be the easiest option for him. He said the advice that Mr. Roman provided “just clicked in my head and I knew it was the right thing to do.” Although Reuben found Mr. Roman's advice useful, he admitted to not going to him often. He said he only saw him a few times as needed but felt he could rely on him for additional assistance if necessary.

Reuben said that he felt his counselor cared about him and was sincere with his intentions toward helping him succeed. Reuben said he felt this way because of the way Mr. Roman spoke to him, listened to him, and made him feel important. He said he thought that Mr. Roman “really believes in me.” This was in contrast to how Reuben thought his previous counselor, Ms. Lazarus, felt about him. Reuben said that he did not

have the same connection with her. He stated, “I didn’t really care for her because she didn’t really have the same sincerity as him [Mr. Roman]. She was most likely nice, but toward me I felt she was coldhearted.” Reuben said he was less likely to seek her for help for that reason.

Student 9. Kora is a 17 year-old female who has intended to graduate high school within 3 years. She attended a different high school in Virginia during her freshman year. She planned to attend a 4-year college after graduating high school and reported that she had already been accepted into one university. She hoped to finish college and attend medical school. She planned to accomplish this because she believed it would “make her parents proud and bring a lot of good things home.” She also hoped to find a way to pursue acting and considered that field to be “more like a passion” for her. Kora had a 3.5 cumulative GPA and Ms. Jacobi as her counselor.

Kora presented herself as a very independent and respectful young lady. She often referenced the student’s responsibility to solicit help when needed, stating that “you have to be able to tell them [counselors] before they can help you,” and “her [counselor’s] job is to help you and your job is to also talk to her so everyone has a part to play.” During the interview, Kora primarily discussed the importance of Ms. Jacobi offering her helpful assistance and being friendly and approachable.

Kora appeared to use her counselor as a resource predominately for college advice and assistance. Kora said she felt like Ms. Jacobi was a helpful advisor who had been with her “every step of the way.” She recalled, “She gave me the ideas and information of what I need to do to finish high school and get to where I am.” She fondly recalled Ms.

Jacobi telling her to “just take things one day at a time,” which she noted was the same advice given by her best friend. When asked about her comfort level in talking to Ms. Jacobi about fears or worries regarding career planning, she emphatically stated, “I am able to talk to her about everything to do with my fears and what is going on with college stuff. I open up to her about that and she helps me.” Kora also stated that most of her post-secondary planning conversations with Ms. Jacobi had been about college

because it is a step-by-step process. Once you've been able to get into college it is the time to start thinking about where you want to go from there. So after I get accepted into all my colleges, I will sit down and talk with her and say what kind of ideas do you have for me [for careers]?

She did, however, recall sharing with Ms. Jacobi her desire to go into the medical and acting fields. Kora recalled that Ms. Jacobi advised her to take the Armed Services Vocational Assessment and Battery (ASVAB) test, to assess her natural skills, and assisted her in signing up for it.

Kora also sought her counselor’s assistance for help with things she needed to accomplish for graduation and the college application process. She recalled getting assistance in signing up for summer classes and the SAT. She said it was the counselor’s job to “help you out with classes, scheduling, SATs, and transcripts.” Although Kora acknowledged being independent and liking to do things on her own, she also recalled seeking Ms. Jacobi's assistance when she was unable to figure out part of the college application process. She said “when she knows something she will help you out but if she doesn’t she will go through the steps with you. She does what she has to do right in front

of you to help you out.” It was that type of response that Kora found helpful in the counseling relationship.

As much as Kora found Ms. Jacobi’s assistance and advice to be helpful, she also expressed pleasure in being around Ms. Jacobi because she found her to be personable.

When asked what she liked best about her counselor, Kora said,

she is really funny and sometimes she pretends to be mad at you and she talks like she’s really ghetto but she’s not ghetto...she makes you laugh. She’s a really nice person and very open and warm and welcome and I like that about her.

Kora also described Ms. Jacobi as someone she could go to at any time and someone who would always be friendly toward her. It appeared that Kora was comfortable going to her because she felt Ms. Jacobi was easy to approach about career planning matters and she was able to communicate effectively with her.

Student 10. Isaac is a 17 year-old male who has attended Canaan Valley HS since the second semester of his sophomore year. He attended another school in Virginia in the earlier part of his high school years. Isaac had a 2.1 cumulative GPA. Mr. Roman was Isaac’s counselor for his senior year and a former counselor, Ms. Lazarus, was his counselor prior to then. Isaac hoped to attend a 4-year college but had not yet applied to any. Isaac’s first-choice college was Norfolk State University. The school website showed that the minimum GPA requirement for admittance was 2.3 (Norfolk State University, 2013). Attending the local community college was his backup plan if he did not get accepted into a 4-year school. Isaac wanted to pursue a career in television broadcast communications.

Isaac was articulate, friendly, and laid back. He presented himself as a very self-assured young man and described himself as "independent, outspoken, and opinionated." Isaac's comments and recollections throughout the interview supported his self-assessment. Isaac also claimed that he did not seek out counseling help often and it was only for things such as information about the college application process or help to drop a high school course he no longer wanted to attend.

Isaac was able to accurately identify many of the ways in which the Canaan Valley HS Counseling Office worked with students to help plan for life after high school. He also had strong feelings regarding how counselors should conduct themselves.

If you're a counselor, you should know how to talk to people...you may be helpful if I can get you to talk to me but if you are going to be rude and standoffish about it then I don't care about your help anymore.

This was Isaac's emphatic reply when asked whether it was more important for his counselor to be friendly versus knowledgeable about career planning matters. Isaac went on to describe another counselor, Ms. Brew, whom he believed was very knowledgeable but with whom he was unwilling to talk because he felt she was "mean." Isaac stated that he would rather go to another counselor who would help him than one who had an unpleasant attitude. Further, he described his own counselor as not very knowledgeable about post-secondary planning, but he said he was not entirely displeased with his services because he found Mr. Roman to be "a cool personality" and "funny." He excused some of his lack of knowledge to the fact that this was Mr. Roman's first year

working with 11th- and 12th-grade students. He said “maybe he’s just used to dealing with freshmen and sophomores.”

Isaac was unwilling to risk straining the relationship by asking Mr. Roman for help with college and career planning because he felt that he got along well with Mr. Roman on a superficial level. Isaac felt that Mr. Roman did not always want to help him, so he mused, “I guess if you ask directly then he could probably help you out...but I don’t really want to stress myself so I’d rather figure it out myself.” Isaac did, however, reference his previous counselor, Ms. Lazarus, who he felt was pleasant and easy to approach. He said he felt that “every time I went to her I would walk away happy.” He attributed this to her helpful advice and assistance as well as her pleasant demeanor.

It appeared that an amiable relationship with his counselor was more important than any assistance a counselor could provide for Isaac. It was also found that Isaac did not use the services of his counselor often. However, when he did go to his counselor it was for assistance with specific school and college matters. Isaac recalled seeing his counselor to request to drop a class he was taking, to get assistance in filling out college applications, and for help to set up a résumé template. Isaac expressed frustration regarding those meetings and the lack of assistance Mr. Roman provided.

I really do need a lot of help when it comes to applications...and he’s just not that type of person to go to for that. I think I asked him one time before and he just brushed me off and I was like...I guess I’ll get someone else to help me.

In another instance he recalled asking Mr. Roman to help him with another college application and he remembered him saying “I don’t know what the requirements are so I

can't help you." To that, Isaac said "I guess I'll have to figure it out myself and...I haven't come to him about anything else since then." He did continue to talk to him on a social level, though.

He said his previous counselor, Ms. Lazarus, was good about expounding on topics and offering in-depth explanations to questions he had. He said she would "tell you what you need to do and she would basically tell you how it is...she will branch out if you ask a question...she would give you the answer and branch off of it." Conversely, he faulted Mr. Roman for not being as informative in their discussions. He stated that Mr. Roman "never really elaborates off his questions." He just appeared to be gathering information that Isaac was unsure how he would use. He felt this one-sided dialogue was not helpful in the counseling relationship.

Isaac mentioned the use and value of his time sporadically throughout the interview. It appeared that the appropriate use of time was one measure he used to help form his perception of the school counselor's role. In one example, he mentioned his previous counselor, Ms. Lazarus, as being "very busy." This phrase was used to show that she was a good counselor because he said she was always busy helping students yet she was available to him whenever he needed her. In contrast, he mentioned that Mr. Roman pretended to be busy so as not to help students. He said "he makes it seem like he's a busy person but he's not. I don't know what he does with his time." He also brought up an instance in which he wanted Mr. Roman to change one of his classes. He said "you took me out of class, I came down here to talk about this situation, and you're still not going to fix it so I'm leaving your office in the same situation." He noted this

was a waste of his time. Isaac also mentioned that he felt the guidance lessons given in class in his junior and senior year were redundant to lessons given in previous years and not a good use of the students' time.

Cross-Case Themes

Ten individual African American 12th-grade students at Canaan Valley HS were interviewed about their perceptions of their high school career counseling experiences. Although each student had her or his own unique recollections, numerous commonalities were found among the cases. Specifically, eight major themes emerged that were common with multiple students. Those themes were: (a) counselors need to be a useful resource, (b) counselors need to emotionally connect with students, (c) counselors need to be personable, (d) students did not seek career development assistance, (e) students judged counselors based on observed work ethic, (f) college-bound students' reported similar counseling needs, (g) males students' reported generally favorable experiences, and (h) counselor demographics not mentioned. An analysis of each theme follows.

Theme 1. Counselors need to be a useful resource. One message that emerged from every individual study was that counselors should be a useful resource to students in the career planning process. Although some participants felt their counselors accomplished this very well and some felt their counselors lacked critical skills, all students found it significant. In particular, there were three different ways in which the students relied on their counselors to meet this need. Some students either found, or hoped that, their counselors were useful resources, offering them specific information about the career planning process and details about life after high school. Some received,

or wanted their counselors to offer, advice, and suggestions on how to plan for their future. Others felt their counselors should actually assist them by conducting research and talking to people on their behalf.

Resource for information. Mark and Hannah both felt that their counselor, Ms. Brew, was an excellent source of information with regard to college planning and the college application process. They felt she was able to give them details about schools and walk them through procedures that helped with their career planning. Mark, in particular, valued her help because “she knows a lot about different topics you ask her and she will give you as much information as she can.” He felt that he could trust the information she provided him about “colleges, careers, and the best path to obtain a goal.” Hannah also felt that Ms. Brew was a good resource for information about the colleges to which she was applying, and Ms. Brew’s information helped her narrow down her college search. Hannah felt she could trust what Ms. Brew said and felt that the helpful information she learned about college from other people was “just a repeat of what Ms. Brew has told me.”

Gene also remembered going to his counselor for information about scholarships and the college application process. He said he valued the details Ms. Jacobi gave him about how to send his transcript, how to write a personal statement, and what to say to college coaches. He said “she answered a lot of my questions and made me feel comfortable knowing I was on track.” Providing information seemed to be an important concern for students who planned to attend a 4-year college. They identified their counselors as the designated school resource to assist them with their college application

needs. They also believed it was helpful to have a reliable resource they could depend on for this role.

Bethany felt her counselor, Ms. Solomon, was not helpful when it came to college planning matters. She faulted Ms. Solomon for not giving her correct information during her academic planning sessions throughout high school, and that that ultimately affected her post-secondary options. She said Ms. Solomon would not let her take a foreign language in her junior year, which she later believed was a necessary college entrance requirement. She reflected “I don’t know why she wouldn’t let me take it. Maybe I would’ve gotten in to some of the colleges if I had.” She believed that Ms. Solomon’s role was to provide her with accurate information about college prerequisites and felt misinformed. This perceived lack of helpfulness appeared to be a source of resentment for Bethany.

Resource for advice. As opposed to being a source of data, several participants said they looked to their counselor for advice and opinions on college and career matters. Kora, in particular, felt she needed her counselor’s advice often with regard to college planning. Kora was planning to graduate early, and she recalled depending on Ms. Jacobi for strategies and ideas on how to successfully complete high school and enter college. She sought her opinion on what types of classes to take and when to take them. She felt that Ms. Jacobi offered helpful guidance on career planning and she felt comfortable going to her for such advice. Josh also felt that Ms. Jacobi was helpful by offering him advice on how to be successful in high school and beyond. He recalled going to her often to get suggestions on what courses to take to prepare him for college and how he should

manage his workload. He said he saw Ms. Jacobi as “a place to go and someone to talk to because she gives me good advice.” Reuben felt his counselor was able to listen to his career plans and offer him advice that was very useful. He liked Mr. Roman’s suggestions and felt like Mr. Roman’s ideas were tailored just for him.

Paula and Bethany, however, felt their counselor, Ms. Solomon, did not offer them enough post-secondary planning advice. Bethany believed she was getting advice from other adults that she should have received from her counselor. Specifically, she mentioned receiving guidance on how to be successful in high school and how to be prepared for college. Both students felt they would have benefitted from their counselor’s guidance and opinions on how to plan for life after high school. Paula felt that Ms. Solomon should have said “even though I know you said you wanted to do the military, there are other good options...or, you can do this in the military but at the same time it’s good to do this.” She felt that her counselor should have “pointed her in the right direction” and offered her more advice.

Resource for assistance. Five of the students believed their counselors should have offered them help with specific college and career planning matters including college application questions, talking to military recruiters, and offering research support. Kora and Isaac mentioned seeking help from their counselors for specific questions on college applications. Kora also recalled needing Ms. Jacobi’s help to interpret specific application questions and to call an application submission service regarding a processing concern. Isaac noted his frustration about Mr. Roman’s lack of assistance in answering specific application questions and feeling that he had to look elsewhere for answers to his

questions. Paula mentioned that she thought Ms. Solomon should have met with her college recruiter in her stead to answer questions regarding her academic progress. She felt that she should “actually work things out with the people I’m working with.” Josh looked to Ms. Jacobi to rearrange his high school schedule and help him register for college classes that would support his career goals. Priscilla hoped that her counselor would have counseled her on her career plans and then offered her information. She said this of the ideal counselor, “I would want them to call me down and say—so you tell me you want to do such and such as your career. I just did some research for you and here it is.”

Theme 2. Counselors need to emotionally connect with students. Half of the students felt that it was beneficial to have emotional connections with their counselors. This meant that they wanted to feel a special bond with their counselors based on the counselors showing a general interest and concern for them. They felt that the connection would have helped to facilitate a better working relationship and that it would have aided how often the student sought career counseling assistance. The students believed that the counselors should initiate contact and cultivate the relationship in a myriad of ways including spending time with them, checking in with them, having personal conversations, and joking around with them. Josh considered his counselor, Ms. Jacobi, to be a “mother figure” to him. This was attributed to the time and attention that he felt she spent with him. He fondly recalled times when she would joke around with him or give him odd jobs to do around the building “to keep him out of trouble.” He felt that she took a personal interest in him and was concerned about his well-being. Conversely,

Priscilla felt her counselor did not try to connect with her. Ms. Jacobi was also her counselor and she mentioned some of the same interactions that Josh said he received as those she wanted in a counseling relationship. She summarized those interactions by stating that it was how a counselor showed that they care. Priscilla even recalled that she observed other students' connections to Ms. Jacobi that she desired, including having personal conversations and laughing together. Bethany also noted that she saw counselors interacting publicly with their students in a way that she thought was helpful. She felt her counselor spent too little time talking to her or trying to get to know her. Priscilla and Bethany both mentioned that they wanted their counselors to call them down to the office occasionally to check in with them. Paula further stated that the counseling meetings should be less formal and should not feel like "business interactions." Reuben believed that, although he did not speak to his counselor frequently, he always felt that Mr. Roman was sincere and that "he really believes in me." This emotional connection he felt with Mr. Roman left him with a favorable impression of his counseling services. Thus, he believed that he could respect him and trust his opinion.

The five participants who believed that an emotional connection was helpful in the counseling relationship were students who were academically lower-performing than the other students in the study. Most of these participants were unable to convey a detailed post-secondary plan. For example, Priscilla was not sure that the major she wanted to pursue was available at the community college she planned to attend. Josh mentioned two colleges to which he wished to apply, but was not sure about the names of

the schools, the locations, the application deadlines, and what field he would study at those schools.

Theme 3. Counselors need to be personable. Several students felt that a counselor's demeanor was a factor in whether or not they would seek assistance from their counselors. Unlike looking for an emotional connection to their counselors, which took time and effort, some students simply wanted a counselor who appeared approachable and friendly. Kora felt her counselor's pleasant attitude allowed her to feel comfortable going to her for career counseling help. She thought Ms. Jacobi was easy to talk to and congenial at all times. Kora valued this in the counseling relationship. She also felt that Ms. Jacobi was funny, a positive attribute that Isaac and Hannah also noticed about their counselors.

Though Isaac did not find his counselor's assistance very helpful, he did enjoy the rapport he felt with him. He regarded his counselor as "someone you could have a conversation with" and noted that he had a "cool personality." This led Isaac to regard him as "one of his favorite counselors." This was in contrast to how he observed Ms. Brew's personality, which he noted was "rude and coldhearted." He felt he would never have been able to work with her in a counseling relationship because of how she came across to him. Hannah, who was Ms. Brew's counselee, also recognized that she could come across as "mean" if you did not know her well. Hannah spoke highly of Ms. Brew and said they had a comfortable working relationship; however, she admitted that Ms. Brew's disposition was initially a hindrance to seeking help from her until she got to know her better. Paula also felt that her counselor's demeanor dissuaded her from going

to her for career counseling help. Paula believed that a counselor should be easy to talk to, yet, she felt Ms. Solomon appeared harsh and lacked the positive emotions Paula felt she needed to see in a counselor.

Theme 4. Students did not seek career development assistance. Career planning is a broad term that can be interpreted in many different ways. As mentioned previously, ASCA (2004) identified career counseling as helping students develop career awareness and employment readiness skills, acquire career information, and identify appropriate work goals. The participants seemed to use their counselors as a resource in a much more limited manner. All student participants thought their counselors should play a role in their career planning experiences. However, most of the students believed the counselor was simply a resource for assistance with the college application process and a gatekeeper for information on other options such as the Pathways program for Nova. It appeared that some students sought their counselors' help after they had developed a tentative post-secondary plan and needed help finalizing it. Others hoped their counselors could assist them in choosing an appropriate educational path to reach the career goal they had chosen.

None of the participants identified their counselors as instrumental in helping them develop ideas about their future careers. Most of the students recalled their parents helping them identify the particular field they were choosing to enter. Bethany and Josh specifically remembered talking to their parents about career choices. Bethany said,

I really didn't want to do nursing at first but my mom kinda talked me into it...my grandma was sick and I was around the nurses all the time and Mom said I would be good at nursing so I decided to do it.

Josh remembered his father's advice. "I wanted to work in business but I didn't know what area. My dad said for me to own my own restaurant and in college I should major in business management." Although Kora had already chosen her major, she was the only participant to report that she planned to discuss her career aspirations with her counselor after she had been accepted into college. She admitted to being torn between a medical career and acting, and would look to her counselor for suggestions on managing both. However, as with the other participants, she did not believe that her counselor influenced the identification of those careers for her.

Gene believed that he chose to major in sports medicine because he liked helping people and being around sports. He credited his parents with helping him research the field to find out specific details. Although Gene felt comfortable talking to his counselor about college advice, he did not discuss his choice of professions with her. Mark adamantly said he did not need his counselor's assistance with formulating his career plans because "I have a plan and I know where I am going." He said he only sought out Ms. Brew for specific help on college applications and scholarships.

Theme 5. Students judged counselors based on observed work ethic. Several students noted that their perceptions of the counselor's work ethic and how the counselors spent their time were relevant to them. Attendance, being organized, and appearing busy were factors that were meaningful to some participants and these factors

were used to assess the relative value of their counselors. Josh thought Ms. Jacobi was a supportive and helpful counselor to him. To further support his claim, he shared observations that he had about her strong work ethic in general.

She stays to herself and has nothing to prove. She just comes here to take care of her responsibilities and you never see her slacking off. She is working, working, working...every time you go to her office she's working, writing, typing, doing something. You might see other teachers laughing and giggling and the only time she does that is at lunch...and it's usually with me.

He later went on to say that her strong work ethic made her a role model to him.

Hannah also talked about her counselor in a favorable manner and compared her to other counselors she had observed. She mentioned that Ms. Brew was “really organized...out of all the counselors” and she “knows what she’s doing...she has experience and she’s not going to slack off and not be here...she’s usually here the most out of all the counselors.” These claims were used to support Hannah’s position that Ms. Brew was a good counselor. Conversely, Bethany, Paula, and Isaac used similar examples to show how their counselors did not appear to be effective. Isaac asserted that Mr. Roman pretended to be busy but did not believe he was working hard. Bethany and Paula simply stated that they did not see Ms. Solomon “doing much.” Bethany complained that she noticed her counselor not interacting with students when all other counselors seemed to be “doing their job.” Paula said she did not even know when her counselor was out of the building stating “She’s never here and no one ever knows where she is.”

Theme 6. College-bound students' reported similar counseling needs. Four students, Hannah, Mark, Gene, and Kora, had cumulative GPAs in the 3.1-3.7 range. They also reportedly applied to 4-year colleges and were able to clearly outline a reasonable post-secondary plan. These students also had a few things in common that are noteworthy. First, they all stated that they were satisfied with their counselor's services. These students were hesitant to speak negatively about their counselors and explained quickly any comments that appeared harmful in nature. Second, they all mentioned seeking their counselor for information or assistance on college matters and finding the process helpful. Kora mentioned relying on her counselor for advice and assistance with college applications. She felt that Ms. Jacobi was with her "every step of the way" as she decided where to apply to college. Hannah, Mark, and Gene recalled seeking their counselors mainly for information and finding their counselors to be useful resources. Third, none of these students emphasized a need for an emotional connection with their counselor. Although they might have felt closely connected to them, the concept did not appear to be relevant or necessary for positive counseling interactions. These students predominately focused on discussing their counselors as available college resources for them.

The two female students, Hannah and Kora, spent a notable amount of time discussing their counselor's personality and how it was helpful that they were personable and approachable. The two male students, Mark and Gene, rarely brought up details about their counselor's personality other than being pleased with how they were pleasant to work with. They did, however, have strong feelings about the difficulties they faced

getting in touch with their counselors. Mark faulted Ms. Brew for sometimes taking too long to respond to his requests for information. Gene faulted Canaan Valley HS for making the process to see the counselors too cumbersome and inconvenient. Hannah and Kora, however, never voiced concerns with time or access.

Theme 7. Males reported generally favorable counseling experiences. The five male students all reported to have had good or satisfactory experiences with their school counselors. Three of the males (Gene, Josh and Mark) reported that they found their counselor to be helpful and were very satisfied with the counseling services they provided. The other two males, Reuben and Isaac, reported high satisfactions levels with at least one of the two counselors they each had in high school. Reuben, perceived Mr. Roman as very helpful and stated he was able to meet his counseling needs with regard to emotional connections and help with career planning. He felt his previous counseling did not respect him, and therefore, did not find her helpful overall. Isaac stated that he liked both his current and previous counselors for different reasons. He believed that his previous counselor, Ms. Lazarus, was more helpful about college matters and offered him more assistance. He was pleased with their relationship overall. He felt his current counselor was not willing to help him with college assistance but enjoyed the rapport he had with him. Although he identified several areas that he felt Mr. Roman needed to improve, he was unwilling to say that he found him to be a bad counselor or that he did not like his services. Instead, he focused more on the aspects that he did find positive about Mr. Roman which were his personality and pleasant demeanor.

Theme 8. Counselor demographics not mentioned. Throughout the interviews, students were asked to consider factors they found meaningful in their career counseling experiences. When asked to describe their ideal counselor or identify attributes of their counselor they liked or that should be improved, no student mentioned any demographic considerations. No evidence was found that the ethnicities, genders, or ages of the counselors impacted the participants' impressions of them. Participants instead spoke about less tangible concepts such as the personality, helpfulness, and responsiveness of the counselor. In addition, none of the students' positive or negative feelings toward their counselors could reasonably be attributed to demographics based on the interview discussions.

Summary

Participants described perceptions of their high school career counseling experiences that yielded themes addressing aspects of the counselors' abilities to help students, counselors' interactions with students, and the usefulness of school counseling programs. Most participants were generally pleased with the counseling interactions they experienced. However, the perceptions varied from some participants finding the interactions very helpful to a few finding them not helpful at all. Additionally, eight major themes emerged that were common to multiple participants. Those included perceptions about how counselors should assist students and how the counselors' personalities and the counseling relationship affected the students. Other themes emerged based on the similarities found among higher-achieving students, the absence of career development concerns, student observations about work ethic, and the absence of

concerns about human demographics. The analysis serves to better understand how African American students think about their counseling interactions and which aspects are relevant to them. Further discussion follows in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceptions of 10 suburban African American 12th-grade students as they discussed their impressions of their high school career counseling experiences. The purpose was to better understand which factors were relevant to the students in their interactions with their school counselors. An analysis of the individual interviews was conducted which yielded a number of themes that were important to each participant and eight that were common amongst multiple participants. Following is a discussion of those findings. This includes understanding how this study fits in with the existing literature and how it expands the fields of research on school counseling practices and African American student needs. Additionally, recommendations for practitioners and policy improvements are given as well as suggestions for future studies.

Implications

Career counseling. Virginia's standards for school counseling programs mandates that career counseling is one of the three primary areas of focus for school counselors. (Virginia Department of Education, 2011a). Counselors at Canaan Valley HS appeared to be performing this function in a way that was evident to nine of the 10 participants in this study. Only one student, Paula, mentioned not being sure of who was responsible for career counseling guidance in her school. The other nine participants stated they believed their school counselor was supposed to play a role in helping them

with career planning. All participants, however, desired that their counselor be a career counseling resource for them. This was one theme that all participants had in common. In fact, the students who felt they received adequate information, advice or assistance with their career plans, believed their counselor was fulfilling their role. Those who felt their counselor was lacking in that area, noted disappointment or frustration in the lack of help.

Varied student needs. The way in which the participants wanted career counseling help varied by participant but included providing *information, advice* and hands-on *assistance* with post-secondary needs. *Information* included details on college entrance requirements, types of majors available at a college and how to obtain scholarships. Some participants valued the counselors' *advice* and sought their professional opinion on which post-secondary path to pursue or wanted strategies on how to accomplish their goals. *Assistance* meant that the participants wanted physical help from their counselor including making phone calls and doing internet research on their behalf.

No common themes emerged within the participant sample to ascertain whether a certain type of student had a preference in the nature or scope of this help. It was evident, though, that these participants sought their counselor for help with more immediate post-secondary education matters versus long-range career development and planning. Participants voiced satisfaction with their counselor based on how well they offered them the specific type of post-secondary planning help they wanted. Because the participants' needs varied, the counselors' were expected to be versatile in their approach to and knowledge of career counseling.

None of the participants reportedly went to their counselor for career development help. The two primary resources they credited for helping to develop their career objectives were their parents or themselves. The supplemental resources considered instrumental in helping to develop those careers ideas were life experiences, television shows and friends' suggestions. These findings support other studies (Gibbons et al., 2006; Crampton et al., 2006 & Howard, 2003) that also determined that students typically sought advice for career development from sources other than their school counselor. It was not clear, however, why students did not seek their counselor for this type of help. It appeared that the participants did not view their counselor as a vital part of this process but did not believe the counselor was negligent in their responsibility to assist them.

Varied counselor practices. As mentioned in Chapter Two, previous studies assessing counselors' career counseling techniques (Barker, 2000; Deemer & Ostrowski, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Osborn & Baggerly, 2004; Tang, Pan and Newmeyer, 2008) found no consensus as to the most common types of methods counselors used in their career counseling practice. Though identifying counselor techniques was not a major goal, this study did not yield any particular counseling practices that appeared to be consistent among the counselors. It appeared that the Canaan Valley High School Counseling Department had a particular way of disseminating career planning information to the students through guidance lessons and meetings. However, the participants did not mention particular practices or techniques that could reasonably be considered consistent among counselors. No identifiable activities or techniques were mentioned by students other than the general Counseling

Department activities. Thus, from this study, no common practices could be found to indicate that these counselors were all taught a particular method that they used with these students. Additionally, the varied way in which the participants discussed the individual counseling sessions further supports that no particular career counseling practices were used consistently by all counselors for these participants.

Varied counselor preparation and training. The NOSCA counselor survey (College Board, 2011) discussed in Chapter One and the study by Lara, Kline and Paulson (2011) in Chapter Two reported that some counselors felt they did not have enough career counseling education to effectively counsel students for all their career planning needs. Some felt they were taught the theoretical framework but lacked skills and others did not even believe they had developed a framework to work within. The participants from this current study voiced different levels of satisfaction in career counseling help. Whereas several participants believed their counselor was well-versed in all career matters and helped them tremendously, a few others felt their counselor was not able to help them even with the smallest concerns. This implies that not all of the counselors at Canaan Valley HS were able to meet the career counseling needs of these participants. Though they all worked in a counseling department that ran a comprehensive counseling program and received RAMP designation, the level of satisfaction from their students varied. This could be due to the education and training differences the counselors have experienced. Some of the counselors may have felt better prepared or equipped than others to address the career needs of their students.

Time concerns. The NOSCA survey findings also reported that counselors felt they were unable to focus on the primary responsibilities of their job because they had other work obligations and tasks that pulled them away from their time spent in counseling (College Board, 2011). This current study may support those findings as well. Several participants reported feeling they were either not able to spend enough time in career counseling sessions with their counselor or they were unable to meet with them as quickly or frequently as they wanted. One student reported feeling rushed by her counselor whenever she met with her. A few students said they wanted their counselor to meet with them more often about career matters. Another student said his counselor took too long to call him down to her office when he requested to see her. These concerns with time could possibly be attributed to the counselors overwhelming job responsibilities which do not allow them enough time to spend in focused career counseling.

The concerns that the participants had regarding time and access to their counselor might also be due to the size of the school. Chapter Two identified two studies (Farmer-Hinton and Holland, 2008; Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines, 2009) that found that larger schools tend to have less counselor/student interactions regarding postsecondary assistance than smaller ones. At the time of this study, Canaan Valley HS contained nearly 1,600 students. It would have been considered one of the larger-sized schools in both studies. Neither of the previous studies focused on the students' perceptions of how much time they needed to spend with their counselor and thus were not sure how the frequency rate affected them. This study adds data to address their findings. In this study, Mark, Gene, Paula and Isaac had strong feelings

about being able to meet with their counselors as often and they wanted. They felt the lack of access to their counselor meant a lack of access to the career planning resources they needed. The participants did not explicitly state that the size of the school made seeing their counselor prohibitive. However, Gene mentioned he thought the school procedures blocked quick access to his counselor. Mark and Priscilla believed that their counselors may have been too busy with other students to see them often enough.

Counselor philosophy. Another possibility for the disparity in student satisfaction with their school counselor could be attributed to the counseling philosophy of the counselor. As referenced in Chapter Two, the Bloch (1996) and Barker (2000) studies on counselors' perceptions of students' counseling needs found that counselors work differently with students whom they believe are college-bound versus those whom they believe are work-bound. Bloch found that counselors reported spending less time with those they considered work-bound. Barker found that counselors allocated the same amount of time to each group yet administered services differently based on the counselors' perceptions of the students' needs. This study may offer some support for those previous findings. The four participants in this study, who had the highest GPAs (3.7, 3.7, 3.5 and 3.1) and intended to pursue a college career, all reported satisfaction in their career counseling experiences. These students could possibly have been counseled differently by their counselor. The counselors may have considered them college-bound versus the other students who either did not express 4-year college aspirations or their academic history made college seem prohibitive. Therefore, some of the lower-

performing students may have been dissatisfied with their career counseling experiences due to the approach the counselor took with them.

Personal and emotional needs. An important finding from this study was the value that participants placed on the social and personal aspects of career counseling. Two major themes that emerged were that *counselors need to emotionally connect with students* and *counselors need to be personable*. All of the female participants and three of the male participants found one or both of these themes to be relevant in a helpful counseling relationship. Five of the six lower-academically performing participants stressed the importance of having an emotional connection with their counselor in order to foster a good career counseling relationship. In many cases, this attribute seemed more important to the participants than the career counseling help itself. It appeared the emotional connection served as a conduit through which the participant would be willing to receive counseling. If they felt a connection to the counselor, they were open to hearing from them. If they did not feel the counselor cared about them personally, they seemed less apt to receive the advising the counselor offered.

The other counselor attribute of being *personable* simply referred to the participants' concerns with feeling comfortable working with their counselor based on the rapport they had with them. As with the emotional connection, several participants voiced that as a critical component to the counseling relationship. One previous qualitative study discussed in Chapter Two identified similar findings with regard to students needing to feel they were in a supportive counseling relationship. Taylor-Dunlop and Norton (1997) studied at-risk adolescent girls in a middle class high school. Two of the three major

themes that emerged from the study were regarding the students' needs for adults to communicate with them in a positive manner. This current study also found that some African American students value their counselor appearing friendly and talking to them in a pleasant way.

African American counseling. Another finding from the study was the absence of any demographic information being discussed by the participants. Specifically, the participants did not mention race as a factor in how they felt about their school counselors and the services they provided. This was an especially significant finding from the interviews with Bethany and Paula. Both participants had the only White counselor at Canaan Valley HS and both participants stated they did not have a good relationship with her and did not find most of their counseling interactions helpful. Yet, both students attributed their poor satisfaction level to their counselor's lack of concern for them and unwillingness to "do her job." Neither voiced speculation that there might be underlying issues that related to race. Additionally, when asked to describe their ideal counselor, neither participant mentioned any demographic details. Because I am also African American, it would be reasonable to assume that the participants should have felt safe to mention their concerns regarding this issue with me.

In fact, none of the other participants mentioned that they felt their counselor treated them more favorably because they were of the same race. Neither did the male participants mention any special connection with their male counselor or females with their female counselor due to gender similarities. Particular attention was paid in the interviews to not ask specific questions about demographics. However, broad questions

were purposely asked to offer the opportunity for the participants to respond as they deemed appropriate. Examples of such questions were "If you could have the perfect counselor, what would they look like?" and in response to one participant's negative response about their counselor's treatment of them, it was asked "Do you think it was personal against you?" None of these questions yielded any claims or speculation about demographic biases.

These findings further corroborate the results found in the studies by Moore et al. (2008) and Owens et al. (2010) that looked at students' perceptions of their counselors. In both qualitative studies of African American high school male students, race did not factor in to the students' perceptions of their school counselor. Only one study of urban students (Howard, 2003) was found that indicated that some students felt their counselors, along with other school personnel, were racially biased in their treatment of them. The one major difference in that study and the current study is that the current study used participants from a suburban school versus an urban setting. The location of the school may have been an influence on how students perceived their counseling interactions.

Implications for practice

Professional school counselors are seen by students as a resource for career planning and assistance. Counselors should adapt their counseling practices to fit the needs of each individual student. Some students want their counselor to provide them with specific career planning information, some want advice and others look for assistance with their post-secondary planning endeavors. Counselors, not only need to

provide the students with the help they need, but be able to ascertain the type of help the student is seeking.

Additionally, it was found that most of the students in this study need more than just career counseling help from their counselor. Many students want to feel their counselor is personable and easy to approach for guidance and assistance. Counselors need to be mindful of their demeanor may greatly impact whether a student seeks them out for services or opens up to them about their career concerns. Further, some students even need to feel they have an emotional connection with their counselor in order to believe their counselors' services are beneficial to them. Only the lower-academically performing students in this study indicated that an emotional connection was needed in the counseling relationship. However, those students indicated that the connection they needed was developed over time by the counselor seeking them out taking a personal interest in them. Establishing positive relationships with students should be considered a key component of the school counselor's job.

Recommendations

As a whole, the participants in this study appeared to be generally satisfied with the career counseling services they received at Canaan Valley HS. However, participants identified several aspects of their counseling interactions that could be improved. Because this study took place in Virginia and counseling expectations and requirements vary from state to state, suggestions for policy changes are focused on Virginia and the school districts within. The following recommendations suggest ways in which the

Commonwealth can help improve counselor practices and thus better assist students in their career counseling needs.

More career education. One of the disparities in student satisfaction was regarding the ability for some counselors to provide their students with the career counseling information they desired. This could have been due to the counselors' lack of knowledge on specific career aspects that the student was seeking. Though most public school systems require counselors have an advanced degree which includes a career counseling course (ASCA, 2010), it does not appear that counselors are required to keep up with current information in this particular area. In Virginia, school counselors are required to update their license every five years.

Each license holder is required to document the accrual of 180 professional development points during a five-year validity period. Points for renewal will be based upon activities drawn from the following 10 options: College credits (180 maximum), professional conference (45), peer observation (45), educational travel (45), curriculum development (90), and publication of article (90), publication of books (90), mentorship/supervision (90), education project (90), and professional development (180) (ASCA, 2012b, para. 46.)

Thus, counselors may not ever choose to focus their professional development efforts in the area of career development. Counselors should be required to direct part of their training efforts on this realm of their job. In addition to the career counseling requirements that the state should implement, counselor advocacy groups, such as ASCA, should assist counselors in making this training assessable and convenient. This training

could be in the form of webinars and on-line classes as well as workshops and conferences. This would allow counselors to have flexibility in how they learn to maximize their resources and learning needs.

Lower counselor caseloads and workloads. Virginia Department of Education mandate states that the student to counselor ratio be no more than 350:1 (ASCA, 2012c). Virginia needs to consider lowering the counselor caseload ratio to the even smaller 250:1 ratio recommended by ASCA. Lowering counselor case loads will allow counselors more time to spend in concentrated counseling efforts with their students instead of managing more students with less time for each of them. With fewer students, counselors could potentially meet with students more often. This would benefit those students who need to feel an emotional attachment to their counselor.

Canaan Valley HS's counselors averaged a caseload close to 400 students which is over the amount currently mandated by Virginia. Local districts need to adhere to the state mandates for counselors. Additionally, school administrators need to be mindful of the myriad of extra responsibilities that might be imposed on counselors in their school. These extra duties can also draw the counselors' focus away from the primary tasks of assisting students with career, academic and social/personal needs.

Academic and career plans. Some of the participants' in this study stated they were dissatisfied with their counselors' services due to the lack of meaningful discussions they were able to have about their career plans. One participant, Bethany, felt that her counselor misguided her in previous years regarding courses needed to meet college entrance requirements. Other students, Isaac and Josh, mentioned planning to attend

college, however, their current academic transcript would probably not be strong enough to allow this to happen. Paula stated that she would have liked to know about the requirements for other post-secondary options other than just her plan to enter the military. To help avoid students entering 12th-grade unprepared, detailed career planning needs to take place sooner. Part of this confusion could lie in the lack of clear expectations and communication between the counselor and the student. Because students may not be able to clearly articulate their specific career goals or college plans, counselors should have tools to help students understand how high school academics can affect students' post-secondary endeavors.

As described in Chapter One, an electronic document, the Academic and Career Plan (ACP), has been proposed in Virginia to assist counselors and students with academic planning. This is a working document that students and counselors can use to write in the students' career goals and list courses that the student should take each year to help reach their goal. This document can be used throughout middle and high school to help students identify careers that might be of interest to them and identify courses that would align with their goals. As students further develop or change their career goals, counselors can help them by advising them about courses that might be beneficial or interesting to them. Parents should also have access to the ACP. This three-way access would allow for more pointed and meaningful conversations to take place regarding career planning. Although this document has been designed, the ACP has not been implemented to date. In 2009, the Virginia Board of Education stated that schools would begin using the Academic and Career Plan beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. This

has since been delayed each year and is now proposed to be in use starting with 7th-grade students in the 2013-2014 school year (Virginia Department of Education, 2011b). The implementation of the ACP should not be further delayed. In addition, training needs to take place within school districts to make sure that counselors are able to maximize the benefits of this document. This training should include middle and high school counselors who will need to work together to make sure that consensus is made on how the ACP can be best used in their district.

Career specialists. Another recommendation for consideration is to add support staff to each school to be a designated career specialist. As found in several studies presented in Chapter One and Two, it is evident that many school counselors either feel overtaxed or ill-equipped to meet all of the needs of their students. Counselors are considered the school experts in all areas of career exploration, development and planning. They are expected to help students with questions regarding the military, technical schools, job planning and all types of colleges and universities. The scope of the material they are required to know is tremendous. Career specialists could support counseling staff in many ways. This person could help with the administrative work that comes along with career planning. This would include activities such as sending student transcripts to colleges, facilitating the administration of the ASVAB test, coordinating the logistics of college information nights and making career information readily available to students and parents. These specialists could also help counselors stay current on post-secondary options by obtaining information they can provide to the counselors. These

efforts would help the counseling department be better equipped to support students in the many ways that they need to for career planning.

Counselor advocacy groups, such as ASCA, should also work to encourage the addition of career specialists in states and counties where there is a need. ASCA, and other advocacy groups, should be able to help states see the need and benefits of adding such a position by providing them data on how this position could improve schools and student services. As school districts have often aligned their practices to the suggestions of ASCA as mentioned in Chapter One, it would be reasonable to suggest that ASCA may also be a persuasive force in this matter as well.

Parent outreach. Because parents appear to play a major role in how students choose their careers, it would be prudent to consider partnering with parents to provide them with information that can assist them. Schools could offer career planning workshops and make information available directly to parents for use in guiding their children. In this way, parents could be the proxy to pass along important considerations to the students. Additionally, if students, parents and counselors participate in these activities together, a partnership could be formed that would allow for greater depth in planning and decision-making for students. This time spent working together in career planning could also help some students build the emotional connection to their counselor that they desire.

Future research

Career counseling with African American high school youth is an area that should be investigated more. Further research should be conducted to gather more data on

African American students' perceptions of their career counseling experiences. Not enough has been done to understand how the student/counselor relationship works and how it can be improved. Very little guidance has been given to counselors on how to career counsel. Therefore, more studies must be done to better comprehend the current practices so counselor advocates can devise ways to improve them. Following, are five suggested studies that could help to accomplish these goals.

Quantitative study. Because this study was conducted in one high school using 10 participants, the study is not large enough to be generalized to the larger population of suburban African American high school students. Additional studies should be done. An approach that would be viable is to use the themes from this study to create a survey for a larger population. The themes could be adapted into categories from which more specific questions could be generated. The breadth of the proposed study would complement the depth of this current study to provide a fuller picture of how these types of students perceive their career counseling experiences.

Replicated studies. Another suggestion would be to replicate the methodology of this study for use in several different scenarios. There are several suggested ways this could be accomplished that would provide more data for the career counseling field. The proposed studies could be conducted using the same format and interview guide as this current study but using a different sample of students. The study could be replicated using a rural school, an urban school setting and a smaller school setting. Because it is unclear whether some of the findings of this study are due to the school profile, studies changing the school format would help determine that. Also, it was assumed that the

findings from the African American participants in this study would yield results that were specific to them. However, interviewing Caucasian students or different minority students may be meaningful to ascertain whether or not any of the findings of this study appear specific to the African American population. Studies like these could help determine what factors appear to influence how students perceive their career counseling experiences.

Counselor perceptions study. Another way to better understand how to assist African American students with their career counseling needs could be to examine counselors' approaches to career counseling. Other studies have tried to identify the particular tools and theories counselors use in practice but have yielded few conclusive results. A qualitative study aimed toward understanding how counselors think about their students and work with them individually could produce useful results. The study could help to better understand the type of information counselors use as they decide how to work with their students. Results from a study of this nature could be used to assist counselor educators in developing curriculum that guides and supports counselors in their practice.

Counselor and student case study. Another meaningful career counseling study could be conducted by taking a case study approach. This could be accomplished by making use of interviews, observations and relevant documents in the counseling setting. Specifically, the case study could incorporate interviewing both counselors and their counselees to try to obtain a holistic view of the counseling dynamic. This study could yield valuable insight from the counselors' and the students' perspectives to better

understand what takes place in the counseling relationship and how it is interpreted. A study of this nature could help counselors and counselor advocates comprehend how messages are sent and received in the counseling relationship.

Parent study. Because parents appear to be instrumental in how students choose their career paths, understanding their perceptions of career counseling could be valuable as well. It would be beneficial to learn what parents believe the counselor's role is in career development and planning and how parents think the counselor should be used by the students. The purpose of this study would be to comprehend how parents think about school career counseling. If this can be better understood, stakeholders could better determine how to disseminate useful career planning information to families. This in turn would benefit the students as they prepare for their future.

Summary

This perception study of suburban African American students was useful for delving into the minds of students to try to ascertain what is important to them in their school career counseling relationships. The analysis of 10 12th-grade students yielded eight themes that were common to multiple students. Those themes, along with the individual analysis findings, were helpful to better understand how to improve school counseling programs for the benefit of students like these. Recommendations were given for the Commonwealth of Virginia, its school districts and schools, as well as ASCA and other counselor advocacy groups; to help improve counseling practices to better support students. Additionally, suggestions for future studies were offered to help further research in this area. These studies were based on the findings in Chapter Four. They were

suggested to address areas of career counseling that have not been previously studied but the findings would add to the small body of research that current exists on African American students and their career counseling needs.

APPENDIX A

Counseling Theories Referenced in this Paper

Cognitive Information Processing Theory

Cognitive information processing is used to look at the role of the three stages of memory (sensory, short-term, and long-term) in retrieving information and then transferring it to store and then recall in memory. Sensory memory allows the learners to organize groups of information or patterns in their environment; learners recognize and then process these patterns. Short-term memory allows the learner to hold and to understand small amounts of information. If the information is effectively connected to previous knowledge, it is stored in long-term memory. Long-term memory allows the learner to remember and then apply knowledge across learning environments and remember the information for large amounts of time after it is learned (Reiser & Dempsey, 2007).

Holland's RIASEC Theory

Holland's theory of career choice (Holland, 1997) maintains that in choosing a career, people prefer jobs where they can be around others who are like them. They search for environments that will let them use their skills and abilities, and express their attitudes and values, while taking on enjoyable problems and roles. Behaviour is

determined by an interaction between personality and environment. Holland's theory is centered on the notion that most people fit into one of six personality types:

Realistic,
Investigative,
Artistic,
Social,
Enterprising, or
Conventional.

Person-Environment-Correspondence Theory

Person-environment-correspondence theory (also known as theory of work adjustment) was originally developed by René Dawis, George England, and Lloyd Lofquist from the University of Minnesota in 1964. The more closely a person's abilities (skills, knowledge, experience, attitude, behaviors, etc.) correspond with the requirements of the role or the organization, the more likely it is that they will perform the job well and be perceived as satisfactory by the employer. Similarly, the more closely the rewards of the role or organization correspond to the values that a person seeks to satisfy through their work, the more likely it is that the person will perceive the job as satisfying. They list six key values that individuals seek to satisfy:

Achievement—conditions that encourage accomplishment and progress,
Comfort—conditions that encourage lack of stress,
Status—conditions that provide recognition and prestige,
Altruism—conditions that foster harmony and service to others,

Safety—conditions that establish predictability and stability,

Autonomy—conditions that increase personal control and initiative.

The degrees of satisfaction and satisfactoriness are seen as predictors of the likelihood that someone will stay in a job, be successful at that job, and receive advancement. (Careers Group, 1991).

Social Cognition Career Theory (SCCT)

SCCT (Brown and Lent, 1996) grew out of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and attempts to address issues of culture, gender, genetic endowment, social context, and unexpected life events that may interact with and supersede the effects of career-related choices. The SCCT focuses on the connection of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals that influence an individual's career choice. SCCT proposes that career choice is influenced by the beliefs the individual develops and refines through four major sources: (a) personal performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious learning, (c) social persuasion, and (d) physiological states and reactions. How these aspects work together in the career development process is through a process in which an individual develops an expertise/ability for a particular endeavor and meets with success. This process reinforces an individual's self-efficacy or belief in future continued success in the use of this ability/expertise. As a result, this individual is likely to develop goals that involve continuing involvement in that activity/endeavor.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is a variety of cognitive constructivism that emphasizes the collaborative nature of much learning. Vygotsky (1978) claimed it was impossible to

separate learning from its social context. He argued that all cognitive functions originate in, and must therefore be explained as, products of social interactions and that learning was not simply the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by learners; it was the process by which learners were integrated into a knowledge community.

Super's Theory

Donald Super argued that occupational preferences and competencies, along with an individual's life situations, all change with time and experience. Super developed the concept of vocational maturity, which may or may not correspond to chronological age; people cycle through each of these stages when they go through career transitions. Super stated that in making vocational choices individuals are expressing their self-concept, or understanding of self, which evolves over time. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and further implement and develop their self-concept.

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Script by Faculty Representative to student

(Initial contact with the student regarding the study – in person)

(Name of student), I called you down here to see if you would like to participate in a research study. A woman from George Mason University wants to interview some students at our school. She is looking for several 12th grade African American students who will share their feelings and stories about their experiences with counseling in high school. She will explain all of the details of the study to you but I wanted to first see if you would be interested in hearing what she has to say.

She plans to do two interviews this semester with you and each will last about 45 minutes or so. It will be during the school day and the meetings will be private between the two of you. I will not be told what you share nor will your counselor ever be told about it.

When you meet the GMU student, she will give you a permission slip that you will need to have your parent sign and one for you to sign as well. I will work with you and her to set up the interview time so you're not taken out of a class you cannot miss that day. What do you think?

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Script by Leah Byrd to student

(Second contact with the student regarding the study – in person)

My name is Leah Byrd and I am graduate student working on my PhD in Education and George Mason University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to find out more about how African American students feel about their high school career counseling experiences.

I am planning to interview some African American seniors at this school who are between the ages of 17-19 and who are planning to graduate this year. I am looking for students who will be able to talk to me about some of the experiences they have had with their counselor. The questions I ask will be specifically about conversations around planning for life after high school.

As a participant, you will be asked to meet with me two times, here at your school, to talk about your experiences with your counselor regarding any career and post-secondary counseling they have given you. The meetings should take about 45 minutes or so. I will meet with you during the day and (faculty representative), you and I will look at your schedule to pick a time during one of your elective classes that will work for you. We will let you and your teacher know in advance which day and time the meeting will be.

Our meetings will be in a private room and our conversations will be kept confidential. I will audio tape our meeting but no one at the school or any other place will be allowed to listen to our tapes nor will anything that you say about your career counseling experiences be shared with anyone else. Once I write up the conversations, I will use false names so that nothing can be linked directly back to you.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please take home this consent form for your parent to sign because I need their approval to meet with you. Return the form to (school appointed personnel) by (date tbd).

Do you have any questions now? If you have questions later, please contact me at lbyrd1@gmu.edu or you may talk to (school appointed personnel) who will answer your questions or get in touch with me.

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

1. What do you plan to do when you graduate from high school?
2. What are some of the ways your school has helped you plan for life after high school?
3. What do you go see your school counselor for?
4. How often have you talked with your counselor about careers and your plans for life after high school?
5. Can you think of a time when you had a helpful meeting with your counselor about career planning? Describe the meeting and what was most helpful about it.
6. How have you used your counselor's career advice?
7. Has there been a time when you felt like your counselor wasn't helpful with career planning? Tell me about that situation.
8. What do you like best about your counselor?
9. If you could change one thing about your counselor, what would it be?
10. Who are other people who have helped you with career planning?
11. Are there things they have done for you that you think your school counselor should have? If so, what are they?

APPENDIX E

Table 3

Number and Percentage Distribution of Public Elementary and Secondary Students, by Race/Ethnicity and Locale: 2007–2008

Locale	Total (thousands)	Caucasian (thousands)	Black (thousands)	Hispanic (thousands)	Asian/Pacific Islander (thousands)	American Indian/Alaska Native (thousands)
Total	48,398	26,991	8,238	10,237	2,346	585
City	14,232	4,659	3,881	4,590	983	119
Suburban	16,914	9,752	2,514	3,536	1,018	95
Town	6,097	4,218	692	940	116	131
Rural	11,154	8,362	1,152	1,171	230	240
Distribution of race/ethnicity for each locale (%)						
Total	100.0	55.8	17.0	21.2	4.8	1.2
City	100.0	32.7	27.3	32.2	6.9	0.8
Suburban	100.0	57.7	14.9	20.9	6.0	0.6
Town	100.0	69.2	11.3	15.4	1.9	2.2
Rural	100.0	75.0	10.3	10.5	2.1	2.2
Distribution of locale for each race/ethnicity (%)						
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
City	29.4	17.3	47.1	44.8	41.9	20.3
Suburban	34.9	36.1	30.5	34.5	43.4	16.2
Town	12.6	15.6	8.4	9.2	4.9	22.4
Rural	23.0	31.0	14.0	11.4	9.8	41.1

Note: Adapted from "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), 2007–2008.

Enrollment counts exclude schools with no reported enrollment or missing race/ethnicity information.

Total enrollment including students with missing race/ethnicity information is 48,910,025. Race/ethnicity categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. For definitions of locales

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