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A Qualitative Study of Street Smarts Among African American Male High School Dropouts: Implications for School Counselors

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF STREET SMARTS AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN
MALE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL
COUNSELORS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Charles Taylor. Dad, you've been my biggest supporter all of my life. Thank you for your wonderful words of wisdom and encouragement through the years. Thank you most of all for the sacrifices you made to give me everything I've ever needed to be who and where I am today. I cannot express the depth of my gratitude. I love you beyond words.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates street smart African American males who dropped out of high school. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the researcher interviewed six participants, to explore their experiences related to street smarts in school and the influences on their decision to drop out. The framework of the study is based on Robert Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence. The role of the school counselor in dropout prevention according to the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Model is presented. Themes from the data include: intelligence, self-sufficient, and support. Implications for school counselors who work in direct and indirect consultation with teachers, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders, are provided.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Qualitative Study of Street Smarts Among African American Male High School

Dropouts: Implications for School Counselors

Research findings and statistics have shown that there are alarming numbers of

students across the United States, who do not complete a high school diploma program

due to dropping out of school. In a report from the National Center for Education

Statistics (NCES) on public school graduates and dropouts in the year 2009-2010

(Stillwell & Sable, 2013), the authors found that across the U.S., 514,238 public school

students dropped out of high school, with an overall dropout rate of 3.4%. As grade-level

increased, dropout rates increased. The lowest dropout rate was 2.6% for grade 9, while

the highest was 5.1% for grade 12. The dropout rate was higher for males (3.8%) than for

females (2.9%), and 5.5% for African American students. Chapman, Laird, & Kewal

Ramani (2010) reported that the national dropout rate for Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites,

were: 5.8%, 4.8%, and 2.4%, respectively.

There have been extensive amounts of research conducted to identify the reasons

students drop out of school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Gleason, P. &

Dynarski, M., 2002; Neely & Griffin-Williams, 2013; Sparks, Johnson, & Akos, 2010;

Suh & Suh, 2007). Variables include poor academic achievement, lack of parental

involvement and engagement, lack of individualized instruction, grade retention,

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uninteresting classes, issues related to behavior, family issues, pregnancy, and lack of support from teachers/administrators. In a study conducted in a large southeastern U.S. school district to identify factors that led to students dropping out of school, Sparks, et al. (2010) found that dropout rates were attributed to three primary factors: grade level retention though grades kindergarten through nine, scoring below grade level on the eighth grade standardized math test, and long-term suspension. Students who consistently struggle with poor academic achievement, often do so because they consistently receive instruction and assessment that do not consider their individual needs and strengths. Students who recognize their strengths have a greater tendency to approach learning more positively and productively (Griggs, Barney, Sederberg, Collins, Keith, & Iannacci, 2009). Students may also perform poorly academically because their various intelligences are not identified and engaged. A student may have exceptional musical or interpersonal abilities/intelligence, however may continue to struggle academically because those intelligences were not identified, included as a part of instruction, and/or assessed properly (McClellan & Conti, 2008; Gardner, 2011; Hatt, 2007).

Methods of increasing student achievement and reducing dropout rates have been the focus of educators around the world for many years. In an effort to close the achievement gap between minorities and underprivileged students and their peers, the United States of Congress passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. This law put measures into action to increase responsibility and accountability of schools for the learning and achievement of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). As a result, principals, teachers, school counselors, and other stakeholders have increased focus on maximizing student learning, growth, and achievement. As new research is

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conducted and presented about how students learn, the goals of institutions of education

nationwide are constantly changing to address the needs of students. A huge part of that

effort lies with identifying and fostering students' strengths (McMahon, 2004). In a study

on the various intelligences of students, Kezar (2001) suggested that that most people

exhibit many intelligences. The author also suggested everyone is smart, however, the

questions are how smart and in what ways? In addition, students perform differently on

tasks that require use of the different intelligences (McClellan & Conti, 2008; McMahon,

2004). Gardner (2011) argued that traditional tests designed and utilized to measure

intelligence, focus primarily on one's verbal and mathematical abilities, and are also

heavily relied on in many educational practices and settings. He acknowledged that while

all students may not be gifted verbally or mathematically, they may possess expertise in

other areas. Many of these students excel in areas that are unrecognized and unrewarded

within today's present school system. As a result, schools based on traditional definitions

of intelligence are not meeting the needs of all students (Conchas & Vigil, 2012). A

student may possess high abilities in some areas, however may possess low abilities as

measured and defined by traditional intelligence tests. Many racial minority students,

particularly in urban schools, are identified for special education services, and are

underrepresented in programs for students who are identified as talented and gifted. Such

students often feel powerless and are often neglected, as they fall through the cracks of

systems and practices that fail to focus on students' individual and cultural strengths

(Bryan 2005; Hatt, 2007). Sternberg (2006) suggested that minority students often

possess culturally relevant knowledge that teachers fail to identify and build upon to

foster academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

The achievement gap between African American and White students has been widely researched and well documented (Osborne, 1997; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). According to a 2009 report from the NCES, the authors suggest that an achievement gap exists between Black students and their White counterparts. On average, White students perform higher in the areas of reading and mathematics. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) found that on average, Black students are at least four years behind White students by the time they are in their last year of high school. In a 2012 report from the NCES, the authors reported that college attendance rates were lower for Blacks and Hispanics, and for males. In a comparison of males and females, ages 18-24, from 1980 to 2010, males attended and graduated from college and graduate school at a lower rate than females, across ethnic groups. The researcher chose to focus on African American males due to the achievement gap that exists between that population and their female and White male counterparts. Osborne (1997) asserts that African Americans are subject to disidentify with academics, which puts them at higher risk for academic problems such as poor grades, truancy, and dropping out. The author also noted that, "African Americans with the highest academic preparation (measured by American College Test and Scholastic Aptitude Test scores) show drop out at rates many times higher than comparably prepared Whites, and show poorer academic performance as measured by grade point average (GPA)." (p.728)

Accountability measures from the NCLB Act, increased focus on the individualization of instruction, particularly with underachieving students and students identified as at-risk. When instruction is not tailored to meet the individual needs of

students and their strengths, students may perceive their intelligences, experiences, and strengths, as not valued (Bryan 2005; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Sternberg 2006). Some students group intelligence into two categories: street smarts and book smarts. Some students believe that one can have membership in both categories (i.e., a person can be both book smart and street smart), although not necessarily equal; a person may be more book smart than street smart or vice versa. Other students may view the constructs as polar opposites and believe that a person is either one or the other (i.e., a person is either street smart but not book smart, or book smart with no street smarts) (Hatt, 2007). Students who self-identify as street smart may feel that that type of intelligence is not valued in school, and in direct contrast to the "norm." They may feel that they will not be successful, as they do not have membership in the book smart category- the type of intelligence traditionally valued and assessed in schools. Such perception may manifest in various ways. Those students may feel neglected, may act out behaviorally, or may struggle in silence, eventually to the point of dropping out of school altogether (Bryan, 2005; Gardner, 2011; Hatt, 2007, Nieto & Bode, 2011).

<center>Nature of the Study</center>

This study was based on a qualitative research design. All participants were male, between the ages of 18 and 24, self-identify as street smart, and have dropped out of school. The study focused on identifying participants': a) definition of street smarts and the characteristics, traits, behaviors, etc. that they and/or someone who is street smart embodies, b) strengths and whether or not their strengths were identified in school, c) experiences with instruction, assessment, etc. that included those strengths if they were

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identified and d) descriptions of what someone at their school might have done differently to recognize their street smarts.

The researcher investigated, from the participants' perspective, how what they consider street smarts, were or were not valued in school and the effects of that (if any) on their decision to drop out of high school. This study provides answers to the following: 1) How do African American males define "street smarts?" 2) How do African American males define "book smarts?" 3) What are the similarities and differences between the two definitions? 4) What experiences did participants have in school that honored or disparaged their alternate intelligence or street smarts? 5) What, if any, influences did their experiences related to street smarts in school affect their decision to drop out of school? Detailed discussions will be provided in chapter three, to include a description of the research methodology, participants, data collection, analyses, and procedures.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

The purpose of the study is to investigate, from the participants' perspective, how street smarts were or were not valued in school and the effects of that (if any) on their decision to drop out of high school. The researcher explored participants' experiences, incidents, etc. that contributed to their reason(s) to drop out. Participants provided insight into how they felt their intelligences, strengths, experiences, etc. could have been included as a part of the educational experience so that they felt they were successful and therefore less likely (or not all) to drop out. Findings will be used to provide suggestions on how school counselors may use this information in consultation with teachers, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders, for successful identification, intervention, and

prevention, according to the American School Counselors Association's (ASCA) National Framework for School Counselors (2012). Specifically, how can school counselors identify the characteristics inherent in the "street smart student?" Once those characteristics have been identified, how can that information be used as a part of the school counselor's comprehensive program, for dropout prevention?

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on a qualitative research design, which allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon being studied that could not be accomplished through quantitative means (Creswell, 2009). A phenomenological approach was used to collect and analyze the data. Individual interviews were used to gather data that were analyzed to identify codes and themes. The lack of research on street smarts versus book smarts in schools made a phenomenological design most appropriate, as it allowed the researcher to explore participants' actual lived experiences related to the phenomena (Hays & Wood, 2011; Wertz, 2005). Hays and Wood (2011) noted that phenomenology is congruent with counseling, as it provides more in depth information about client experiences, which is a natural part of professional practice.

The theoretical framework for this study is according to Robert Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence. He suggested that intelligence is comprised of three parts: analytical (componential) intelligence, creative (experiential) intelligence, and practical (contextual) intelligence (Sternberg, 1985, 1997; Tigner & Tigner, 2000). Analytical intelligence refers to what one uses to analyze, compare, and evaluate information, in order to effectively solve problems and make decisions. An individual who excels in this type of intelligence usually performs well in academic settings.

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Analytical intelligence is comparable to the type of intelligence generally measured by traditional IQ tests (Tigner & Tigner, 2000). Creative intelligence is the ability to recall existing knowledge to formulate new novel ideas. Individuals with this type of intelligence are insightful and imaginative. Practical intelligence, which can also be described as "street smarts", refers to one's ability to understand, solve, and navigate the problems of everyday life situations, and to shape and adapt to one's environment (Sternberg, 1985, 1997; Tigner & Tigner, 2000).

Definitions

ASCA- American School Counselor Association, the professional association for school counselors that supports counselors' efforts to provide a comprehensive program for students in the academic, personal/social, and career domains (Retrieved January 12, from schoolcounselor.org).

ASCA National Model- the model that outlines the components of a comprehensive school counseling program- an integral component of the school's academic mission (ASCA 2012)

Dropout- students in public schools that left before completing an academic program to receive the necessary credits for a high school diploma (Gleason & Dynarski, 2009).

School Counselor- a counselor and an educator who designs and delivers comprehensive school counseling programs in grades K-12, to promote student achievement in the areas of academic, career, and personal/social (ASCA, 2012).

Street Smart- possessing the skills, knowledge, and intellectual competencies necessary for navigating through the structures of modern urban life, such as poverty, the police, street culture, etc. (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Hatt, 2007). Having the "skills necessary to

avoid dangerous situations, locate resources, determine who to trust, and adapt to the social structures and culture of street economies" (Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, Flynn, 2007, p. 30).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The researcher began the study under a number of assumptions. One was that there are skills, characteristics, and strengths inherent in the street smart individual. Another assumption was that all students possess sociocultural traits and strengths. The researcher also assumed that individuals who identify as street smart and dropped out of school, may have done so because those strengths were not identified and built upon as a part of the educational experience.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this study. One is that the study was limited to African American males. This presents a limitation in that females, individuals of other ethnicities/races, or students in other regions of the United States may have had different experiences. Another limitation was researcher bias, as the researcher was the principle interviewer in the study. In addition, because the participants were no longer in school and the interviews were retrospective, accurate accounts of participants' experiences also presented a limitation. Lastly, the researcher did not triangulate the data by obtaining information from multiple data sources.

Scope

The scope of the study is limited to African American male participants who dropped out of high school. Participants were located in South Carolina. Although the

scope of the study encompasses experiences from individuals from one central location, results from the study can provide implications for school counselors in dropout prevention.

Delimitations

A delimitation of the study is that of the criteria (of the participants) set forth by the researcher. Other delimiting factors are the researcher's choice of research and interview questions. The theoretical framework from which the research will be conducted, poses an additional delimitation.

Significance of the Study

Knowledge Generation

Knowledge from this study will inform school counselors about working with at-risk racial minority students, who possess sociocultural characteristics, skills, and strengths, relevant to the academic domain of the comprehensive program. While theories of counseling are a part of the counselor education curriculum, most programs do not incorporate teaching of *learning* theories as related to the K-12 student population. Perhaps programs with a concentration in school counseling can address such theories to include topics related to identifying, nurturing, and assessing students' strengths according to their various intelligences as a part of consultation within the guidance curriculum.

Professional Application

This study will look at two of the ASCA National Model Themes: advocacy and collaboration, to investigate the role of school counselors as related to dropout prevention. According to the model (ASCA, 2012), the school counselor and

comprehensive school counseling program are in place to support the academic mission of the school. Results of this study will provide implications and suggestions for school counselors in increasing student achievement and dropout prevention, in carrying out the school's overall mission.

Social Change

An essential role of school counselors is that of advocate for social justice and change. The findings from this study will provide suggestions on how school counselors can act as advocates on behalf of students whose strengths are often neglected, due to lack of identification and/or appropriate instructional practices. Social changes created from this study include a better understanding of students who may identify as street smart. School counselors can provide consultation and training for other school personnel, on implementing practices that promote achievement and reduce rates of dropout.

<p align="center">Summary</p>

Implications from the study will be provided for school counselors who consult with teachers, parents, administrators, working with at-risk high school students. Findings will provide suggestions on how counselors can work with teachers or stakeholders to identify students who may have street smart characteristics, and how they may modify instruction or provide services, accordingly. Specific characteristics will be identified to provide suggestions for what to look for in such students and how that information can be used to identify and draw out student strengths. Suggestions and examples will also be provided for next steps after identification. Specifically, how those who work with such students, may make modifications and/or accommodations for delivery services,

instruction, assessment, etc. so that students feel their strengths and intelligences are valued to decrease the likelihood of dropout. Chapter two will present further review of the literature. Chapter three will include a description of the research methodology, participants, data collection, analyses, and procedures. The results of the study will be presented in chapter four, and a discussion of the findings along with the implications for training, practice, and future research, will be provided in chapter five.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

Content of the Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature regarding the role of the school counselor in dropout prevention of street smart African American male students. There is a lack of research on street smart students, which suggested that further research is needed. In light of the limited research conducted on street smarts in African American males, the researcher's aim was to conduct a study on the topic in order to fill in the gap that currently exists in the literature. Although there is little existing research, there are no studies that provide implications for school counselors in dropout prevention of such students. A review of theoretical and empirical literature is presented in the areas of: intelligence, street smarts, dropout, and dropout prevention. The study examined the role of the school counselor in dropout prevention by reviewing the literature on students at-risk for dropout and effective methods of prevention. The counselor's roles of advocate and collaborator are also explored.

Organization of the Review

The content of the chapter begins with a review of the literature on intelligence, street smarts, dropout, and dropout prevention. The review will provide insight into the research and lack thereof, in the current existing literature. Definitions and characteristics of street smarts will be presented, as well as factors that contribute to dropout, and suggestions for

dropout prevention efforts on behalf of the school counselor. The last portion of the chapter will give attention to the role of the school counselor, specific to advocate and collaborator in dropout prevention.

Strategies Used for Searching the Literature

The literature search was conducted using the online resources available through the University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Library, and through InterLibrary Loan (ILL). The following topics were searched using single key words or key words/terms in conjunction with term connectors (e.g., and, or, and not): street smart, street intelligence, common sense, practical intelligence, students, African American male students, intelligence, multiple intelligences, triarchic theory of intelligence, dropout, high school dropout, dropout prevention, student attrition, school counselor roles, leadership, advocacy, history of school counseling, ASCA. Professional journals were primarily used to obtain relevant articles, using the library's electronic resources database. Primary search engines used were Academic Search Complete, Education Source, ERIC and PsycINFO. TDNet and the Encore Article Search engine were utilized to locate books and full text, peer reviewed articles from 2004 to 2014. Books referenced were obtained from the University library. Those not readily available were requested via ILL.

REVIEW OF THEORETICAL LITERATURE

Theories of Intelligence

Gardner (1999) suggested that all individuals are intelligent, however possess different types of intelligences. He defined intelligence as "a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or

create products that are of value in a culture" (p. 34). The author described eight types of intelligences: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist (2011). Linguistic intelligence includes syntactic strategies involved in the use of language for communication, and the sensitivity to the sounds, meanings, and rhythms of words. Musical intelligence is defined by abilities to distinguish pitch, rhythm, timber, and other sound patterns. Logical-mathematical intelligence is the ability to think abstractly, logically, and to discern logical numerical patterns. Spatial intelligence involves perception of the visual world, and the capacity to think in pictures and images, as well as to visualize accurately and abstractly. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is defined as the ability to control one's body movements and use the hands and/or body to solve problems and create products. Intrapersonal intelligence is demonstrated by the ability to identify and be in tune with inner feelings, beliefs, values, and processes of thinking, while interpersonal intelligence is the ability to notice other individuals' feelings and intentions and respond appropriately to their desires (Gardner, 2011). Naturalist intelligence enables individuals to recognize and discriminate upon certain features of the natural environment (Checkley, 1997).

Sternberg (1985) presented a triarchic theory of intelligence, which he also referred to as the theory of successful intelligence. He defined intelligence as having, "the mental abilities necessary for adaptation to, as well as shaping and selection of, any environmental context." (Sternberg, 1997, p. 1030). He also proposed that there is an interaction between the internal and external worlds that individuals possess. The internal world consists of the mental mechanisms that underlie intelligence, while the external environment refers to the application of those mechanisms to everyday life situations.

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The author described three categories of intelligence: analytical, creative, and practical. Practical intelligence is also known as street smarts (Wagner & Sternberg, 1990) and refers to an individual's ability to find the best fit between their internal and external worlds (the demands of their current environment) (Sternberg, 1985, 1997; Tigner & Tigner, 2000). For the purpose of this study, the author will highlight practical intelligence, as it is considered to be the type of intelligence that those who are street smart embody. Theories of intelligence as proposed by Gardner and Sternberg, allow for a broader lens with which to examine and define intelligence.

The various intelligences students possess, are often unidentified or undervalued in academic settings (Gardner, 2011; Kezar, 2001; McClellan & Conti, 2008; Sternberg, 2006). Such intelligences are often unrecognized because they are not characteristic of traditional, "book smart" intelligence according to traditional definitions and/or methods of assessment (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Sternberg, 2006). Many of the skills and characteristics students possess are cultivated outside of the classroom (e.g., street smarts) and are not deemed valuable to academic constructs and contexts inside of the classroom (Brayboy, 2005). When students' strengths are recognized, they have a greater tendency to approach learning more positively and productively (Griggs, Barney, Sederberg, Collins, Keith, & Iannacci, 2009; McMahon, 2004; Nieto & Bode, 2011). Sternberg and Grigorenko (2004) asserted that "teaching practically means encouraging students apply, use, put into practice, implement, employ, and render practical what they know. Such teaching must relate to the real practical needs of the students, not just to what would be practical for other individuals." (p. 276). When students' intelligences are not identified and valued, many feel neglected and as if though they cannot be successful

in school. Such perceptions often lead to dropping out of school (Hatt, 2007; Nieto & Bode, 2011). Brayboy (2005) stated,

> While Indigenous ways of knowing and "book smarts" are often seen as diametrically opposed, these different forms of knowledge do not necessarily need to be in conflict. Rather, they complement each other in powerful ways. This blending of knowledges – academic and cultural ones – creates knowledge that is key to survival. (p. 435)

> In a study by Sternberg (2006) on recognizing students' neglected strengths, the author investigated types of culturally relevant knowledge and abilities that can be used to increase student achievement. He argued that,

> children from nonmainstream cultures often bring to school the kinds of knowledge and skills that are relevant to their lives and upbringing. Their teachers, however, fail to recognize this adaptive knowledge. Instead, they assume that the students have other, more school relevant kinds of background knowledge—and thus they fail to provide the scaffolding the students need to build further learning. (p.30)

The study was conducted with participants, enrolled in grades 9-12 who lived in southwestern Alaska. Participants were given an assessment that measured culturally relevant adaptive knowledge. Results showed that students from the nonmainstream culture, possessed knowledge and skills that were not found on measures of standard achievement. For example, students from many of the Alaskan communities, scored higher on items related to knowledge of subjects such as fishing and hunting, herbs, folklore, and survival. The author described a second study, in which he administered a

test that measured analytical, creative, and practical skills to high school students identified as gifted. The students participated in a college-level psychology course in a summer program and were divided into five groups: high analytical, high creative, high practical, high balanced, or low balanced. Students were randomly placed in one of four instructional groups, so that each ability type was included in each group. Students in each group used the same text and were exposed to the same lectures, however, participated in discussion groups according to their ability type. Assessments included homework, a mid-term, final exam, and an independent project. Evaluation was according to the following categories: analytical, creative, and practical quality. The author found that when instruction was modified to build on those skills, thereby capitalizing on students' cultural strengths, their achievement levels increased. Students who participated in discussion groups that were aligned with their ability type scored higher than participants who were not. The quantitative methodology of the study did not allow for exploration of participants' perceptions of how their cultural strengths impacted their achievement. The current study will investigate those perceptions.

<div align="center">Review of Street Smart Literature</div>

Hatt (2007) conducted an ethnographic study to explore the figured world of smartness by investigating street smarts versus book smarts, among urban youth. The author explored how students perceived and defined smartness, as well as how smartness was defined and valued (or not) by educational institutions. The framework of the study was guided by the concept of figured worlds (the rules, entities, etc., that influence the ways people speak, behave, and practices within social contexts). The figured worlds consisted of three key elements: artifacts (the ways figured worlds are developed and

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given meaning), discourse (the way artifacts become misunderstood), and identity (learning about oneself and others in relation to the dominant discourses). The participants were students enrolled in a program for urban youth, ages 18-24, who had been withdrawn or expelled from high school. They had to have been considered to be in low income status, and at a turning point in their lives (e.g., trying to escape poverty, drug addiction, etc.). The data were collected using two interviews with 18 students (12 African American, 1 Mexican, 5 White), on their experiences and perceptions of smartness. Classroom observation and assisting the classroom teacher were also a part of the data collection. The data were analyzed using an interpretive frame, using matrices for organization, and then analyzed for themes connected to smartness. The themes were analyzed according to the theoretical framework of the study.

The findings showed that students perceived smartness to include what they described as book smarts and street smarts. Some defined smart as strictly one or the other, and identified book smarts as relating to artifacts such as diplomas, gifted/talented membership, standardized test scores, and participation in advanced level courses. All of the participants expressed that at some point in their education, they felt as though they were not book smart, which was the only type of knowledge valued in the educational systems. As a result, they disengaged and focused on the type of intelligence they felt they did possess (i.e., street smarts). The author suggested that by blending cultural and academic knowledge, it would allow youth to be more connected to their cultural identities and achieve in school without feeling as if they can only have one or the other, with only one (academic) being valued in schools. The author suggested four essential components that need to be addressed in teaching in order to reframe the figured worlds

of smartness: method, assessment, content, and a collaborative component that focuses on building relationships among students, teachers, families, and schools.

In relation to the current study, Hatt's study also explored book smarts and street smarts from the perspectives of students who dropped out of school, using a qualitative research design. This method allowed the researcher to explore participants' actual lived experiences (Hays & Wood, 2011; Wertz, 2005). The study also investigated how schools defined smartness and the impact on student achievement. Results from the study suggested that students who identified as street smart, dropped out or disengaged because they felt as though they were not book smart, which was the type of intelligence valued in school. The author noted that students' perception of what it meant to be smart in school, was directly connected to identities inside and outside of school contexts. Hatt (2007) concluded that,

> When youth are framed as failures in school, they are forced to adopt the
> ''angle'' of street smarts over book smarts to find a way to succeed and get
> the things they want out of life. It is their own way of refiguring smartness
> and finding some sense of agency within the institutionalized figured world
> of smartness where schools overwhelmingly do not allow for students to be
> both street smart and book smart. (p.163)

Implications for education included a collaborative approach among stakeholders. In contrast to the proposed study, Hatt's findings included suggestions for school reform in the areas of method, assessment, and content, as it relates to teaching. The current study will provide suggestions for school counselors in the areas of advocacy and collaboration, which Hatt did not explore. Limitations of the study included a lack of a description of

procedures to assure accuracy of the data (e.g., trustworthiness, member checks, triangulation, etc.).

In a qualitative study by Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn (2007), the authors explored strengths of homeless street youth that yielded three major themes: developing street smarts, existence of personal strengths, and resources youth used to survive. The authors defined developing street smarts as, "skills necessary to avoid dangerous situations, locate resources, determine who to trust, and adapt to the social structures and culture of street economies." (p. 30). Using focus groups, the authors interviewed sixty homeless female and male participants, ages 16-24, from a Southwestern community center. Questions used to identify strengths were, "What are your greatest strengths that help you cope with street life?", "What would you say are your own, internal strengths?", "What strengths come from outside yourself, like family, friends, other street youth?" (p. 29). The authors found that, "For homeless youth, negotiating the balance between self-reliance and accepting help from others required the development of street smarts. These skills helped youth to avoid dangerous situations and increased their efficiency in locating valuable resources. However, developing these skills required extensive experience living on the streets, and street smarts are not easily acquired." (p. 30). Other characteristics present in street smart youth included the ability to differentiate those who could be trusted from those who could not, being guarded and slow to develop relationships in order to avoid relying on those who were undependable or out to exploit. Youth also, "felt they had to balance their ability to fend for themselves with the need to seek assistance from others." (p.30). In addition, participants reported

being very cautious about sharing personal information, particularly with those who had not yet earned their trust.

Raterink (2001), conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study on factors that influence success in high school students. Participants stated attributes such as: self-responsibility, self-starter, self-confident, street smart, quick thinker, flexible and adaptable, risk taker, change agent, and lifelong learner. In a description of street smarts as a factor of high school success, the author found that,

> The participants felt that being aware of their surroundings was important to success. It was important to understand what was expected of them in the culture in which they were involved. The participants felt that they truly understood the school, the culture and the climate in which they were surrounded. The participants felt that they were able to distinguish the areas in which they should be involved, and the areas in which they should avoid as they moved through their school years. The participants felt that being street smart was, at times, more valuable than being book smart. It was perceived that knowing what was going on around them was important in order to make good decisions involving everyday life not necessarily for the long-term goals. (p.62)

One limitation of the study was the unclear definition of the measurement of "success" in the selection process. The researcher chose participants from a pool students who school staff thought were successful. Another limitation of the study is that it was conducted using only high school students. The author suggested that further research should be conducted on the attributes to determine relation to school success. This study will address the street smart attribute. The author also suggested that future research should be

done with students who were not considered successful (e.g., dropouts), in order to determine factors that prevented such students from achieving success. That will also be accomplished with the current study.

<center>Review of Literature on Students who Drop Out</center>

There is much in the literature on identifying factors that contribute to students' reasons for dropping out of school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Chapman, C., Laird, J., & Kewal Ramani, A., 2010; Gleason, P. & Dynarski, M., 2002; Neely & Griffin-Williams, 2013; Sparks, Johnson, & Akos, 2010; Stillwell & Sable, 2013; Suh & Suh, 2007). Sparks et al. (2010), conducted a quantitative study to identify factors contributing to high school dropout rates. The authors noted that the practice of using demographic factors such as race or socioeconomic status to identify at-risk students can lead to stereotyping or delivery of inappropriate services. The authors also noted that although minority students are most likely to drop out of school, there are other factors that lead to one's decision to leave school. Intervention suggestions were provided for school counselors to identify and serve students most at risk. The study was conducted with 9th grade students in a large southeastern school district. Ninth grade students were chosen based on research support documenting the challenges associated with transitioning from middle to high school. The authors attempted to identify factors that were characteristic of those who dropped out. A stepwise factor analysis was used to identify variables that would be the best predictors of dropping out of school. Following tests of statistical significance, the authors identified factors common among those who dropped out. Three primary risk factors were identified: (1) being retained in any grade from K-9 (2) scoring below grade level on a standardized state exam, specifically, an

<center>23</center>

end-of-grade (8th) math test or failing Algebra I, and (3) receiving a long-term suspension. Interventions suggested included: less tracking in middle school, participation in extracurricular programs, and participation in transitions programs aimed at helping students make a smoother transition into the ninth grade. The quantitative nature of the study did not allow for gathering of data from participants, on their perceptions on reasons for dropping out of school. In addition, the study did not explore reasons for dropout, from students who actually dropped out of school, which will be provided in the current study.

Suh and Suh (2007) conducted a quantitative study to identify factors that lead to students dropping out of high school. The study was conducted around four research questions: (1) What are the most significant risk factors leading to school dropout? (2) How much does the combination of two or more risk factors accelerate the likelihood of dropping out compared to a single risk? (3) What are the predictive indicators within each risk group and how different are they across the different types of at-risk groups? (4) What kinds of prevention strategies are effective for different sources of risk? Participants were approximately 6,000 male and female students from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, who graduated from high school or dropped out. Using multiple logistic regression to identify risk factors from 180 variables, 16 were found to be statistically significant. The authors identified three primary factors that contributed to dropout, as significant in the coding process: low grade point average (GPA), low socioeconomic status (SES), and behavior problems. The authors proposed that school counselors should develop prevention programs based on the characteristics of at-risk students in their schools. Limitations of the study included the longitudinal nature due to

the 11 year gap between the collection of data and publishing of the study. In addition, the risk-factors examined in the study were limited to three, although 16 were found to be statistically significant. The authors suggested that further research is needed to understand other factors, such as the influences of the individual, home, and school, beyond the factors explored in this study. The current study will use interviews to explore influences from the perspective of the individual, and influences outside of the school environment.

Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) conducted a qualitative investigation of dropouts, by interviewing former students who dropped out of school. Focus groups were used to interview racially and ethnically diverse students, ages 16-24, from 25 locations—including small towns, suburban areas, and large cities in the Philadelphia and Baltimore areas. Five major factors were identified as primary reasons for students dropping out: (1) classes were not interesting (2) absent too many days and could not catch up (3) spent time with people who were not interested in school (4) too much freedom and not enough rules (4) failing in school. Based on the results of the study, Bridgeland et al. (2006) proposed suggestions on what educators and parents could do to improve students' chances of remaining in school: (1) provide opportunities for real-world learning to make lessons more relevant (2) employ better teachers who keep class interesting (3) provide smaller classes, which would allow for more individual instruction (4) establish better communication between parents and school in order to get parents more involved (5) parents make sure their children go to school every day (6) increase supervision at school to ensure students attend classes. The authors also noted that instructional content must be relevant to students' lives, and classroom activities should

tie into students' interests outside of the classroom. Such practices can help bridge the achievement gap and may lead to less students dropping out of school. Limitations of the study included the wide age range of the participants as well as the locations being limited to areas in the northeast. Those who have been out of high school longer may not be able to accurately recall experiences related to their decision to leave high school.

The School Counselor's Role in Dropout Prevention

Bemak and Chung (2005) suggested that school counselors play an essential role in eliminating academic inequities, and bridging the achievement gap between students of color and European American students. Counselors also play an important part in the achievement of minority students, including students from low socio-economic backgrounds, in urban settings, as they are increasingly at risk for dropout (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Bryan 2005; Lee, 2005). Bryan (2005) suggested that school counselors take on the roles of facilitator, advocate, and collaborator, in working with school staff, families, and communities, to enhance student achievement (Carr, 2010). In a study on the school counselor's role in preventing dropout, White and Kelly (2010) sought to investigate how counselors could address the problem within the context of the comprehensive guidance program. The authors argued that school counselors play a vital role in identifying, monitoring, intervening, and following-up with students identified as high risk for dropout. The authors proposed a model prevention program for high school students that included an integration of school-wide programs and special services programs for students identified as at-risk. Components of such programs may include: 1) a committee of school personnel, tasked with early identification of risk factors in students 2) a counselor-parent communication initiative 3) implementation of a classroom

volunteering program that would allow the classroom teacher to devote additional time to instruction.

ASCA's National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs

ASCA's National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs (2012) was used as a framework to investigate the direct and indirect roles of the school counselor in dropout prevention efforts. The Model states that through consultation:

> School counselors share strategies that support student achievement with parents, teachers, other educators and community organizations through consultation. School counselors also serve as student advocates to promote academic, career and personal/social development through this strategy. Finally, school counselors use consultation to receive information on student needs and to identify strategies that promote student achievement. (ASCA, 2012, p. 87)

This study will address two of the four themes of the Model: advocacy and collaboration. Of the major components of the Model (foundation, delivery system, management system and accountability), delivery system will be explored, as related to dropout prevention.

In 2003, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) published the first National Model to guide the practice of counselors in school settings, and outline the components of the comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). The purpose of the model was to provide responsive services (activities or interventions such as individual or group counseling, or crisis response) for all students, provide standard, uniform policies and practices among school counseling programs, and to re-establish school counseling as an essential component to increasing students' achievement and success. In addition, the Model served to clearly define the role of school counselors and

the school counseling profession, which had historically been unclear among school staff, parents, and other stakeholders (ASCA, 2012). In *ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (2012), Wong stated:

> The ASCA National Model also required school counselors to think in terms of new paradigms. School counseling programs need to be comprehensive in scope, results-oriented in design and developmental in nature. The transition from service to program necessitated that school counselors become leaders to manage the program. To do this, school counselors could no longer operate in isolation. They need to collaborate with other school staff, parents, community resources and students. (p. xi)

The present study used the ASCA National Model as a framework to explore the role of the school counselor in dropout prevention, specifically African American male students at risk for dropping out of high school. Two of the four themes of the Model (collaboration and advocacy) will be addressed, as well as the Model's delivery component. Carr (2010) noted that school counselors tend to gravitate to roles that address the needs of the majority population as opposed to those students who are marginalized or at-risk for dropping out of school. Although the needs of some students identified as at-risk can be provided through responsive services such as individual and/or group counseling, school counselors must go beyond those roles. The author noted that such services fail to address the systemic issues that may prevent those students from succeeding in school. As such, school counselors should adopt roles such as "advocacy, collaboration/teaming, systemic change, and leadership in addition to delivery system. Systemic change and advocacy should be high priorities when looking to assist

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marginalized students, since those are the students dropping out of school at the highest rates." (p.88)

Advocacy

Advocacy can be defined as the process of arguing or pleading for a proposal, or cause of another (Bryan 2005). Bemak and Chung (2005) defined advocacy as "the belief that, to fight injustices, individual and collective actions that lead toward improving conditions for the benefit of both individuals and groups are necessary." (p. 196). In the context of the school counselor, advocacy can be described as speaking up and/or taking action on behalf of clients or students to promote change that addresses social inequities and institutional, or environmental changes (Bemak and Chung, 2005).

Collaboration

Collaboration can be defined as "a process for reaching goals that cannot be reached alone but are reached through shared vision, responsibility, and resources; parity; joint work; mutual expertise; and shared outcomes in accomplishing the goals" (Bryan 2005, p. 221). School counselors collaborate with stakeholders (within the school, family, and community) to promote student achievement and development, which cannot be achieved by an individual or school alone (ASCA, 2012). Examples of such collaboration may be youth-centered in which students are viewed as experts and partners who share responsibility and accountability; inter-professional collaboration that takes place with school counselors, teachers, administrators, social workers, etc.; parent-centered collaboration in which parents are viewed as partners sharing accountability; family-centered collaboration; and community collaboration (ASCA, 2012).

Delivery System

The delivery component of the ASCA National Model addresses methods of implementing the school counseling program. In relation to the current study, the delivery system will provide a guide for school counselors in carrying out the components of their comprehensive programs, as related to dropout prevention. The delivery system consists of direct and indirect student services. Direct services are interactions between students and school counselors in the areas of the school counseling core curriculum (instruction and group activities), individual student planning (appraisal and advisement), and responsive services (counseling and crisis response).

Summary

An extensive review of the literature confirmed that there are students who identify as street smart, however, failed to address the school counselor's roles in identifying those students and in providing intervention and prevention services as a part of the comprehensive school counseling program. The purpose of this study was to explore from the participants' perspective, their definition of street smarts, street smart skills/characteristics, and how they felt their skills were or were not valued and/or included in the academic context. In addition, did such perceptions play a part their decision to drop out of high school? The results of the study will inform school counselors of their roles as advocate and collaborator in dropout prevention of street smart students, through the counseling program's delivery system. The study will use a qualitative, phenomenological design. The following chapter will outline the details of the methodology and substantiate the rationale for the research design. Chapter four will

offer a discussion of the findings of the interviews conducted. Chapter five will provide

implications of the study for school counselors.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter provided an overview of the literature on street smart students, dropout factors, and the role of the school counselor in dropout prevention. While there are a number of studies in the literature on factors that lead to dropping out of school and little on street smart students, there has not been a qualitative study that has provided implications of the school counselor's role in dropout prevention of street smart African American males. In this chapter, the researcher will present the methodology regarding the investigation into participants' perceptions of how their street smart intelligence was or was not valued in school, and if that lead to their decision to eventually drop out. Details will be presented on the processes of data collection for the study. Attention will be given to the context of the study, the qualitative paradigm, the research questions, the role of the researcher, and analysis of data.

Research Design

As suggested in the literature and by the lack of research in the literature on the phenomena being studied, the goals of the current study will be best accomplished through qualitative inquiry. Maxwell (2005) suggests five instances for which use of a qualitative design is most appropriate: "understanding particular meaning, understanding particular context, identifying 'unanticipated phenomena and influences,' understanding process, and developing explanations based on cause" (p. 22-23). Glesne (2006) proposed fours factors that should be considered when determining if the research design is

qualitative or quantitative: assumptions, purpose of the research, research approach, and the role of the researcher. Creswell (2009) describes characteristics of qualitative research that distinguishes it from quantitative design: qualitative research occurs in natural settings and is based on assumptions that differ from quantitative inquiry; the focus is on participants' perceptions and experiences; the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and focuses on the process and outcomes; and data that emerge are descriptive and reported in words as opposed to numbers.

Within the qualitative design, the researcher will use a phenomenological approach. Due to the lack of research on street smart students and the need to explore the construct, the researcher deemed a phenomenological approach most appropriate when compared to other methods. Although methods such as ethnography or narratology also seek to gain understanding of human experiences of a phenomena (Hays & Wood, 2011), the design and goals of the current study are parallel to those of a phenomenological design. Ethnography is designed to "identify social patterns and norms for a culture-sharing group. Research questions focus on individuals, processes, events, and outcomes of a particular site." (p. 289). Narratology places emphasis on understanding of participants' experiences through storied meaning or narrative conceptions. Because the goals of ethnography and narratology are not the intent of the current study, the designs are not appropriate for exploration of the phenomena. Unlike other qualitative approaches, phenomenology explores participants' world through the lens of their lived experiences (Wertz, 2005). Hays and Wood (2011) state, "the sole purpose of phenomenology is to describe the depth and meaning of participants' lived experiences. Specifically, phenomenologists seek to understand the individual and collective internal

experience for a phenomenon of interest and how participants intentionally and consciously think about their experience" (p.291). Heppner and Heppner (2004) describe five guidelines for conducting a phenomenological study: (1) philosophical perspective; (2) lived experiences and research questions; (3) sampling and data collection; (4) phenomenological data analysis; and (5) essence of lived experiences.

Role of the Researcher

Due to the nature of the study, the researcher will serve as the primary instrument in data collection. Creswell (2009) asserts that, "Particularly in qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study" (p. 196).

Experience

The researcher is an African American female counselor, with over ten years of experience in working with children, adolescents, and adults, in university, public school, and correctional settings. The researcher is also a member of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). The researcher's current position is at a school district that serves high school and adult education students who are incarcerated. The researcher's experience and interest in the current study developed from working with incarcerated youth in correctional settings, many of whom self-identify as street smart and dropped out of school.

Assumptions

The researcher brings to the study, a number of assumptions. One is that there are students, particularly African American males, who identify as street smart. Another

assumption is that all students have strengths that can be valued in the educational setting, and there are skills, characteristics, and strengths inherent in street smart students. In addition, the researcher assumes that the knowledge and skills street smart students possess, are often unrecognized and undervalued (or not valued) within the academic context. There is also an assumption that individuals who identify as street smart and dropped out of school, may have done so because those strengths were not identified and built upon as a part of the educational experience.

Biases

In my experience of working with students who are incarcerated, I primarily work with male students, which suggests a bias towards the male population. Although there may be female students who identify as street smart and dropped out of school, I have not had conversations with female students on the subject. As a school counselor, I am also biased in that I believe school counselors are in the most ideal position to advocate for such students to bring awareness and change.

<div align="center">Interview Questions</div>

The research questions for a phenomenological study are constructed around understanding the lived experiences of the participants and investigating the meaning of those experiences, and serve as the foundation for the specific interview questions (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Kline (2008) states that developing appropriate interview questions is vital to obtaining credible data:

> To the extent possible, interview questions need to be consistent with the research approach used and avoid the limitations of researchers' assumptions about participants and the topic being researched. After initial data are collected and

analyzed, more focused questions are acceptable (depending on the qualitative approach selected) because they can be based on participants' responses and not on researchers' assumptions. Later, focused questions based on data collected from participants might be used to develop more thickly described concepts. (p. 214)

A list of the interview questions were provided to each participant to prepare them for the interview. The questions were developed according to the goals and nature of the study, as well as the review of other qualitative research in the literature. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions:

1. What is your definition of "street smarts?" What is your definition of "book smarts?" How are street smarts and book smarts the same? How are street smarts and book smarts different?

2. How would you describe your own street smart characteristics?

3. How were your street smart characteristics treated in school?

4. Do you think your street smart characteristics were appreciated? If so, describe how they were.

5. If not,

   a. What effect, if any, did appreciation of your street smarts have on your decision to drop out of school?

   b. What was your experience with your school counselor? What might your school counselor have done differently to recognize your street smart characteristics?

6. What were your reasons for dropping out of school?

Context for the Study

Hays and Wood (2011) state that when selecting participants, "researchers need to carefully select participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon rather than simply those who have perspectives on the experience." (p. 291). Creswell (1998) suggests that the rationale for selecting participants should reflect the goals of the study, allowing the researcher to find individuals who possess the characteristics being investigated. The context of the study took place in South Carolina.

Accessing Participants

Creswell (2009) suggests that in qualitative research, participants should be purposefully (as opposed to randomly) selected to provide the researcher a better understanding of the problem and research question(s) under investigation. The selection of participants was based on criterion and snowball sampling. In criterion sampling, participants are chosen based on criteria that are pre-determined by the researcher (Patton, 2002). "The point of criterion sampling is to be sure to understand cases that are likely to be information-rich because they may reveal major system weaknesses that become targets of opportunity for program or system improvement (p. 238). The criteria for participation were: ethnicity (African American), gender (male), age (18-24), dropped out of high school, and self-identify as street-smart. Patton (2002) suggests that snowball sampling is appropriate when the researcher seeks to recruit key participants from existing participants. This technique is particularly helpful for identifying potential participants who may be more difficult to reach. The assumption is that members of certain populations often know one another, and can likely provide names of other individuals who meet the criteria and may be willing to participate. "This process is, by

necessity, repetitive: informants refer the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer her or him to yet other informants, and so on." (p.330). Because a sample population of males who have dropped out of school are not necessarily easy to access, the researcher chose the snowball sampling method as the best approach for accessing eligible participants. The first participant was selected through word-of-mouth referral for an individual who met the criteria, and the remaining participants through subsequent referrals, and so on.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

The working relationship between the researcher and participants was established through a preliminary meeting prior to the actual interview. The purpose of the meeting was to establish rapport, describe the context and nature of the study, and the role of the researcher. In addition, the researcher reviewed ethical considerations, informed consent, and had participants complete consent forms.

Measures of Ethical Protection

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher received approval from the University of South Carolina's Institutional Review Board (IRB). In order to maintain anonymity, no identifiable information was disclosed and all information will remain confidential. Participants were only identified using pseudonyms. Participants were provided with informed consent which described the participant's right to voluntarily participate and to withdraw at any time.

Selection of Participants

Wertz (2005) suggested that when determining the appropriate number of participants, consideration should be given to the nature of the research problem and the

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potential outcome of findings. Englander suggests that, "the phenomenological method in human science recommends that one uses at least three participants" (p.21). A review of the literature (Creswell, 2009; Englander, 2012; Hays & Wood, 2011) suggests six to ten participants as sufficient for a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. Based on the literature and phenomenological approach, six participants were selected for this study. Participants were selected according to pre-determined criteria. This allowed the researcher to gain more in-depth valuable information (Patton, 2002).

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

According to Marshall & Rossman (2006), in-depth interviewing is extensively relied on by many qualitative researchers. The authors state:

> The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses. This method, in fact, is based on an assumption fundamental to qualitative research: The participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it (the emic perspective), not as the researcher views it (the etic perspective). (p.101)

Phenomenological interviewing is a specific type of in-depth interviewing in which the researcher describes meaning of the phenomenon that participants share (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). An advantage of this type of interviewing is that it explicitly focuses on the experiences of the interviewees, and the deep meanings of lived events (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The data in this study were collected using in-depth face-to-face phenomenological interviews with all participants. The interviews lasted 40-50 minutes, and were audio recorded to ensure accuracy. During the data collection process, the

researcher focused on gathering detailed information directly related to answering the interview and research questions. The interview was semi-structured in effort to allow further exploration. Follow-up questions were used to seek clarification and/or elaboration. Following each interview, the researcher reviewed the audio recording, and transcribed the data. To ensure accuracy, a number of verification methods were used. Member checking (Glesne, 2006) was used by the researcher by providing a copy of the transcript of the interview to each participant. The participant had the opportunity to verify accuracy, clarify, or elaborate if needed. A peer in the Counselor Education doctoral program, engaged in the peer review process by reviewing transcripts and assisting with identifying codes and themes.

<center>Analysis of Data</center>

Glesne (2006) describes the process of data collection as organizing what you have seen, heard, and read in order to make sense of everything the researcher has learned. According to Morrisette (1999):

> Analyzing data within phenomenological research involves uncovering the essential structures of the phenomenon in question. The essence of co-researcher experiences is captured in phenomenological themes. The meaning or essence of a phenomenon is not a one-dimensional entity but a multidimensional structure consisting of many parts that make up the whole. Therefore, to understand the experiences of co-researchers, one must acknowledge the various components of their overall experience and synthesize them into a logical and coherent whole. When themes are synthesized, a more complete understanding of one's lived experiences is possible. (p. 3)

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The data were analyzed according to Morrissette's (1999) seven-step model for

phenomenological research:

Step 1: Interview as a Whole

Following the interview, the researcher listed to and reviewed the audio recorded

conversations. To remain familiar with the data, the researcher reviewed the tapes

as soon as possible, following each interview. Particular attention was paid to tone

of voice, body language, etc. This process allowed for awareness and

understanding of participants' experiences.

Step 2: Interview as Text

During this stage, the researcher transcribed each interview. The researcher

personally served as the transcriber to ensure anonymity and to become more

immersed in the data.

Step 3: First Order Thematic (Abstraction)

The third step involved reviewing the written transcripts to identify significant

statements which were paraphrased and assigned a theme.

Step 4: Second Order Thematic (Cluster)

During this stage, the researcher created a second order thematic group by

clustering the first order themes similar in meaning.

Step 5: Individual Co-researcher (i.e., participant)

This process is also known as within person analysis and involves reflecting on

and summarizing participants' experiences to identify common themes among the

second order themes.

Step 6: Overall Syntheses of Co-researchers' Protocols

This step consists of reflecting on themes that emerged from each individual

participant to gain an understanding of individual and shared experiences among

participants. This provides an opportunity to compare experiences in a descriptive

format and relate descriptions to existing research.

Step 7: Between Person Analysis

Following the synthesis, the researcher organized clustered themes in a grid

format to provide a visual comparison of participants' experiences.

Summary

This chapter provides a detailed description of the study's methodology, including

the qualitative paradigm and processes for data collection and analysis. In addition, the

context for the study is described along with measures for selecting and protecting

participants. In the following chapter, a discussion of the findings will be presented.

Implications for the study will be provided in chapter five.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study was conducted to investigate the experiences of street smart African American males who dropped out high school. The purpose of the study was to explore participants' experiences to determine whether or not they felt their street smarts were appreciated in school, and if that had an effect on their decision to drop out. A review of the literature in chapter two suggested that students who feel their strengths/intelligences are not recognized, often disengage and eventually drop out of school (Hatt, 2007; Nieto & Bode, 2011; Osborne, 1997; Sternberg, 2006). The research was conducted through a phenomenological study with six participants. The participants provided insight into whether or not they felt their street smarts were valued/appreciated in school, and if that played a part in their decision to eventually drop out. Research was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How do African American males define "street smarts?"

2. How do African American males define "book smarts?"

3. What are the similarities and differences between the two definitions?

4. What experiences did participants have in school that honored or disparaged their alternate intelligence or street smarts?

5. What, if any, influences did their experiences related to street smarts in school affect their decision to drop out of school?

In this chapter, a description of the participants will be provided, along with the results of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, which will be presented through themes. In order to provide insight into participants' experiences, statements/quotes from participants will be provided, to support each theme.

Description of Participants

The participants in the study consisted of six African American males from South Carolina between the ages of 18-24, who self-identified as street smart. Each participant will be identified using a pseudonym. Participant one ("Shawn") is 22 years of age, resides in Sumter, works at a local manufacturing plant, and last completed the 10th grade. Participant two ("Brandon") is 21 years of age, resides in Sumter, does not work, and last completed the 10th grade. Participant three ("Tevin") is 19 years of age, resides in Sumter, does not work, and last completed the 9th grade. Participant four ("Dre") is 23 years of age, resides in Orangeburg, works as a cook at a fast food restaurant, and last completed the 11th grade. Participant five ("Michael") is 24 years of age, resides in Columbia, does not work, and last completed the 10th grade. Participant six ("Cedric") is 23 years of age, resides in Columbia, works as a truck driver, and last completed the 11th grade.

Analysis of Data

Each interview was conducted individually and audio-recorded. Following completion of each interview, the researcher transcribed and analyzed the data using Morrissette's (1999) seven-step method for phenomenological research. Member checking included providing each participant an electronic or hard copy of his transcript,

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to verify the accuracy of responses. All but 2 responded, and the remaining 4 communicated that the responses recorded were accurate. None of the participants had anything further to add or clarify. The transcripts were reviewed to identify first order themes, which were derived from and paired with statements from the participants. To ensure accuracy, the transcripts were also reviewed by a peer who coded the statements, which were later compared to those of the researcher. The codes produced by both reviewers were similar, and some identical. After the first clustering of codes, the transcripts were independently reviewed to identify second order themes by grouping codes similar in meaning. Findings from analyses of the data yielded three themes: intelligence, support (support/lack of support), and self-sufficient. The interview questions were:

1. What is your definition of "street smarts?" What is your definition of "book smarts?" How are street smarts and book smarts the same? How are street smarts and book smarts different?

2. How would you describe your own street smart characteristics?

3. How were your street smart characteristics treated in school?

4. Do you think your street smart characteristics were appreciated? If so, describe how they were.

5. If not,

   a. What effect, if any, did appreciation of your street smarts have on your decision to drop out of school?

b. What was your experience with your school counselor? What might your school counselor have done differently to recognize your street smart characteristics?

6. What were your reasons for dropping out of school?

Table 4.1 illustrates the codes that emerged within each theme. In the context of this study, the themes were defined according to the meaning as described by the participants. Intelligence refers to knowledge that is learned or acquired through formal or informal means. Support refers to encouragement, resources, or expressions that were provided by school faculty/staff (teachers, principals, school counselors) that made the participants feel that they/their street smarts were appreciated in school. Lack of support is defined as limited or the absence of encouragement or resources from faculty/staff. Self-sufficient refers to means of acquiring resources and taking care of self and family outside of school.

Table 4.1 Codes and Themes

Themes	Codes
Intelligence- knowledge that is learned or acquired through formal or informal means	Knowledge, Formal Learning/Education, Informal Learning/Education, Common Sense
Support (support/lack of support)- Support refers to encouragement, resources, or expressions that were provided by school faculty/staff (teachers, principals, school counselors) that made	Support/Lack of Support: Support, Encouragement, Awareness, Lack of/Limited Support, Unawareness, Unappreciated, No Relationship, Limited/No Interaction, Lack of Academic

the participants feel that they/their street smarts were appreciated in school. Lack of support is defined as limited or the absence of encouragement or resources from faculty/staff.	Support
Self-Sufficient- means of acquiring resources and taking care of self and family outside of school.	Resourceful, Financial, Adapt, Survival

Themes

Intelligence

The theme of intelligence appeared across participants when asked about their definitions of street smarts and book smarts, as well as similarities and differences between the two. Each participant expressed that he thought each type of "smarts" consisted of knowledge, skills, or abilities that were learned inside and/or outside of school. With street smarts, such acquisition enabled one to survive life on the street and adapt to certain situations or contexts. Book smarts described the type of knowledge one needed to further education or be successful in school. A couple of participants described the two primarily as opposites, while some described a number of similarities between the two. Some participants communicated that a person could be one, the other, or both; and some thought that in order to be successful and navigate through the obstacles of life, having both book and street smarts are helpful.

Shawn- my definition of street smart is when you know more about the streets than you know about school or education. When you grow up spending a lot of time in the streets and around street people, you become more street smart. You learn certain things about life and how to survive that they don't teach in school…without it [street smarts] you would be lost and wouldn't know how to handle certain situations that could sometimes get you hurt.

Brandon- Street smarts is everything you learn in the streets…how to hustle, how to make money and survive, how to protect yourself and stay alive, and avoid trouble and know how to get out of trouble if you do get into it.

Dre…street smart is using knowledge that you pick up in everyday life and using it living life, with no homework on it, just living inside it …the things that you don't learn in school that you get from everyday life situations…some of it is like common sense in a way and some of it you pick up on or just learn through living. There are things I use every day that get my by because of my street smarts.

Michael- Street smart means you can recognize things that a "square" person or average person wouldn't see. You're going to look at somebody's clothes or jeans, or how they walk, and you're going to be able to make an assumption about them. Or you can look at a crowd and know when to go near it or when to not go near it. You're going to be able to analyze a situation and know if it's dangerous or not and you know how to take care of yourself or get out of a dangerous situation…it's not always about fighting. You have to be able to talk your way out of certain things or manipulate people to get what you want…they don't teach you that in school.

Cedric…street smart? Somebody who has knowledge, common sense about what goes on in the streets. I mean, you know, you have the ability to go anywhere. It's not necessarily about dope or drugs, but you recognize what's going on in the street. You see things that the average person doesn't see…it's like common sense. You've got different levels of it, but I mean mine, I can go like anywhere, I can go in any hood and blend in or pick up on what's going on.

Most of the participants defined book smarts to include knowledge that is learned through formal education inside of school. Some of the participants associated book smarts with the type of knowledge one would need to get a good job or to pursue post-secondary education.

Shawn… [book smart] Learning and preparing to get a job and not staying out in the streets. If you want to have a real job, you have to have book smarts that they teach you in school.

Brandon- Book smarts is when you're smart about things that you learn from books when you're in school. Most people that are smart in school and make good grades and go to college are book smart and people who are in the streets and don't do so good in school have street smarts.

Tevin- Book smart is when you're learning more and getting more experience from a book and knowing what to do by like examples and definitions. It's everything you learn in school that you can't get from being in the streets.

Dre- It's kind of like when you're good with books, and you're good at your work- school work and whatnot. You can be smart at both but with book smart, you're learning to be smart… It's like an on and off switch. When you're at

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school, you switch over to book smarts. I wasn't the type of person to take street smarts there, you know? I would have street smarts out and about with my friends, but I didn't take it into class with me. I think there is a time and place for both so when I was in school, I tried to focus on the book smarts that I did have and when I was in the street, I didn't want that side of me to show.

Michael... book smart means you know how to act, read and write, and speak proper English. People with book smarts only know the things that they get from books or what's taught in school, but a lot of street smart people I know are dumb when it comes to common sense…those are the people who get taken advantage of easily because all they know is how to be book smart.

Cedric... science, English, math, subjects like that…but it doesn't have anything to do with you in the streets like street smarts do, but that's what you need to go to college with- they rely on book smarts… I can play my street smarts off as book smarts because it's a hustle. I mean when you learn the game, you know the game. I have both and I know when and where to use them depending on the situation. You can only go so far in life if you only have street smarts and you can only go so far if you have book smarts. You would probably get farther with only book smarts but I think both are important to survive.

When asked about the similarities and differences between street smarts and book smarts, although the majority of the participants described the two as types of intelligences, they defined them as opposites. Street smarts were described as being learned and used in the streets, not in school and vice versa. One participant expressed needing both book and

street smarts to avoid trouble. Another participant described book smarts as being able to be taught and learned, but street smarts as something one must "pick up on."

> *Shawn-* They are the same because both of them are ways of being smart, but a different kind of smart. You need a little bit of both…the smartest people are street smart and book smart at the same time…they are different because you use them for different things. Street smarts are for the streets and you need book smarts to make good grades in school and get a good job.
>
> *Brandon-* They are the same because they are both knowledge. You gotta know how to get by in the world knowing different things whether you learn it from the streets or in school. Street smart, they don't teach it in the books or school- you get it from the streets or whatever. Another person who you look up to who's book smart, goes to school and finishes school. You don't need street smarts in school cause that's not going to help you solve a math problem.
>
> *Dre…* both of them are types of knowledge. You gain from both of them. You're learning with both of them. Both take you through life… With book smarts, it will take you to another level, I suppose with furthering your education and making something out of yourself, out of life. Street smarts- the difference with that is…you can use the knowledge you've learned with street smarts to get you by. It's helpful, but it's not going to get you where you could be going if you had the book smarts.
>
> *Michael…* they're the same in the sense that they both help you get through life and sometimes you can use them together to get you out of trouble…they're different because it involves knowing about different things. I have both, I don't

have as much book smarts but I have enough of it to use them together to get what I need and get ahead.

Cedric…they're the same because you can get ahead with both of them. Street smarts, I mean you learn hustles, you can still make it. There are plenty people out here in the streets that have street smarts that don't have book smarts and they still get ahead- you can still hustle, you can still get money. Same thing with book smarts. That's how you get money…both of them are knowledge- you get ahead either way…book smarts can be taught in school to most people…street smarts are something that you learn on the streets- not by choice normally, it's just a way of life. You've gotta pick up on it, everybody doesn't have it. You have people in the streets who don't have any book smarts or whatever but they can survive in the streets and vice versa.

Self-Sufficient

This theme emerged within participants' descriptions of street smarts or experiences that played a factor in their decision to drop out, as having to be resourceful, and make money to provide for themselves and/or family. A few of them expressed that they could not get immediate payoff from being in school, as opposed to being able to make money on the street right away.

Brandon… street smart… knowing how to get it [money] when you don't have a job. I had to get money. School might get me money in the long run but when you're thinking about it at the time, it's so far ahead and all you're thinking about is needing money right then. I already knew I wasn't going to college and I knew I could make more money on the street than someone with a high school diploma.

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Michael... I didn't need it [school], it wasn't getting me places, and it took too

long. I know how to read and write and I have a calculator, so that was about all I

needed from school…there was money in the streets, it ain't no money in high

school. I can stand on the corner and make a couple hundred dollars in a week or

so, but I won't make shit in high school.

*Cedric …*I figured I could make money. I mean, what was being in school going

to do for me? There's plenty of people who went to school and still turned out

homeless or whatever. I see people all the time that I went to school with that

finished school but aren't doing anything. At least with my street smarts, I know I

can survive, whether I'm in the streets, or whether I have a job or not.

Support

The theme of support included sub-themes of support and lack of support. Some

of the participants communicated that they received some form of encouragement from

faculty or staff that led them to feel as if they or their street smarts were appreciated or

that they saw something in them that made them feel they could be successful. Although

there may have been some level of support, the support was not frequent or substantial

enough to keep them from dropping out of school. Only half of the participants reported

receiving any type of encouragement or support at all.

Brandon… I had some teachers pull me to the side and say, "You don't have to be

in the streets cause you're a smart young man," some stuff like that. Little

comments. It made me feel good, like they saw something in me besides just

being somebody from the streets who didn't know anything.

*Tevin...*me and my teachers, we would like talk a lot because I had so many

questions. By the end of the day…I learned more and got the chance to show

someone else what I learned and teach them, and they could go out and show the

others too…helping others, showing them, made me feel like I was smart enough

to share the things I knew

Dre... we [school counselor] had a good relationship. She was always on me

about what I wanted to be in life and what I wanted to do. She made me think

about what I wanted to do after high school and what I would take to get there.

Lack of support was the most prominent and frequently occurring of the themes

presented. This included experiences that disparaged students, and were all or in part, the

reasons that ultimately led them to leave school altogether. Lack of support appeared in

many forms, including unawareness of support resources (such as the school counselor),

feeling as if though the type of intelligence (i.e., street smarts) they had was not valued or

appreciated in school, lack of academic support, or having no relationship with

faculty/staff.

Brandon... some of them [faculty/staff], they would treat me like, "Oh he's just

another boy from the hood." That's all they saw me as, they didn't look past that

to see that to see anything else in me.

Tevin... I was depressed at the time and stressing a lot. My grades were going

down, I was getting lazy, missing days…I got a call from the school or whatever

saying that I was missing days. I had low credits, but I didn't know how many

so…it really like brought me down to where I was like, 'I don't think I can

survive, I don't think I can last' and plus I was getting problems from like some people in school, and I had problems back at home. I left and basically that's it.

Dre…sometimes when you're in school, the street smarts you already have, there are a lot of things you feel like you already know for what you have in mind to do in life. You feel like the streets smarts you have are enough. You could probably learn more if your mind was there, but…how they taught, made you want to give up and take the knowledge you've learned in the streets, and just go with that... I was tired of the way things worked in the school system. It seemed like it was just about talking about different things that I wasn't going to need in life.

Michael... street smarts weren't looked upon happily. They basically tried to discredit it and told me that I needed a good quality education if I ever wanted to be something in life. I know a lot of people who have a so called quality education and I know more than they do.

Cedric... as far as like being acknowledged [street smarts] by teachers- it really wasn't there… not in school. They [street smarts] weren't needed in school- that's what your book smarts are for…I mean, I don't think there's much they could have done to recognize my street smarts or there's no way they could have really put them in a positive manner to me that I would have cared about. I mean…they know we know right from wrong but it's school- it's a place for book smarts, not street smarts

When asked about their experience with their school counselor, the first two participants did not know who the "school" counselor was, but was able to reference the "guidance" counselor when I provided that as an alternate title. I included the guidance counselor

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title in subsequent interviews. The majority of the participants reported either no or a negative relationship with their counselor(s).

> *Shawn*…oh, guidance? I didn't know the guidance counselor. I never went to guidance like that. I would just go to the principal sometimes and talk to him.
>
> *Brandon*…oh, I don't think I knew the guidance counselor.
>
> *Tevin*- My guidance counselor was cool. I didn't go there often unless it was time to change a class or course or whatever.
>
> *Michael*- Guidance counselors didn't like me because I pointed out things…or I basically explained to them that this high school thing was only going to get me so far.
>
> *Cedric*- Really they didn't have too much to say to me. To be honest, I mean they talked to me, I got in trouble of course, but it's like… to be honest, they really didn't care. They had certain students they cared about and certain ones they didn't. Street smart people with common sense, or what they call "hood" they don't care- all they want to do is write you up or suspend you and move you on your way.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

Table 4.2 illustrates the themes that emerged within each research question. Intelligence was a prevalent theme, as it answered the first three questions, addressing participants' definitions of street smarts and book smarts, as well as similarities and differences between the two. This suggests additional support for street smarts as a type of intelligence. All participants described both street and book smarts, to include knowledge that may be similar or different in nature, however, a type of intelligence

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nonetheless. Most agreed that you could get by with one or the other type of intelligence, and some communicated that having both types is ideal. Support/Lack of support provided answers to the last two questions. Lack of support was the most prominent theme, as all participants described an overarching theme of lack of support, including a lack of appreciation for their street smarts and lack of or no support from the school counselor or other faculty/staff. Self-sufficiency was also a theme that answered the last research question, as many of the participants described having responsibilities outside of school that they felt were more important or that had to be taken care of that led to dropping out. When describing street smarts, some participants provided definitions that included knowing how to provide for self and family. The need to make money to be a provider or to focus on street smarts as opposed to book smarts to be successful, were contributing factors that led to dropping out of school.

Table 4.2 Research Questions and Themes

Research Questions	Themes
1. How do African American males define "street smarts?"	Intelligence
2. How do African American males define "book smarts?"	Intelligence
3. What are the similarities and differences between the two definitions?	Intelligence
4. What experiences did participants have in school that honored or disparaged their alternate intelligence or street smarts?	Support Lack of Support

5. What, if any, influences did their experiences related to street smarts in school affect their decision to drop out of school?	Lack of Support Self-Sufficient

Summary

Findings from this study provided insight into participants' experiences of being street smart, whether or not they felt their street smart characteristics were appreciated in school, and if that had an effect on their decision to drop out. The results revealed that participants did not feel that their street smarts were appreciated in school, and lack of support was the primary reason for eventually leaving school altogether. Results from the study yielded three themes: intelligence, support (support/lack of support), and self-sufficient. A detailed discussion of the themes and findings as it relates to the literature will be presented in chapter five. In addition, implications for school counselors and suggestions for future research will also be presented.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of street smart African American males who have dropped out of high school, to determine whether or not they felt their street smarts were appreciated. If they felt like their street smart characteristics were not appreciated, the researcher sought to find out if that had any bearing on their decision to drop out of school. Although there has been research on the topics of students who have dropped out of school, reasons for dropping out, and even street smart students (Brayboy, 2005; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Chapman, C., Laird, J., & Kewal Ramani, A., 2010; Gleason, P. & Dynarski, M., 2002; Hatt, 2007; Sternberg, 2006), none addressed a link between the three and implications for school counselors, which was the purpose of the current study. Results from the study provided implications for school counselors, and how they may collaborate with teachers, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders, to identify students who primarily identify as street smart and implement appropriate intervention/prevention strategies, according to the American School Counselors Association's (ASCA) National Framework for School Counselors (2012). This chapter includes a discussion of the findings of the study as it relates to the literature presented in chapter two, implications, reflections, and suggestions for future research.

Results of the study were generated from data collected and analyzed following interviews with six African American male participants, ages 18-24, who identified as street smart and dropped out of school. The prevailing research questions were: 1) How do African American males define "street smarts?" 2) How do African American males define "book smarts?" 3) What are the similarities and differences between the two definitions? 4) What experiences did participants have in school that honored or disparaged their alternate intelligence or street smarts? 5) What, if any, influences did their experiences related to street smarts in school affect their decision to drop out of school? Data were coded and analyzed according to Morrissette's (1999) seven-step method for phenomenological research, and three themes emerged: intelligence, support (support/lack of support), and self-sufficient.

<div align="center">Findings and Themes</div>

Intelligence

Gardner (1999) proposed that everyone is intelligent, however, may differ among various *types* of intelligences. According to the literature, students have a number of intelligences, however many are not recognized or valued, as they do not resemble the types of intelligences (i.e., "book smarts") valued in traditional academic contexts (Gardner, 2011; Kezar, 2001; McClellan & Conti, 2008; Sternberg, 2006). The theoretical framework for the study was according to Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence, of which he proposed three parts: analytical, creative, and practical (Sternberg, 1985, 1997; Tigner & Tigner, 2000). The focus of the study was practical intelligence, as it is descriptive of the type of intelligence those who are street smart embody. Practical intelligence, also known as street smarts, refers to a type of contextual

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intelligence, and consists of one's ability to comprehend, solve, and navigate through/adapt to everyday situations (Sternberg, 1985, 1997; Tigner & Tigner, 2000; Wagner & Sternberg, 1990). Gardner's and Sternberg's theories of intelligence provide validation for alternate types of intelligences, such as street smarts, where it may otherwise be neglected. Hatt (2007) and Nieto & Bode (2001), assert that students may drop out of school when they feel as though their intelligences are undervalued or neglected. In a study conducted by Hatt (2007) on street smarts versus book smarts among urban youth, the author found that students who identified as street smart, eventually dropped out of school because they felt that type of intelligence was not valued or needed in school. Results from the current study found that participants expressed similar experiences. For example, when asked if he felt his street smarts were appreciated in school, Cedric stated, "as far as like being acknowledged [street smarts] by teachers- it really wasn't there… not in school. They weren't needed in school…" Michael shared, "street smarts weren't looked upon happily. They basically tried to discredit it and told me that I needed a good quality education if I ever wanted to be something in life." Both participants' definition of street smarts included a type of intelligence, however, they both communicated that their street smarts were not appreciated.

Hatt (2007) argued that students are often not allowed to be both street and book smart in school. Dre expressed that his street smarts were something only exhibited outside of school- "It's like an on and off switch. When you're at school, you switch over to book smarts. I wasn't the type of person to take street smarts there, you know? I would have street smarts out and about with my friends, but I didn't take it into class with me."

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Cedric stated, "…school- it's a place for book smarts, not street smarts." Responses from both participants suggested that they did not feel their street smarts *could* be exhibited inside of school. Perhaps they felt they could not be both, and had to choose "book smarts" in school while disowning his street smarts. The author also noted that when students are viewed as failures, they are often forced to adopt street smarts to get what they want out of life and be successful. Dre stated, "how they taught, made you want to give up and take the knowledge you've learned in the streets, and just go with that... I was tired of the way things worked in the school system. It seemed like it was just about talking about different things that I wasn't going to need in life."

Self-Sufficient

In a study conducted by Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn (2007), the authors defined street smarts as having the "skills necessary to avoid dangerous situations, locate resources, determine who to trust, and adapt to the social structures and culture of street economies." (p. 30). Raterink (2001) found that participants attributed characteristics such as taking responsibility, being confident, being able to adapt, and being a quick thinker, to being successful in high school, which were also characteristics of being street smart. Characteristics of street smarts also included the ability to differentiate between those who could be trusted and those who could not, as well as being slow to develop relationships. Participants in the current study shared similar definitions, including being able to look at a crowd and determine whether or not to go near it. They also described being self-reliant and being able to provide for self and family as characteristics of street smarts. A few of the participants expressed that making money to provide for others, was highly important, for some, even more than school.

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Support

The support theme included sub-themes of support and lack of support, with lack of support being the most prevalent. A few of the participants communicated isolated instances of support from faculty or staff, however, none significant enough that they felt an overall sense of support, or enough to remain in school. Most of the participants conveyed experiencing a lack of support, which contributed to their decision to eventually drop out of school. Although all of them reported having street smarts, none of them reported feeling that their street smarts were valued or appreciated. In Sternberg's (2006) study on recognizing neglected strengths, the author asserted that students who are not a part of the majority culture, often bring with them knowledge and strengths that are culturally relevant but are neglected in school. When that type of knowledge (e.g., street smarts) is not acknowledged, valued, or practically applied, students are deprived of opportunities for learning and often feel underappreciated, which then increases the likelihood of dropping out (Hatt, 2007; Nieto & Bode, 2011). In Hatt's (2007) study, the author found that participants who identified as street smart, reported dropping out because they felt they were not book smart, which was the only type intelligence valued in school.

Implications for School Counselors

The results of the current study will provide suggestions on how school counselors can collaborate with students and other stakeholders through the delivery system in order to increase achievement and success among street smart students, and decrease the likelihood of dropping out of school. Suggestions on how school counselors can act as advocates on behalf of street smart students, in dropout prevention will also be

provided. Participants in the current study expressed that their street smarts were not appreciated or acknowledged, and some felt that it was not even acceptable to show or use their street smarts in school. How can school counselors recognize and advocate for street smart students? What can a counselor do to help those students use their assets in school and help them feel like they belong?

Results from the study suggest that school counselors must first recognize street smarts as a type of intelligence. Research shows that street smarts include a type of practical intelligence that includes learning through experience, having situational awareness, and the ability to adapt to environmental and situational contexts (Sternberg, 1985, 1997; Tigner & Tigner, 2000; Wagner & Sternberg, 1990). To recognize street smart intelligence, one must first validate it as a type of intelligence and style of learning as opposed to being characteristic of someone who spends a lot of time "in the streets." The participants in the current study identify as street smart, which means it's a part of their identities- it's a part of who they are. Acknowledging that part of students' identity is essential in making them feel as though their style of learning is recognized and valued. Results of the study suggest that to identify characteristics in the street smart student, counselors should look for students who are social and outgoing outside of class but may be introverted in class. Such students may also be good at talking their way out of situations and have the "gift of gab." Street smart students may also include students who have gifts/talents in other areas such as those who are musically or kinesthetically inclined.

Once a school counselor recognizes and validates street smarts as a type of intelligence what can he/she do to acknowledge street smart students and learn about

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what is means to be street smart? The same way one might go about learning about any culture- simply ask, engage in dialogue, and have conversations about it. A high school counselor for example, might form a group of students within the school who self-identify as street smart and explore what that means to them. Similar to the current study, the counselor may explore how students define street smarts. How do they define book smarts? What are specific street smart characteristics? What suggestions might they have about what teachers, counselors, etc. can do to show acknowledgement and appreciation of students' street smart characteristics? Counselors could use the responses to compile data regarding best practices for identification of street smart students and using their knowledge and strengths to provide culturally relevant instruction. School counselors might also help street students recognize how their skills outside of school may be transferrable to skills that can be used inside of school. For example, a street smart student may be great at networking and leading among social groups outside of school. A counselor may encourage that student to join a club or organization in which he/or she uses those same skills to take on a leadership role within the group. Counselors might use statements from participants in this study, to find out more about street smart characteristics outside of school. For example, Michael expressed that having street smarts means that one can recognize things that the average person would not recognize. Counselors should ask students about things that they are able to pick up on that others may not, and then show them how those recognition skills can be transferrable to academic contexts. Counselors should also meet with students and ask them about things they do outside of school, skills they use, etc. and work with them to apply those same skills in school. A couple of the participants talked about how they were able to make

money outside of school. A counselor might talk with a similar student about how he/she is able to keep a system of accounting, checks and balances, etc. and show how those same skills can be used in mathematics. Counselors should also give attention to students who may be failing. Tevin shared that he felt discouraged about his low grades and not knowing how many credits he had/needed, and the lack of support to help him figure it all out was a part of the reason for his dropping out of school. Even though he did not feel successful in school, he felt that his street smarts allowed him to be successful outside of school. When counselors meet with students to discuss grades, credits, etc., a part of that consultation should include dialogue about successes outside of school. Inquire about how they are able to make those successes happen. Ask about the specific skills used to make them successful outside of school, and create a plan to help students transfer those same skills to use in their area(s) of weakness. A student who sees the value and transferability of his/her skills may be more likely to feel a part of the larger school culture, which may in turn transfer to academic contexts. Lastly, school counselors must share information received from students and data results, with teachers in particular, as students spend the majority of their time in the classroom. A workshop would be a great opportunity for counselors to share how teachers might recognize street smart characteristics and skills in students and how they can use those to help students learn.

<center>Delivery System</center>

The delivery component of the ASCA National Model addresses methods of implementing the comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors provide indirect student services as a means to support student success and achievement to promote equity and access for all students. While students reap the benefits of indirect

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services, school counselors work with others inside and outside of the school to deliver these services. "School counselors may interact with parents, teachers, administrators, school staff and community stakeholders in order to promote student achievement for a specific student or to promote systemic change to address the needs of underachieving or underrepresented groups of students in the school." (p. 87). Indirect services are services provided on behalf of the students as a result of the counselor's interactions with others through referrals, consultation, and collaboration.

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

Bryan (2005) suggested that school counselors, particularly those in urban school settings, can act as collaborators by establishing partnerships among school personnel, families, and community entities. Lee (2005) suggested that school counselors should collaborate with business, religious, and political entities in urban settings, as well as with teachers, administrators and families to meet students where they are culturally. The author also noted that school counselors in urban schools, must work against factors that are more challenging than those in suburban or rural settings. One of the characteristics of urban settings noted by the author was a "high concentration of people of color", which suggests that school counselors working with African American male students are faced with additional challenges. The author suggested that school counselors must come from a systems perspective in order to counter the issues that confront youth in urban settings. Lee stated,

> Urban school counselors must adopt a systemic perspective with respect to their
> helping roles and functions. Rather than focus exclusively on the etiology of
> problems originating with students, counselors should make the urban systems in

which young people must develop and function also a center of attention for programmed intervention. Adopting a systemic perspective demands that counselors develop an understanding of important urban systems and how they interact to affect student development. These include the educational system, the family system, the political system, the criminal justice system, and the social welfare system. (p.186)

Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) suggested that counselors in high-poverty schools have the responsibility of additional roles. Such roles include: (a) serving as a cultural bridge between teachers and students (b) functioning as a pedagogical partner with teachers by connecting the curriculum more directly to students' lives, and (c) teaming with teachers to create a more welcoming, family-centric school climate. The author's noted that school counselors can work with teachers to learn more about the various social and linguistic practices apart of students' homes and communities.

Lee (2005) noted that school counselors in urban settings should be leaders in developing initiatives that promote student achievement. The majority of participants in the current study did not know who the school counselor was, a couple of them did not know who the "school" counselor was, but was able to recall him/her when prompted by the title of "guidance" counselor, and one knew the school counselor but only saw her for scheduling. Such findings suggest that any efforts to collaborate with students, parents, administrators, community, etc. must begin with clear identification of the school counselor(s), the roles of the counselor, along with the purpose and functions of the school counseling program. It is vital that school counselors increase their efforts to be more visible and accessible to students. High school students who are aware of the school

counselors, are more likely to view them as resources for scheduling and other administrative tasks. ASCA (2012) recommends that school counselors spend 80 percent of their time in direct and indirect services to students, including individual student planning and responsive services that help students develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Carving out more time during the day for direct services and less administrative duties may require school counselors to advocate for the profession, which in turn allows more opportunities to advocate on behalf of students.

<center>Advocacy</center>

According to the ASCA National Model (2012), "Because school counseling cuts across all curricular areas, school counselors often are the only adults who have a big picture of the students; therefore school counselors need to advocate for their students to allow students to become successful. That advocacy and other work of school counselors should lead to changes in the school culture to create the optimal environment for learning. (p. xi)

> As educational leaders, school counselors are ideally situated to serve as advocates for every student in meeting high academic, career and personal/social standards. Advocating for the academic achievement of every student is a key role of school counselors and places them at the forefront of efforts to promote school reform. To promote student achievement, school counselors advocate for students' academic, career and personal/social development needs and work to ensure these needs are addressed throughout the K-12 school experience. School counselors believe, support and promote every student's opportunity to achieve success in school. (ASCA, 2012 p. 4)

<center>69</center>

School counselors also serve as advocates by working with school faculty/staff, parents/family, and community members to remove barriers to student success and achievement, especially for minority students in low-income, urban schools (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Bryan, 2005; Lee 2005). Bryan suggests that counselors can educate teachers, administrators, and other school staff, about those barriers through professional development and other staff training.

Taking on the advocate role requires a shift in thinking and practice, as advocacy is a role not historically held by school counselors (Bemak & Chung, 2005). In an article by Bemak and Chung (2005), the authors explored advocacy as a critical role for urban school counselors, and provided suggestions for training and practice. The authors shared that the one of the challenges school counselors may face in the shift to advocacy, is maintaining a healthy balance between supporting the causes for unfair practices and a healthy relationship with principals and administrators. The authors proposed three levels of training in order for school counselors to become effective in their role as advocates: pre-service, in-service, and supervision. Prior to entering into the field, school counselors can gain pre-service training through counselor preparation and training programs that include an advocacy component as a part of the curriculum. Those actively practicing as school counselors can participate in and provide in-service training on specific issues impacting students. The third level of training is through supervision that takes place with a supervisor who includes advocacy as a part of the supervision experience. Lee (2005) noted that adopting a systems perspective means acting as an advocate. As advocates, urban school counselors become systemic change agents, working to impact urban social

systems in ways that will ultimately benefit the students with whom they work (Lee, 2005).

Dahir and Stone (2009) suggested that school counselors serve as advocates for social justice in eliminating the achievement gap among students, particularly those who are underserved and underrepresented. The authors noted that school counselors should engage in data-informed practices through action research, to demonstrate accountability for student achievement and individual student success. The authors propose a six-step action research model called MEASRUE (mission, elements, analyze, stakeholders unite, results, and educate). The model serves as a guide for school counselors to use data in order to identify a problem or need for improvement, devise and implement an action plan, and monitor results. In this model, the counselor serves as a collaborator, to work with parents, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders, to focus on data, such as graduation rates. The authors propose the following through MEASURE:

> *Mission*: Connect the comprehensive K–12 school counseling program to the
> mission of the school and to the goals of the annual school improvement plan.
> *Elements*: Identify the critical data elements that are important to the internal and
> external stakeholders.
> *Analyze*: Discuss carefully which elements need to be aggregated or disaggregated
> and why. Analysis will determine the institutional or environmental barriers that
> may be impeding student achievement and adversely influencing the data
> elements.
> *Stakeholders unite*: Determine which stakeholders need to be involved in
> addressing these school-improvement issues and unite to develop strategies.

These individuals will collaborate to create an action plan, and all concerned

members of the internal and external school community should be included.

Results: Describe the outcomes of the collaborative efforts that delivered

interventions and strategies to move the critical data elements in a positive

direction.

Educate: Show the positive impact the school counseling program has on student

achievement and on the goals of each school's improvement plan. Publicizing the

results of an effective school counseling program is a vital step in the

accountability process. (p. 14).

The ASCA National Model (2012) includes advocacy competencies as examples

of how school counselors can act as advocates for students, both on a micro and macro

level, within the delivery system (direct and indirect student services). Competencies

include: acting with students (student empowerment) and acting on behalf of students

(student advocacy, school/community collaboration, systems advocacy, public

information, social/political advocacy).

<div align="center">Future Research</div>

Results of the current study suggested that failing to identify and provide

culturally relevant instruction tailored to students' strengths and street smart intelligence,

may contribute to those students dropping out of school. Future research may address

limitations that were presented in the current study. One limitation in the current study

was the focus on males only. Future research may include experiences of street smart

females as well, as the experiences of females may be significantly different. The

participants were selected using the snowball sampling method, in which participants are

more likely to have more similarities than those from a broader participant pool. Future research may include participants selected from school counselor recommendations. Another limitation was that the accounts of experiences were from participants who dropped out of school. Because they have been out of school for a number of years, less accurate accounts of experiences may have provided a limitation. A future study may include investigating the experiences of street smart students who are currently in high school and who may be at-risk of dropping out as opposed to those who have already dropped out. Experiences of participants from other racial/ethnic minority groups may also be explored. The experiences of Latino/Latina students who identify as street smart may be different from African American students. Participants in other geographical locations may differ from those located in South Carolina, and should also be explored. Future studies may suggest implications for teachers, particularly with the identification of street smart students and practices for instruction.

<div align="center">Researcher Reflections</div>

The research topic was chosen because of the researcher's experience working with incarcerated male high school students who identify as street smart. Conversations with students regarding post-release career plans, often included descriptions of being street smart as a type of intelligence similar to or opposite of book smart. Prior to engaging in the interviews, I had to examine my biases, assumptions, and preconceived notions, which are inevitable in qualitative research. Peshkin (1988) described a researcher's subjectivity as a "garment that cannot be removed…insistently present in both the research and nonresearch aspects of our life." (p.17). To monitor my subjectivity, I used field notes and maintained a journal to record thoughts, reactions, and

reflections throughout the study. Through the process, I developed a greater appreciation of qualitative research, particularly phenomenology, as I was able to see the richness and value of accounts that can only be gathered through actual experiences. The experiences shared by participants greatly increased my awareness of a type of intelligence (i.e., street smarts) that many people have, but rarely [formally] identified or acknowledged and valued in academic contexts. Data from the study provide support for school counselors to take on roles beyond the traditional, to identify and advocate for street smart students.

Summary

This study investigated the experiences of street smart African American male students who dropped out of high school. The purpose was to provide implications for school counselors and provide suggestions for identifying, collaborating with, and advocating for, street smart students in order to prevent those students from dropping out of school. Results of the study from six phenomenological interviews, yielded three themes and two sub-themes: intelligence, support (support and lack of support), and self-sufficient. Although two of the participants reported a few isolated incidences of support, all of them communicated an overall lack of support and appreciation of their street smarts, which contributed to their decision to drop out of school. Further research is needed to provide additional insight into the world and experiences of street smart students, as they are an underrepresented population. Implications from the study provide school counselors with essential information to effectively serve and advocate for students who identify as street smart.

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