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## African American Pastors and Their Perceptions of Professional School Counseling

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AFRICAN AMERICAN PASTORS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL  
SCHOOL COUNSELING

By

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B.A., University of Virginia, 2005  
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April 2015

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **AFRICAN AMERICAN PASTORS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELING**

Krystal L. Freeman

Old Dominion University, 2015

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The Black Church and its pastors are important in the African American community, and influence many aspects of daily life including education. There is a gap in the literature concerning professional school counselors' specific interaction with African American pastors. This phenomenological study examined the experiences of ten African American pastors regarding professional school counseling, including referral, collaboration, and consultation. The results highlighted three emerging themes: school counseling experiences, barriers to collaboration, and clergy-school collaboration. School counseling experiences focused on personal and professional experiences. Barriers to collaboration included themes such as separation of church and state and lack of visibility. Finally, clergy-school collaboration included outreach and resources. The implications from this study suggest a lack of understanding of all involved. The implications also suggest a willingness to collaborate.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“For every mountain You’ve brought me over....for every trial You’ve seen me through...for every test...hallelujah. For this I give You praise.” Thank You Jesus.

Mommy and Daddy: thank you for everything. Thanks for the safe place to rest, the safe place to vent, and the safe place to cry. Most of all, thank you for training me up in the way I should go and for teaching me that Jesus is and always will be the Answer. I love you.

Keith: a hug from you always makes everything all right. Thanks for making me smile when I wanted to sigh. You are the best brother/twin I could have ever received. I love you.

My grandparents: I know that your prayers kept me strengthened. Thank you for everything you’ve done for me. Thank you for teaching and reminding me to hold on to God’s unchanging hand. I love you.

My extended family and friends: Thank you for keeping me as sane as possible. Family gatherings, phone calls/texts, etc. were all so appreciated. I love you all...

Hiawatha: I am reminded how much God loves me and how highly He thinks of me every time I look at you, for I know He created us for each other. From *A Counselor’s View of Italy* to forever...I love you.

Dr. Hoquee: your guidance and confidence in me helped me to get through this work. Thank you for taking me on and keeping me on task. Thank you for including me in your professional efforts and showing me the ropes. You’re my favorite!!!

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In loving memory of my grandfathers, Bishop Herman Clark, Sr. and Raleigh Freeman, and my uncle Dr. Vernon L. Clark... I love and miss you all so very dearly. “‘Til we meet at Jesus’ feet....”

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

The Black Church is described as “the pulse of the African American community, attending to the social, psychological, and religious needs of African Americans” (Adksion-Bradley, Johnson, Sanders, Duncan, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2005, p. 147). The Black Church sparked the Civil Rights movement and produced world leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, Sr., and United States Ambassador Andrew Young (Hawkins, 2005, Morris, 1984). Historically, the Christian church has been central to the African American community and influenced how it tends to think, behave, and act (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991). African American worship styles and practices are unique and have roots in African traditions (Edwards, 2009). As a result, the African American pastor is extremely influential in the everyday lives of African Americans. Since the days of slavery, the African American community has turned to the leadership of the clergy to be a guide socially, politically, psychologically, and even financially (Taylor, 2002).

As leader of the African American church, the African American pastor often shepherds his congregation in caring for their physical, emotional, spiritual, and economic health. African American pastors are also influential when it comes to caring for congregants’ mental health needs (Young, Griffith, & Williams, 2003). Research has been done on pastoral counseling and the role African American pastors play in their church mental health (Stansbury, Harley, King, Nelson, & Speight, 2010), yet no research speaks to professional school counseling and African American pastors. The missing piece is literature determining what influences their beliefs about professional school counseling. This phenomenological study attempts to begin the conversation between African American pastors and professional school counseling.

## **Brief Summary of Literature**

A copious amount of literature surrounding African American Christians and professional counseling highlights the reasons why African American Christians will not seek professional counseling (Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2010; Alvidrez, 1999; Chatters, Mathis, Woodward, Taylor, Neighbors, & Grayman, 2011; Constantine, 2000; Ennis, Ennis, Durodoye, Ennis-Cole, & Bolden, 2004; Stansbury, Harley, King, Nelson, & Speight, 2012). Allen, Davey, and Davey (2010) conducted a quantitative study at a Black Baptist mega-church (11,000 congregants) examining African American clergy members' attitudes and beliefs about mental health counseling. They sought to recruit participants from three indicated levels of church leadership (associate pastors/ministers, deacons/deaconesses, and congregational caregivers) and evaluate the differences in attitudes toward mental health across these levels. The church used for this sample offered its congregants up to ten free counseling sessions with lay and pastoral counselors. The lay and pastoral counselors all had mental health backgrounds (e.g., social work and psychologists). The original sample included 25 associate pastors/ministers, 50 deacons/deaconesses, and 200 congregational caregivers. The final purposive sample consisted of 112 respondents (22 associate pastors/ministers, 34 deacons/deaconesses, and 56 congregation caregivers). Participants answered the National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (NSAL) and four questions created to examine attitudes about referring congregants to outside mental health services compared to their immediate church supervisor and the senior pastor. Findings indicated a willingness to work with professional counselors to meet the needs of the church members, yet the church leaders that were furthest from the senior pastor had the least favorable views about outside mental health services for congregants. This study not only neglected to examine the senior pastor's views on outside mental health services, but it

neglected to examine the church leaders' attitudes and beliefs about referring congregants to professional school counseling services. My phenomenological study gives the senior pastor a platform to share his or her views about professional school counseling. Allen et al.'s (2010) article offered reasons some African Americans would not seek counseling from their pastors/clergy members: marital issues, everyday issues, erectile dysfunction, sexual/domestic violence, and substance/drug abuse. There is no indication in the research that African American pastors encouraged or discouraged congregants from addressing these issues within the realm of professional mental health counseling.

African Americans are an underserved population with regard to mental health (Constantine, 2000; Gary, 2005). The church is seen as a refuge in the African American community, where all needs can be serviced, including mental health (Allen et al., 2010). Due to this importance, pastors are seen as authority figures (Farris, 2006). The pastor's beliefs about mental health and help-seeking affect the congregation's beliefs about mental health and help-seeking (Neighbors, Musick, & Williams, 1998; Payne, 2008). Black clergy believe they are more qualified than mental health counselors to aid congregants due to the perceived ignorance of spiritual issues on the counselors' parts (Neighbors et al., 1998). Black clergy also see poor relationships with God as a major cause of mental health, rather than the biomedical concept of the professional mental health field (Neighbors et al., 1998). Payne's (2008) study examining 10 sermons given by African American pastors reiterated this phenomenon of seeking God rather than professional mental health services.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework includes the purpose for the study, a description of the topic, and the significance of the study. It is the concepts, theories, personal and professional

assumptions, and prior research that collectively informs the topic (Maxwell, 2005). This study will examine African American pastors' perceptions of professional school counseling.

Prior research has examined African American pastors' beliefs with regard to mental health, education, and professional help-seeking (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Vassol, 2005). General counseling literature discusses the reluctance of African American Christians to seek professional services for mental health needs (Breland-Noble, Bell, & Nicolas, 2006; Constantine, 2000; Lesser et al, 2010; Williams, 2011). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning African American pastors' beliefs about professional school counseling. The topic for the current study came about as I studied the research and realized this significant gap.

The researcher's assumptions, expectations, and biases and specific interconnections among ideas comprise experiential knowledge (Hays & Singh, 2012). Gould and Swoboda both said a passion for one's research is a critical skill (Laureate Education, Inc., 2008). I have a passion for my community and my chosen profession, and I want them to integrate effectively. As both an African American active Christian and a professional school counselor, I have clear biases and assumptions about bridging the two worlds based on my lived experiences. My assumptions, expectations, and biases as a researcher are clearly documented via bracketing, memos, and reflexive journaling.

I operated from an ontological philosophical perspective. Ontology allows for subjective research about some idea of truth in context (Hays & Singh, 2012). It is difficult to objectively research a topic about phenomena that developed my personal and professional selves. There are multiple ideas about African American Christians and mental health, and ontology allows the discussion of the subjective realities of these ideas. Ontology will also allow for the participants' subjective experiences with professional school counseling to be uncovered. This study will also

operate from an emic viewpoint rather than an etic viewpoint. An emic viewpoint will allow for the examination of the subculture of pastors within the larger African American community and their experiences with professional school counseling in order to derive meaningful concepts. An etic viewpoint would mandate the examination of faith leaders in several different ethnic communities, such as Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, etc. (Korn, 2001; Mio, Barker-Hackett, & Tumambling, 2006).

Social constructivism deals largely within a cultural context, and the researcher works with the participants to describe, comprehend, and solve the research problem (Hays & Singh, 2012). African Americans respond well to telling their story rather than having their story told for them (Barnes, 2005), and phenomenology is a social constructivist research methodology (Hays & Wood, 2011). I chose social constructivism rather than positivism because positivism subscribes to the notion that there is one universal truth as opposed to multiple truths, thus limiting the applicability of research to underrepresented groups (Hays & Wood, 2011). Discovering how to integrate professional school counseling with the African American religious experience is best told qualitatively because it is difficult to quantify something so personal. My research topic deals with my African American Christian culture and my professional school counseling culture, and I could not objectively study these two phenomena. This research paradigm resonates with me because it allows me to operate within my cultures while building a bridge between the two.

### **Rationale for Study**

There have been several studies examining African Americans, the church, and professional counseling (Adksion-Bradley, Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2010; Hankerson & Weissman, 2012; Johnson, Sanders, Duncan, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). There have been

studies examining the beliefs of African American pastors and collaboration as they relate to professional counseling (Vassol, 2005). However, there are no studies examining beliefs and collaboration regarding professional school counseling.

Vassol (2005) examined African American pastors' perceptions of their congregants' mental health needs. The findings of this study suggested willingness on the part of African American pastors to refer and collaborate with mental health professionals in order to meet congregants' needs (Vassol, 2005). While this study is an important foundation for working with African American pastors and mental health professionals, it does not discuss referral to school counselors. The current study expands upon Vassol's (2005) study and incorporates professional school counseling.

Fundamentalist Christians tend to isolate themselves from secular influences (Ammerman, 1991; Kellestedt & Smidt, 1991; Ostow, 1990; Spinney, 1991), and mental health is seen as secular in many fundamentalist Christian circles (Sullivan, Pyne, Cheney, Hunt, Haynes, & Sullivan, 2013). Faith communities and African American communities tend to mistrust mental health professionals (Gary, 2005; Garzon & Tilley, 2009; Hannon & Howie, 1994).

While there is literature surrounding African American pastors' beliefs about mental health counseling, there is little to no literature discussing their beliefs about school counseling. McCray, Grant, and Beachum (2010) discuss the importance of the church and religion to most African American schoolchildren, yet the role of school counselors has not been broached. This is important because the distinct nature of professional school counseling and its role in the schools directly influence all children, including those African American children heavily involved in the Black Church. Copeland (2006) noted that African American youth are directly



influenced by their families, community, and the church. This study provides information on how African American pastors perceive professional school counseling and may highlight areas in which African American pastors need further education and information about professional school counseling and how it will benefit their congregations.

### **Research questions**

The research questions are:

1. How do African American pastors experience professional school counselors?
2. How do African American pastors experience referral/collaboration/consultation with professional school counselors?

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are a few limitations to this study. First, I did not obtain a representative sample of each denomination. I was unable to get a representative sample of geographic locations outside of the Commonwealth of Virginia. I have personal relationships with most of the participants; therefore, the answers obtained may be due to social desirability. One challenge to conducting a phenomenological study is gathering participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon rather than just a perspective of the phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011). My population of interest may or may not have had direct experiences with professional school counseling. My own experiences and assumptions may be difficult to bracket in order to keep them from influencing the study (Hays & Wood, 2011).

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

- Protestantism -- one of three major branches of Christianity; stemmed from the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century denying the universal authority of the Pope and

affirming the Reformation principles: justification by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, and the belief of the Bible as the only source of revealed truth.

- Fundamentalism -- a religious ideology characterized by adherence to Biblical infallibility, authority, and literalism; enforced by separatism and submission to authority
- African American Church (interchangeable with Black Church) – any predominantly African American Protestant congregation; represents several denominations including Baptist, African Methodist Episcopalian, Church of God in Christ, Seventh-Day Adventist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, and Jehovah’s Witness; “incorporates elements of African religion and Euro-Christianity as well as Islamic and Judaic sectarianism, thus exhibiting syncretism” (Adksion-Bradley et al., 2005, p. 147).
- Denomination – groups within the larger umbrella of Protestantism that have different traditions, practices, and slightly different beliefs.
- Non-denominational – Protestant church that is not affiliated with a particular denomination
- Pastor – primary leader of a church
- Professional School Counselor -- certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master’s degree in school counseling; uniquely qualified to address all students’ academic, career and personal/social development

### **Overview of Methodology**

This study followed a phenomenological design. I used the phenomenological approach to seek out and understand the essence of the participants’ lived experiences instead of seeking large samples (Van Manen, 1990). In order to fully understand and describe the essential meaning of the phenomenon, I used in-depth interviews with participants who have direct

experience with the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). I was the key instrument for collecting data for this study, as this is a defining characteristic and tenant of qualitative research.

In my role as researcher I identified the topic, designed the study, and formulated the research questions and interview protocol. The qualitative design aided me in maintaining flexibility throughout the study. (Creswell, 2007). As a qualitative researcher I was the primary means for data gathering and analysis.

Snowball sampling gave me quick access to the community of African American pastors. The main criteria for participants was the following: identify as African American, and be a pastor of a church in one of the seven denominations acknowledged by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) as being part of the Black Church or a non-denominational church.

One round of semi-structured interviews was the primary method of data collection. I asked each participant for an in-person interview. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed via a transcription service in order to reduce attrition. I followed Moustakas' (1994) data analysis procedures: epoche, bracketing, horizontalization, textural description, structural description, and structural synthesis. Epoche is ensuring my own biases and experiences of the phenomenon do not cloud the data (Hays & Wood, 2011). I fully described and bracketed my personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. I created an a priori codebook using key words. The next step of analysis was horizontalization, which is to develop a list of significant statements found in the interview data (Hays & Wood, 2011). I listed and grouped significant statements, organized them by emerging themes, and analyzed them for meaning and depth. This process is textural description. Structural description is the process by which I sought multiple meanings and tensions in the textural description. The clustered themes or meaning units (Patton, 2002) culminated by way of structural synthesis and yielded the meaning

and essence of the experience. The codebooks aided in the creation of these structural and textural themes. Finally, I created a textural-structural description of participants' reported experiences via a final codebook and concept map (Hays & Wood, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Member checking via email occurred for each transcript, a priori codebook, final codebook, and concept map.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study looks at the perceptions of African American pastors concerning professional school counseling. It attempts to fill in the gap in the literature regarding the African American church and professional school counseling. This study is significant due to the factors that might influence African American pastors' beliefs about professional school counseling. The majority of the literature addresses African American pastors' beliefs about and familiarity with professional mental health counseling. This study also builds on the previous research regarding African Americans, the African American church and pastors, and seeking professional counseling.

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Some in the African American church believe that seeking help outside the church for mental health issues indicates a lack of faith in God (Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2010). Not wanting to appear faithless, many African Americans do not seek professional mental health services (Farris, 2006); instead, they may seek counsel from a clergy member who may or may not have received counseling education. The church is often the first place that many African Americans turn to seek mental health services (Allen et al., 2010). Many churches employ the services of lay counselors; however, lay counselors with no formal counseling education are often involved in caring for emotionally impaired people (Garzon & Tilley, 2009). The African American church is also a place for its congregants to obtain resources outside of counseling. Many churches offer outreach programs targeted toward children and adolescents, such as tutoring services, school supply drives, and mentoring, as part of the overall ministry (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991).

African American pastors may play many important roles in the lives of their congregants including teacher, mentor, and advocate, to name a few (Richardson & June, 1997). African American pastors' beliefs about entities such as professional counseling and professional school counseling strongly influence those of their congregants due to their important status in the African American community (Ennis, Ennis, Durodoye, Ennis-Cole, & Bolden, 2004). Several studies have examined African Americans, the church, and professional counseling (Taylor, Ellison, Chatters, Levin, & Lincoln, 2000). Researchers have also examined the beliefs of African American pastors as they relate to professional counseling; however, no studies have examined what influences these beliefs. Specifically, there are no studies examining African American pastors' beliefs about professional school counseling.

## **Characteristics of the African American Church**

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) defined the Black Church as being comprised of seven major Protestant denominations: African Methodist Episcopal (AME); African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ); Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME); the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Adksion-Bradley, Johnson, Sanders, Duncan, and Holcomb-McCoy (2005) gave a broader definition of the Black Church, noting it includes any predominantly African American congregation. The Black Church as a whole is included in those groups who ascribe to fundamentalist beliefs (Hannon & Howie, 1994; Marsden, 1991). Fundamentalism is defined as subscribing to the following beliefs: (a) the infallibility of the Bible; (b) Scripture as factual history; (c) Jesus Christ's deity and virgin birth; (d) salvation and eternal life as a result of Christ's redemptive sacrifice; (e) Christ's literal Resurrection; (f) Christ's literal return to Earth; (g) evangelism and missions work as necessary; and (h) a spiritually changed life as significant (Marsden, 1991; Miller, 1995).

African American Christianity has a unique style, look, and character, having incorporated traditional African religion, Euro-Christianity, and some elements of Islam and Judaism (Adksion-Bradley et al., 2005). Edwards (2009) provided context for understanding African American Christians and their worship practices by looking at the differences between African American and European American worship practices. The author gathered data from the NCS–National Congregations Study using 907 predominantly African American or European American Christian congregations. The results showed certain worship practices are unique to predominantly African American congregations. African American congregations are eleven

times more likely to participate in acts of spontaneous physical worship than European American congregations are. Younger African American and European American congregations are more likely to participate in verbal affirmations during worship service than older congregations. These unique worship practices, notably spontaneous physical worship, are more to identify ethnic identity than religious identity (Edwards, 2009). Yet this author failed to examine why these specific worship practices are unique to African American churches, and what influence these culturally specific practices have in the congregants' daily lives.

### **Importance of Church to African American Community**

"No other institution in the United States can claim the level of loyalty and attention to African Americans as the institution of the Black Church" (Allen et al., 2010, p. 121). A major part of the African American experience is religion. Eighty-five percent of African Americans count religion as a very important aspect of their lives, and seventy-eight percent of African Americans surveyed identify as Protestants (Boyd-Franklin, 2010).

The church has provided "self-help, social and emotional support, spiritual leadership, financial support, opportunities for educational advancement, and empowerment through participation in social change activities" (Moore, 2003, p. 47) for the African American community since the days of slavery. Nearly nine out of ten African Americans claim the church is a positive aspect in their lives (Allen et al., 2010). The Black Church has a family element to it in that its teachings, beliefs, and rituals overlap with the institution of the African American family (Farris, 2006).

A quantitative study by Ellison and Taylor (1996) examined factors that determine an individual's coping mechanisms using logistic regression. The authors used a multivariate analytical design with data from the National Survey of Black Americans. Results showed

religious coping is employed mostly by African Americans. Bereavement and health issues lead to religious coping, and women use religious coping more than men. These findings correlated with Morris and Robinson's (1996) article discussing coping mechanisms such as prayer. However, neither article discussed the importance of these coping mechanisms in the daily lives of African Americans. Learning about these mechanisms can help professional school counselors understand how their African American students cope with daily life.

A conceptual article by Giger, Appel, Davidhizar, and Davis (2008) examined the importance of the church regarding African American health care and access, noting the African American church can be a great resource in enabling the health care community to reach African Americans that might otherwise not have access to health care services. While the authors thoroughly examined the importance of the church and spirituality in the African American community, the conceptual nature of this piece did not provide any new data to back up its claims. Furthermore, the article did not provide ideas for collaboration within the African American church, nor did it speak to the importance of using the African American church as a means to grant healthcare resources to children.

Those involved in the African American church have learned coping mechanisms for many years (Morris & Robinson, 1996). Singing and praying are cultural norms that are seen as alleviations to the daily pain and suffering that many African Americans experience (Allen et al., 2010). Farris (2006) discusses four ways in which religious participation affects psychological health: (a) producing social resources; (b) providing coping mechanisms; (c) shaping lifestyles and behavior patterns; and (d) enhancing self-esteem and personal control.

### **Influence of Pastors in African American Community**



The church elders, most notably the pastor, are given special honors with regard to helping their congregants make daily life decisions (Farris, 2006). Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) stated, “The Black Church continues to hold the allegiance of large numbers of African Americans and exerts great influence over their behavior” (p. 428). If the church is such an influential medium in the African American community, the pastor would naturally command a large amount of respect. The pastor is “a pivotal figure whose guidance and direction are vital” (Farris, 2006, p. 172) in the African American community. The pastor decides what kinds of programs and resources are offered in the church as well as what the church will offer the surrounding community (Taylor et al., 2000). The pastor has been a natural leader in the African American community from the days of slavery through the days of the Civil Rights movement (Battle, 2006; Gaines, 2010). African Americans tend to be skeptical of leaving their communities for resources, but will take advantage of services if the pastor endorses them (Giger et al., 2008).

### **African Americans and School Counseling**

Fundamentalist Protestants are wary of the professional school counselor, fearing the ignorance of the spiritual values of the students’ family and dismissal of lessons learned through Bible study and regular church attendance (Miller, 1995). African American Christians learn spiritual values through the institution of the Black Church, which has a history of fundamental Protestantism (Hannon & Howie, 1994; Marsden, 1991). Spirituality has long been known as a protective factor and coping mechanism for African Americans (Boyd-Franklin, 2010; Taylor et al., 2000). As this cultural characteristic has been passed from generation to generation, it is not unusual for today’s African American child to be spiritual (Braxton, 2011; Haight, 1998; Jett, 2010). Professional school counselors need to be aware of these spiritual values when dealing

with these children, as well as how to work with the spiritual leaders of these children in the community (Lonberg & Bowen, 2004).

African American parents are especially fearful of stigmatization when it comes to their children being diagnosed with a mental illness. There is differential treatment for African American children who have been identified with emotional/behavioral issues in that they are more likely than European American children to be mislabeled and/or mistreated (Breland-Noble, Bell, & Nicolas, 2006). Many African American parents are not aware of their rights regarding special education (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006), and it is the role of the professional school counselor to advocate for parents and students in the special education process (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). The Black Church can be used as an appropriate venue to begin the holistic interventions needed to navigate the educational system (McCray, Grant, & Beachum, 2010).

Owens, Simmons, Bryant, and Henfield's (2011) phenomenological study explored African American males' perceptions of their school counselors. Findings indicated that while the thirty participants had generally positive views of their school counselors, they desired more direct contact with the school counselors. The participants specifically requested more information regarding academics and higher education. They felt this important aspect of school counselors was missing due to their heavy workload. Lee (2005) noted that school counselors in urban areas often have to deal with issues such as low academic achievement, low family functioning, student transience, student absenteeism, and school violence. In situations like this, school counselors need to be creative in meeting the needs of African American children (Owens et al., 2011). Bemak and Chung (2005) noted the importance of professional school counselors reaching out to community agencies in order to reach every student's need, but did not mention

the church as one of those community agencies. Meeting and collaborating with African American pastors can provide the professional school counselor with an option for disseminating essential information regarding academics and higher education to African American families.

### **African American Pastors' Perceptions of Counseling**

Payne (2008) studied sermons of ten African American Pentecostal pastors to see how they discussed depressive symptoms, if at all. Findings indicate these preachers do not regard depression as an illness, but rather a weakness. Findings also indicate these preachers discourage use of psychiatrists and psychotropic medications. While this study provided some important information on the thoughts of African American pastors regarding depression, Payne (2008) did not utilize many trustworthiness strategies other than having a research team. Stansbury, Harley, King, Nelson, and Speight (2012) discussed African American clergy's thoughts and beliefs about pastoral care and counseling. The researchers interviewed eighteen clergy members of different age groups and educational levels. Two themes emerged from this qualitative study: (1) shepherding the flock and (2) distinguishable concepts with different meaning and functions. Findings also indicated that pastoral care is the most important ministerial duty. Sixteen clergy believe pastoral counseling is different from pastoral care and believe specialized training/licensure is needed for pastoral counseling. Here, the authors begin to explore African American clergy's attitudes and beliefs about some sort of counseling. The current study adds to the discourse through exploring African American pastors' beliefs about the separate entity of professional school counseling.

Allen, Davey, and Davey (2010) examined the role the African American church has played in influencing African American families to seek professional mental health services. They provide an example of a collaborative partnership between mental health services and the

African American church. An African American Baptist church with more than 11,000 congregants was chosen for this study due to the church's hierarchy being similar to other African American churches in the area. The sample population consisted of 22 associate pastors/ministers, 34 deacons/deaconesses, and 56 congregation caregivers/deacon aides. This quantitative cross-sectional study used items from the National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century questionnaire and four transmission questions, which were as follows: (1) In terms of advising congregants, how often does the person you report to talk to you about seeking mental health care services outside the church? (2) In terms of advising congregants, how often do you talk to the person that you report to about seeking mental health care services outside of the church? (3) Compared with your senior pastor, would you say your views toward seeking and using mental health care services outside of the church: are (1 = much more favorable; 2 = more favorable; 3 = about the same; 4 = less favorable; 5 = much less favorable; and 6 = don't know)? and (4) In terms of advising congregants, how much do you agree with the views of your senior pastor about seeking mental health care services outside the church? (Allen et al., 2010). Results indicated lower level church officials (e.g., deacons and trustees) view mental health care less favorably than higher level officials (e.g., associate ministers and pastors). However, there is no information as to why there is this gap between church leaders and their ideas of mental health care. Allen et al. (2010) acknowledged that none of the questions in the study directly asked how likely the participant was to suggest mental health services outside of the church. This study did not ask about referral to services not found directly in the church since professional school counseling services are not church-based. While this study provided valuable information about the views and beliefs of African American church leaders regarding mental health, there were no identifiable trustworthiness strategies. The

current study employs trustworthiness strategies such as member checking in order to make the research as rigorous as possible.

Pastors who have not received postgraduate education receive little training in counseling individuals experiencing basic issues (e.g., marital and family conflict) and are completely unfamiliar with the area of psychopathology and severe mental illness (Farris, 2006; Neighbors et al., 1998). Well-educated pastors are more familiar with mental health issues, participate more in outreach programs, and are more likely to be familiar with mental health services (Taylor et al., 2000). A research study with a random sample of 204 Protestant clergy members asked how they normally help their congregations deal with depression (Payne, 2013). The analysis found that pastors with at least a bachelor's degree in secular education believed they were not well equipped to handle church members with depression, and those without secular education believed they could handle members with depression. Theological education had no influence on decision making. While this study is one of the first to scrutinize how level of education might influence African American pastors' views about mental illness and depression, it did rely on self-report data. Cooks (2010) discussed formal education (and/or lack thereof) for African American pastors. These studies begin to provide information on whether or not education levels influence clergy's beliefs about mental health, yet they do not differentiate among different levels of education (e.g. bachelor's degree, master's degree, doctorate degree.).

### **Role of Pastors in African Americans' Perceptions of Counseling**

Many African Americans perceive mental health issues to have a stigma (Gary, 2005), thinking that those who go to professional mental health care providers are crazy (Neighbors, Musick, & Williams, 1998; Payne, 2008). Randolph-Seng, Nielsen, Bottoms, and Filipas (2008) quantitatively analyzed 358 self-identified Christians' responses to the Christian Orthodoxy

Scale, the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, and the Brief Symptom Inventory. Findings indicated that African Americans with high Christian orthodoxy beliefs have better mental health. Some African American Christians may perceive mental health professionals as less religious than the general population due to the scientific nature of mental health and psychology and are therefore wary of them (Constantine, 2000). In addition, mental health, much like homosexuality and AIDS, is a topic not discussed in the African American community (Alvidrez, 1999; Herek, 1999; Loiacano, 1989).

Boyd-Franklin (2010) mentioned the spiritual resilience of African American Christians in times of hardship, many believing that “God will see me through” and “He never gives you more than you can carry” (p. 989). This brings to mind the idea of John Henryism, referring to the African American legend of a steel driver named John Henry who died of exhaustion after defeating a mechanical steel drill in a contest (Breland-Noble et al., 2006). The idea of John Henryism comes from overcoming obstacles at the expense of physical and psychological health. It makes sense, then, that African Americans would sooner perceive psychological distress as an obstacle that needs to be conquered rather than seek treatment for any psychiatric disorder.

Boyd-Franklin’s (2010) article included a case study of an African American Christian woman with suicidal ideations who was too ashamed and embarrassed to share her woes with church members. Constantine (2000) said the extensive use of prayer in the African American church might reflect an attempt to minimize the stigma of mental health in the community. Adksion-Bradley et al. (2005) examined how counselors can work with the Black Church’s strengths to aid its people.

McRae, Thompson, and Cooper (1999) used group theory as a framework to discuss the idea of the church as a source of psychological support for the African American community.

They conducted seven focus groups from four Baptist churches, two Episcopal churches, and one AME church in the New York metropolitan area (5–17 church members per group; 84 participants). Four themes emerged from the focus groups: spiritual renewal (emotional release that leads to rejuvenation); church as family (group cohesion and a sense of belonging); empowerment (activism); and interpersonal learning (education and socialization). The researchers noted the implications for counselors included more effective communication with African American clients and to develop relationships with African American pastors.

Some studies suggest African Americans are receiving mixed messages from their pastors regarding counseling. Payne (2008) found that pastors discourage their congregants from seeking professional counseling or taking psychiatric medications, and many people may not seek help from their pastors for fear of being seen as spiritually weak (VanderWaal, Hernandez, & Sandman, 2012). Yet it appears that African American pastors are willing to refer their congregants to outside mental health services if warranted (Aten, Topping, Denney, & Bayne, 2010; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Taylor et al., 2000; Vassol, 2005).

### **Collaboration between Professional Counseling and African American Pastors**

Neighbors, Musick, and Williams (1998) used data from 2,107 African Americans' responses to the National Survey of Black Americans to examine factors influencing African Americans to seek help from clergy. Results showed sociocultural factors lead African Americans to seek help from clergy, which correlates with the findings from Taylor et al.'s (2000) literature review. The majority are satisfied with help received from clergy and therefore do not seek help elsewhere. Minorities, including African Americans, do not have equal access to mental health care and are therefore at a disadvantage in this area (Allen et al., 2010). There are limitations in mental health benefits throughout the country, and this may lead people to seek

lay counseling through their church (Garzon & Tilley, 2009). Since the church has served as a resource for African Americans for various reasons, including financial reasons, it is a natural occurrence for African American Christians to turn to their pastors for help with mental health issues.

Pastors have an advantage over professional counselors because church members are more likely to go to their pastors instead of counselors regarding issues of bereavement (Moore, 2003). However, Allen et al. (2010) pointed out the extreme disadvantage pastors have due to the inability to clinically evaluate, diagnose, and treat mental illness. Despite this, African Americans who opt for lay pastoral counseling report satisfaction with the services and indicate no true desire to seek professional counseling (Allen et al., 2010).

Young, Griffith, and Williams (2003) conducted 99 semi-structured interviews with African American pastors to examine the importance of pastoral counseling. The pastors reported an average of six hours of pastoral counseling per week, yet only forty-eight pastors received formal training. There is no mention of actual collaboration between the pastors and the community mental health resources. Chatters, Mattis, Woodward, Taylor, Neighbors, and Grayman (2011) examined the use of clergy among African Americans for serious personal issues by using data from the National Survey of American Life. Results showed that those who are heavily involved in church are more likely to seek help from clergy than from other sources.

Several studies classify the African American church and its pastors as gatekeepers (Farris, 2006; Neighbors, Musick, & Williams, 1998; Young, Griffith, & Williams, 2003). Molock, Matlin, Barksdale, Puri, and Lyles (2008) proposed a gatekeeper suicide prevention model for African American churches to use with the youth: HAVEN--Helping Alleviate Valley Experiences Now. The article showed how a conceptual model for counseling and suicide



prevention can exist effectively in the African American church, but it does not provide information on the effectiveness of such a model. Another limitation of this model is that there is no mention of collaboration with professional school counselors.

Hankerson and Weissman (2012) reviewed several published studies of church-based mental health promotion programs among African Americans to see if using such programs to address the racial gaps in mental health care is a worthwhile undertaking. Results showed that church-based health programs emphasized African American culture and spirituality, and mostly dealt with substance abuse disorders rather than other disorders (e.g., depression). However, this study did not take descriptive articles into account when reviewing these studies. The article also examined studies with low participant numbers, and it failed to conduct a meta-analysis to see if any of the named interventions were effective.

Ennis, Ennis, Durodoye, Ennis-Cole, and Bolden (2004) provided a template of a successful counseling ministry at an African American church. The ministry provided resources for the following: encouragement, addiction, grief, money management, family living, and mental/emotional illness. The counseling ministry staff consists of a director (a professional master's-level counselor with a doctorate in theology and crisis intervention certification), four professional school counselors, one social worker, and a licensed professional counselor. Six staff members are paraprofessional human service providers. Although professional school counselors were on staff, the study does not mention how the professional school counselors used their precise expertise to collaborate with the pastor of that church or the surrounding community.

Many studies call for pastors to be trained in mental health services so they would be conventionally more effective (Adksion-Bradley et al., 2005; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991;

Ennis et al., 2004; Farris, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000). In-services, trainings, and orientations would be a way to bridge the gap between African American pastors and mental health services (Ennis et al., 2004).

### **Collaboration between Schools and African American Pastors**

Title I schools are required to work jointly with family and community members to develop school-family-community involvement programs per the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Title I schools usually house groups protected by NCLB; African Americans and low-income students are specifically named (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Herwantoro, 2005). These partnerships hold the key to meeting the overarching goal of NCLB, which is to shrink the achievement gap between White and poor and minority students in public schools, yet they are often overlooked (Bryan, 2005). Since African Americans place high value on a quality education and church is the cornerstone of the African American community (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991), it makes sense for schools to partner with African American churches to reach every African American student. Many African American churches are located in low socioeconomic neighborhoods (McRoberts, 2001), and many children residing in these areas are the targets of Closing the Gap plans mandated by the American School Counselor Association (Trusty, Mellin, & Herbert, 2008). Partnerships created by the African American pastors and the professional school counselors could prove to be vital to the academic success of African American children and adolescents.

Billingsley and Caldwell's (1991) mixed methods study examined the interaction among the church, the family, and the school in the African American community and designed the Black Church Family Project. The authors looked at a case study involving one African American church in the northeast and data from 315 Northeast African American churches'

responses to the National Survey of Black Americans. The study found that most churches have outreach programs involving families and schools. In fact, 76.5% of the churches collaborated with local schools, and 50% collaborated with mental health agencies. However, none of the churches reported contact with the professional school counselor during any of these collaborations. This study also looked at an outreach program titled Project Spirit. This program consists of fifteen churches in Oakland, CA, Indianapolis, IN, and Atlanta GA, and is comprised of three components: (a) after school/Saturday programs, skills development, and life enhancement sessions; (b) a parent education program; and (c) individual and family counseling training for pastors. The program enlists the help of qualified and certified teachers, but there was no mention of expertise provided by professional school counselors.

### **Conclusion**

Studies reviewed showed the following themes: African American church as fundamentally conservative; church central to the African American community; pastor as leader in the community; collaborations between church, schools, and community; growing acceptance of professional counseling in the Black Church; and pastor as gatekeeper. Many of the studies included data from the southern region of the United States and tended to be qualitative or conceptual in nature. Limitations of these studies included exclusion of the professional school counselor and information from a limited geographical region. While I found several studies that covered mental health and African American pastors, there were none that covered African American pastors and school counseling (Adksion-Bradley et al., 2005; Allen et al., 2010; Farris, 2006; Neighbors et al., 1998; Stansbury & Schumacher, 2008; Stansbury, Harley, King, Nelson, & Speight, 2012; Taylor et al., 2000). It is important to make the distinction between mental health counseling and professional school counseling, noting that school counselors help children

maintain academic, personal/social, and career standards in a school setting while mental health counselors primarily handle serious mental health issues in an agency setting (Neukrug, 2012). As stated earlier, education is important to African American pastors and the African American community. Achievement gaps in the African American community regarding Advanced Placement courses, honors courses, and college acceptance are all areas addressed by the school counselor (Davis, Davis, & Mobley, 2013), yet some African Americans feel neglected by their school counselors in these areas (Owens et al., 2011). Collaboration with African American leaders, especially pastors, can help close these important gaps. The Black Church has historically stepped in to close the education gap; the Black Church founded several historically Black colleges and universities (Abelman, 2013). In addition, spirituality is a major component of African American students and it is important for professional school counselors to work with African American pastors to address this spirituality (Curry, 2010). This topic is important because it can demonstrate for the professional school counselor the influence of pastors in the lives of African Americans.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

Studies about African American pastors and counseling have focused solely on mental health counseling (Adksion-Bradley et al., 2005; Allen et al., 2010; Farris, 2006; Neighbors et al., 1998; Stansbury & Schumacher, 2008; Stansbury, Harley, King, Nelson, & Speight, 2012; Taylor et al., 2000). To date, there have been no known qualitative research studies that focus on African American pastors' perceptions of professional school counseling. I looked at the phenomenon of pastors working interprofessionally with professional school counselors. Specifically, I wanted to understand their experiences with referring, collaborating, and consulting with professional school counselors in various ways. These experiences could take place in a personal context (e.g., regarding their own family members) or a professional context (e.g., regarding their congregants). In order to investigate the phenomenon, I utilized a research method from the qualitative tradition known as phenomenology. In the following sections, I describe the principles of phenomenology and qualitative research methods that shaped the design of this study.

#### **Research Design**

My approach was non-manipulative in nature so that I could study the real-world phenomenon of how the participants experience and perceive school counseling. I used a qualitative research design because it is flexible, therefore aiding with discovering deeper understandings of the phenomenon by allowing more participant voice (Hays & Singh, 2012). Follow-up questions provide participants with an opportunity to expound upon their answers, therefore lending more of their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings to the process through their voices. I used qualitative methods to obtain a detailed understanding of African American pastors' perspectives on professional school counseling. This study explored African American pastors'

experiences with professional school counseling and their experiences with referral, collaboration, and consultation with professional school counselors. The overarching goal of phenomenology is to create a thick and detailed description of the perspectives of those who are experiencing the phenomenon of interest (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Qualitative research was an appropriate methodology for this study because I explored a topic about which little is known (Padgett, 1998). I wanted to know what African American pastors think about school counseling, what they know about it, and what their lived experiences are. I used phenomenological inquiry to elicit my participants' interpretations and perceptions of professional school counseling as it relates to their overall work as pastors in the African American community. Grounded theory seeks to produce a theory rooted in data regarding participant perspectives (Hays & Singh, 2012). There is little to no data regarding African American pastors' perspectives on professional school counseling. I chose phenomenology over grounded theory because it is important to know *how* African American pastors experience professional school counseling before one can understand *why* they experience it in that manner.

The purpose of qualitative methods is not to generalize meaning from a sample to a population, but to provide insights to a particular phenomenon (Patton, 2002). I utilized purposeful sampling to ensure the findings are full of information. I attained thick descriptions from the participants' detailed perspectives and experiences using semi-structured interviews.

According to Patton (2007), it is critical to combine personal experiences and insights with others who share closeness with the phenomenon in order to gain full understanding. While having complete objectivity is not a goal in qualitative studies, it was important for me to reflect on my own perspective regarding the phenomenon to ensure participants' voices were clearly heard (Patton, 2002). I began the epoche process before conducting the research study, which

means bracketing my experiences in order to ensure my own thoughts and beliefs did not interfere with the research itself (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Brief Description of Phenomenology**

The basic purpose of phenomenology is to describe the essence of a phenomenon through individual experiences with that phenomenon. The researcher selects an area of study and utilizes in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest. The researcher looks for themes through analyzing the interviews and other qualitative observations. The themes guide the researcher to develop textural (what the participants experience) and structural (how they experience it terms of the conditions, situations, or context) descriptions and combine those to convey an overall essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007). This realized essence might subsequently provide a guide for decision making and action (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This study aimed to add to the current body of knowledge relating to exploring the experiences and perceptions of African American pastors and professional school counseling.

I tried to examine the perceptions and experiences of African American pastors regarding professional school counseling. Since it is uncertain if these experiences and perceptions are universal or only occur in a specific context, a constructivist perspective is best for this qualitative study because it helps to decipher the difference (Hays & Singh, 2012). African Americans are a diverse group of people; therefore, it is possible there are multiple realities for one phenomenon. Social constructivism allows the researcher to examine the multiple realities of a particular phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). Social constructivism deals largely within a cultural context, and the researcher works with the participants to describe, comprehend, and solve the research problem (Hays & Singh, 2012).

## **Researchable Problem**

Phenomenological research begins with the researcher identifying and selecting a researchable problem. According to Billingsley and Caldwell (1991), pastors in the African American community influence their congregants and aid in making everyday decisions about life in general. The church often plays a crucial role in congregants' education as well (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Moore, 2003). African American churchgoers look to the guidance of their spiritual leaders when it comes to things such as mental health and professional mental health counseling (Vassol, 2005). Some literature addresses African American pastors and the Black Church as it relates to the youth and education (Barnes, 2005; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Bryan, 2005; Cooks, 2010). Congregants of African American pastors seek help from the clergy in dealing with their children and education (Jett, 2010; McCray, Grant, & Beachum, 2010), yet there is a gap in the literature regarding African American pastors and their views of professional school counseling. The purpose of this study was to explore African American pastors' perceptions of professional school counseling.

As noted above, one of the procedures for conducting phenomenological research is recognizing and specifying the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology. I collected data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon by way of in-depth interviews with participants. Demographic forms were collected as an additional source of data.

After I collected data, I coded the text according to sentence groupings, quotes, and other important statements that provided an understanding of how the participants experience the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) recommended taking the important statements and writing a description of the context or setting that influenced the structural and textural description. Moustakas (1994) invited researchers to write about their own experiences as well. I included the



textural and structural descriptions as well as a composite description that presented the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows:

1. How do African American pastors experience professional school counselors?
2. How do African American pastors experience referral/collaboration/consultation with school counselors?

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role was to identify a topic, design the study, and create research questions and an interview protocol. I also built in trustworthiness strategies to minimize personal biases, selective perception, and theoretical assumptions in order to preserve the integrity of the research data that I collected (Patton, 2007). I clearly stated my biases, values, and assumptions at the outset of this study and continued to do so throughout the research process.

### **Researcher Assumptions and Biases**

Participants were selected from pastors of predominantly African American churches throughout a metropolitan area of the Commonwealth of Virginia. It was expected that all of the pastors in the sample identified as African American. Both male and female participants were included in the sample, though it was assumed that most participants would be male due to the male dominance of pastoral leadership in the African American church (Green, 2003). I assumed African American Christians are heavily influenced by their pastors, partaking in worship services and activities advertised by the pastor. It was also assumed that many of the pastors would not be familiar with the term “professional school counselor,” instead being acclimated to the term “guidance counselor.”

I am a 32-year-old African American female who actively practices Christianity within the Black Church. I am also a licensed professional school counselor, a nationally certified counselor, and a nationally certified school counselor. I have practiced Christianity within the Black Church my entire life and believe there is a great advantage for African American pastors in seeking professional counseling and school counseling services. When I first entered the counseling field over eight years ago, I experienced ridicule for my career choice. The belief among certain family members was that my career choice would not benefit African Americans at all because according to them, “Black people do not go to therapy.” I was also told Christians should not participate in any sort of counseling because “Jesus will fix our problems if we just ask Him.” These experiences caused me to believe my participants would have a negative opinion of school counseling and school counselors since African American Christians tend to follow their pastors’ beliefs and thoughts about these things. As I continued my education, I realized African Americans and Christians can benefit greatly from this type of professional care. My education taught me that mental health issues and counseling are not for one particular group of people, but instead are universal. My experiences as a professional school counselor in the public school realm magnified this fact. I address this bias further in this study in order to promote trustworthiness.

### **Trustworthiness Strategies**

I used multiple strategies in order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. I used bracketing to detect and deal with researcher bias as well as to document thought processes throughout, which is step two of the phenomenological research process (Moustakas, 1994). As stated earlier, I began bracketing before beginning data collection in order to thoroughly deal with researcher bias. I engaged in memoing after each data collection to assist with data analysis

and coding. I had a research team to aid in developing the interview protocol and reduce bias for the study. I also met with a peer debriefer after each interview. I participated in member checking regarding the initial transcripts and initial themes via email.

### **Strategies to Maintain Objectivity**

In efforts to maintain empathic neutrality, I did not conceal biases that were the basis for expectations I had for my study. I expected to find that most African American pastors would not be familiar with the role of professional school counselors and the impact they may have on their young congregants. Another bias that I had was that I believed that the majority of the pastors would have some sort of aversion to the counseling field as a whole based on my experiences and the research highlighting African American Christians' distaste for professional counseling.

Several means to maintain objectivity and neutrality were used during the data collection and analysis process. I identified my personal biases and continued to monitor the influences of these biases by keeping a reflexive journal. Additionally, multiple forms of data were collected. I used a demographic form, transcripts from the initial interviews, and emails confirming results. These multiple forms of data allowed me to compare and contrast themes across several mediums and sources.

I was not the sole reviewer of the data. I utilized member checking, a research team, and a peer debriefer to assist with producing the material to guarantee the findings were correct and not limited or affected by my biases. The multiple perspectives in my research analysis advocated for my stance and efforts at maintaining authenticity, trustworthiness, and neutrality throughout the research process. I used a transcription service and coding software to reduce attrition and improve member checking turnaround time.

## **Researcher Subjectivity**

Qualitative research acknowledges and embraces researcher subjectivity, or how the qualitative researcher internally gauges the phenomenon (Schneider, 1999). Advocates of qualitative research assert that attempting to minimize subjectivity aligns qualitative approaches too closely with quantitative paradigms of objective science (Hays & Singh, 2012). In qualitative research, subjectivity is a means to understand the phenomenon more intimately (Patton, 2007).

## **Strategies for Maintaining Subjectivity**

Peshkin (1988) stated that subjectivity should be embraced, as it is an important part of qualitative research. He wrote of the importance of both individual and multiple subjectivities, including the researchers themselves, for their tension-inducing qualities. Tension between the researcher values and the values supported by the subject matter leads to and enhances the nuanced account of the subject matter (Hays & Singh 2012). Trustworthiness occurs as a result of the researcher being an inexperienced inquirer and proactively engaging in participant checks (Hays & Singh, 2012). I used reflexive journaling to explore and identify personal and professional issues that might indicate a lack of neutrality in my data analysis. I explored my own cultural complexities and those of my participants as they might openly and also covertly influence data collection and analysis.

## **Research Plan**

### **Specific Participant Selection Procedures**

The participants were African American pastors from throughout a metropolitan area of the Commonwealth of Virginia, chosen through snowball sampling. All recruited participants were pastors of churches instead of associate ministers. Associate ministers are ordained ministers but serve as support to the pastor and are not in charge of the church. Payne (2009)

defined “pastor” as the leader of a church from twenty-six Protestant denominations. The denominations included in this study are those defined by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) as the seven major denominations of the Black Church (AME, AMEZ, CME, NBC, NBKA, PNBC, and COGIC). Pastors of non-denominational African American churches are also included in this study since African American attendance and participation in non-denominational churches has increased greatly since 1990 (Pew Research Center, 2008). Excluded from the study were pastors or leaders of non-Protestant denominations, including Catholic, Jesus Christ Church of Latter Day Saints, and Jehovah’s Witness. I used a homogenous sample of people who identified as African American pastors because this particular population’s voices have not been heard with regard to professional school counseling.

### **Gaining Entry**

After identifying participants, I gained entry through an initial email invitation (See Appendix A) with potential participants and a follow-up phone call if needed. The initial interview with each participant was conducted in-person. A second contact was via email in which I asked the participant for any additional thoughts.

At the start of the initial interview, I presented and explained the informed consent. After discussing the study and the measures that would be taken to maintain confidentiality, participants were asked to sign the informed consent indicating that they understood the purpose of the study, exactly what was to be expected of them if they chose to participate, and that they agreed to participate in the study.

### **Measures to Ensure Participant Confidentiality and Safety**

Participants’ identities were disguised via a randomly assigned number in order to preserve confidentiality and anonymity. Observation notes, audio-taped interviews, and

transcripts of the interviews are all being kept in a secure location. Individual interviews were audio-taped. A professional transcriptionist, who was instructed to omit all personal identifying information from the typed transcripts, transcribed the auditory recordings. I erased the taped interviews once research was complete. All transcripts, consent forms, and data will be stored in a secure location for seven years, after which time all these items will be destroyed. After completion of the data collection and analysis, participants were emailed a copy of the identified themes and codes and asked to give feedback on their accuracy.

Section G of the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014) outlines the traditional ethical considerations of research, including informed consent, right to privacy, and protection from harm. An application for exempt research was submitted to and approved by the Old Dominion University Darden College Human Subjects Committee prior to collecting data (See Appendix B ).

### **Informed Consent**

Participants must be thoroughly and truthfully informed about the nature and requirements of a research study in order to give consent (ACA, 2014). I engaged with each participant individually via email, in person, and by telephone. The informed consent (See Appendix C) explained the potential benefits and the risks involved, highlighting the voluntary nature of my research. Additionally, I provided an introductory letter via email explaining the purpose of the study.

### **Right to Privacy**

Each recorded interview was assigned an anonymous participant code to maintain confidentiality. I also used a pseudonym for all the participants mentioned in the narrative of the results. I erased the tapes immediately after I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. Transcripts,

field notes, and memos were labeled and are being kept in a locked file. Electronic versions will be kept under double lock that includes a password-protected computer kept in a locked room for five years.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Individual Interviews**

One round of semi-structured interviews was the primary method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews are suitable for a phenomenological study because the flexible interview process allows unexpected themes to emerge (Hays & Singh, 2012). I asked participants for an initial 60-120 minute in-person interview. Before the initial interview, I sent the participants a copy of the interview protocol (See Appendix D) via email so that participants had time to consider initial responses. Questions were added to the protocol as themes emerged that warranted further exploration. Member checking occurred via email, which allowed the participants to share additional thoughts after reviewing the identified themes.

### **Interview Questions**

The following questions were asked in the interview:

1. How long have you been the pastor of your church?
2. Would you consider your church to be fundamental in its beliefs and teachings? Why or why not?
3. To what extent do you see the role of a pastor as being a leader in the African American community? (*prompt: What are some of the ways pastors take charge in the community?*)
4. How do you define professional school counseling? (*prompt: You might know it as guidance counseling.*)

5. What experiences have you had, either personally or professionally, with school counselors? (*prompt: perhaps with your own children or yourself during your school years*)
6. Have you referred any of your congregants to their school counselor? Why or why not? (*prompt: if any of your congregants have had issues at school*)
7. Tell me about your experiences collaborating and/or consulting with professional school counselors. (*prompt: meeting with them, talking with them, etc.*)
8. Tell me about your best experience with professional school counselors.
9. Tell me about your worst experience with professional school counselors.
10. Is there anything you would like to add?

### **Document Reviews**

Each participant completed a Demographics Information Form (See Appendix C). The demographic form provided the following information: age, gender, level of formal education, denomination, and number of years as pastor. This document was included in data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Phenomenological analysis seeks to understand and clarify the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people (Patton, 2002). Phenomenology's entire focus is to understand the depth and meaning of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The first step in phenomenological analysis is called *epoche*, a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment. Epoche helps the researcher to investigate the phenomenon from a fresh and open perspective without imposing meaning too soon. This suspension of judgment is critical in phenomenological investigation and requires the setting aside of the researcher's



personal viewpoint in order to see the experience for itself (Katz, 1987). Epoche helped me to become aware of personal bias and made sure that I eliminated or at least gained clarity about my own preconceived notions.

After epoche, I bracketed. Bracketing is the process in which the researcher's biases, meanings, and preconceptions identified during the epoche phase are removed from the subject matter. Bracketing allows for the phenomenon to be confronted as directly as possible as its own entity, undisturbed by the researcher's experiences. My personal experiences were fully described and bracketed in an attempt to set them aside as much as possible so that the focus would be directed to the participants in the study.

Horizontalization is the process of spreading out the data for examination and then organizing it into meaningful clusters. I developed a list of non-repetitive statements into themes. Once themes were extracted, I used them to develop a textural description of the phenomenon. This textural description provided content and an illustration of what the participants were experiencing (Patton, 2002). Next, I constructed a structural description from the data, which portrayed how the participants' experience what they experience (Patton, 2002).

The "what" and "how" of participants' experiences with the phenomenon were incorporated together in the final stage of data analysis. This process, called structural synthesis, yielded the meanings and essences of the experience.

### **Verification Procedures**

Just as quantitative research is evaluated in terms of its quality and soundness of research design, data collection, and analysis, the term "trustworthiness" is used to evaluate a study's balance, fairness, and comprehensiveness in a qualitative study (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1995) suggested four criteria that combined verify trustworthiness: transferability, credibility,

dependability, and conformability. The following sections describe the verification procedures used for this study.

### **Transferability**

I achieved transferability through detailed descriptions of the participants, settings, and contexts needed for determining the degree to which results were applicable to individuals or the settings in which they work (Hays & Singh, 2012). I provided thorough profiles of each participant, recorded the data collection and analysis steps taken, and compiled an audit trail. These techniques and thick descriptions can help readers decide whether or not the outcomes of this study are transferable to other individuals and contexts. It is best to use multiple cases, informants, and data-collecting methods to strengthen a study's usefulness for other settings (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Credibility**

The credibility of a qualitative study is based on the degree to which the results are believed to be valid. The researcher has to demonstrate that the study is conducted in such a way that the subject is appropriately identified and described in order to be credible (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I engaged in member checking during the interviews and after data analysis via email. I collaborated with a peer debriefer after each interview and during data analysis.

The data came from multiple data sources including transcripts of individual interviews, written communication, and document review. I was not the only one analyzing and comparing the data; I used member checking and shared my collection of data with the study participants and requested feedback on whether the themes and conclusions I initially made accurately reflected their perceptions and perspectives. Lincoln and Guba (1995) encouraged the use of multiple coders to increase the likelihood of the data being an accurate reflection of participant

perceptions. I asked a peer debriefer to investigate my data and to examine it for indications that my biases might influence the data. These techniques aided in establishing the credibility of my study.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to whether or not outcomes of the study are consistent across time and among researchers (Hays & Singh, 2012). Consultations with the participants and peer debriefer were used while reviewing the data analysis for maintaining consistency during the duration of the study. I followed Creswell's (2007) suggestions of persistent observation, learning the culture and building trust with participants.

### **Confirmability**

Hays and Singh (2012) define confirmability as the degree to which findings of a study are genuine reflections of the participants' perspectives and feedback and not a reflection of the researcher's preconceived biases or agenda. I attempted to prevent this by having systematic data collection procedures, multiple sources of data, a reflexive journal, and an audit trail. Raw data such as field notes and transcripts, drafts of data reductions and analysis were all shared with an external auditor for examining whether or not the findings, interpretations, and my conclusions were supported by the data (Creswell, 2007).

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the qualitative research design that I used to explore African American pastors and their perceptions of professional school counseling. This chapter included a rationale for the study, as well as a rationale for using qualitative, phenomenological methodology. This chapter included my research questions, a description of my role as researcher, and data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, this chapter contained a

description of the verification procedures that I adhered to in order to enhance the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research.

## **CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF DATA**

This study was designed to explore African American pastors' experiences and perceptions of professional school counseling, guided by the research questions:

1. How do African American pastors experience professional school counselors?
2. How do African American pastors experience referral/collaboration/consultation with professional school counselors?

Data was collected from participant interviews and shared documents using a phenomenological methodology. The data was then examined for emerging codes and themes in order to create a description of the essence of professional school counseling experienced by African American pastors.

This chapter begins with a summary of the data collection and analysis procedures, followed by a demographic overview of the group of participants. The next section includes a brief profile synopsis of each participant, followed by the results of the study. The meta-themes, themes, and sub-themes that emerged are presented in full detail, and an essence of the phenomenon is also presented. The final section will interpret conclusions from the data analysis.

### **Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

I used snowball and purposive sampling to identify potential participants from a pool of African American pastors from the seven denominations identified by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) as being part of the Black Church. The participants agreed to sit for a 60-120 minute interview and filled out a Participant Demographics Form (See Appendix E).

### **Data Collection**

**Interview.** I scheduled a convenient day, time, and place of the participant's choosing for the interview via email and phone correspondence. I then conducted an interview with each

of the ten participants in this study. I reconfirmed the participants' consent to record the interviews in the email correspondence and indicated that part of my protocol was to have the digital recorder on at the onset of the interview.

Following the initial casual remarks and consent to record, I began to engage with the participant, following the interview protocol. All ten participants completed the Participant Demographics Form prior to the interview.

The interview protocol sought to address the research questions: "How do African American pastors experience professional school counselors?" and "How do African American pastors experience referral/collaboration/consultation with professional school counselors?"

Interview questions from the protocol included:

1. How long have you been the pastor of your church?
2. Would you consider your church to be fundamental in its beliefs and teachings? Why or why not?
3. To what extent do you see the role of a pastor as being a leader in the African American community? *(prompt: What are some of the ways pastors take charge in the community?)*
4. How do you define professional school counseling? *(prompt: You might know it as guidance counseling.)*
5. What experiences have you had, either personally or professionally, with school counselors? *(prompt: perhaps with your own children or yourself during your school years)*
6. Have you referred any of your congregants to their school counselor? Why or why not? *(prompt: if any of your congregants have had issues at school)*

7. Tell me about your experiences collaborating and/or consulting with professional school counselors. (*prompt: meeting with them, talking with them, etc.*)
8. Tell me about your best experience with professional school counselors.
9. Tell me about your worst experience with professional school counselors.
10. Is there anything you would like to add?

I actively listened and responded to the participants attentively in order to comprehend and provoke personal and in-depth explanations of their experiences with the phenomenon. I employed prompts, probes, and follow-up questions to gain clarity and a greater understanding of their responses.

### **Data Analysis Process**

The interviews were digitally recorded and the files were uploaded to a secure drive shared only with the transcription service. The data, which consisted of the interview transcriptions, were then printed for analysis purposes. The data collection took place over a span of three months. Once I collected the data, I reviewed the interview transcripts of each participant separately. I began immersing myself in the data beginning the analysis process first by compiling piles of the raw data. I read the transcripts several times, engaging in epoche and bracketing out as many indicators of my personal experiences and identity as possible. I read through the data again to ensure my bracketing did not leave any of my assumptions and biases. After fully engaging in epoche, my focus was exclusively on the voices of the participants. Next, I used an undetermined amount of time to search each individual interview transcript for words, phrases, and other details and coded them into units of meaning. Significant statements were gathered into meaningful clusters according to their corresponding emerging themes. I developed a codebook for each interview, and common statements from each were assembled

into meaningful structural themes and textural sub-themes. I used the horizontalization process to eliminate overlapping and repetitive statements. The structural themes consisted of descriptions related to the participants' experiences with professional school counseling. The related sub-themes were narratives regarding how the participants experienced professional school counseling. These structural themes and textural sub-themes were synthesized to form an overall portrayal of the essence of professional school counseling from an African American pastor's perspective.

### **Verification Procedures**

#### **Member Checking**

Member checking was done during and after the semi-structured interviews. Member checking allowed me to share findings with participants and receive their feedback to ensure that my interpretations were accurate (Merriam, 2009). While conducting the semi-structured interviews, I engaged in member checking by summarizing participants' responses to ensure that I was correctly capturing the true essence of their experiences and perceptions. This technique of member checking helped the conversation to flow smoothly and allowed participants to feel validated while sharing their stories. It also granted participants the opportunity to correct my incorrect impressions or interpretations of their thoughts. As a final method of member checking I sent each participant a copy of their interview transcription via email (See Appendix F) within a week after transcription was complete and asked them to review them and let me know if any information needed to be added or changed. I sent them a follow-up email (See Appendix G) including a copy of their individual codebooks and themes a week after coding was complete. None of the participants required any additional or changed information.

#### **Bracketing and Reflexive Journaling**



Before collecting data, I bracketed my biases and assumptions to ensure that I was immersing myself within the participants' world with a new perspective (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2002). To further preserve the authenticity of participants' voice I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process so that I could separate my thoughts and gauge how I was being impacted by the research process (Hays & Singh, 2012; Watt, 2007).

### **Thick Description**

I wanted to develop a rich and thick description of the participants' experiences and perceptions by conducting individual and collective analyses of the participants. Deriving a thick description requires the researcher to look beyond participants' reported details and feelings to identify meanings and explanations (Hays & Singh, 2012). Due to this, I reflected upon my interpretation of participants' quotes and the details that they shared. Taking the time to allow for member checking during the interviews, participants' reports of their backgrounds, and following up after each interview allowed me to understand the participants' experiences and perceptions.

### **Audit Trail**

I maintained a thorough audit trail to uphold various elements of the research process and provide a thick description of its findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). In addition, the audit trail includes information about the data collection, analysis, and other important information concerning the research methodology (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The audit trail consisted of the following: semi-structured interview protocol, informed consent forms, participant demographics, bracketing documents, reflexive journals, participants' transcribed interview responses, proof of coding analyses, and the final codebook.

### **Research Team and peer debriefer**

My peer debriefer and research team member was a practicing school counselor in the same geographical area as the participants. He was also a doctoral candidate in a counseling program at another university. I had repeated contact with him in person throughout the data collection and analysis process. I debriefed with him before we analyzed each transcript, and he was beneficial in helping me check my biases and assumptions.

### **Auditor**

My auditor was an assistant professor of communications at a Washington, D.C. area university. We stayed in contact via text, email, and phone throughout the process. I engaged my auditor once data collection and analysis were complete, as her purpose was to detect any bias from either me or my peer debriefer.

## **Demographic Overview**

### **Group Profile**

A demographic portrayal of each participant's personal and professional background is shown in Table 1. Participants completed a Participant Demographics Form prior to the beginning of the semi-structured interview. This section presents a group profile, or an overview of participants as a whole.

Eight participants were male and two participants were female. Six participants fell in the 50-59 age range, two fell in the 40-49 range, and the 30-39 and 60-69 age ranges had one participant each. In terms of years as pastor, three participants fell in the 1-10 range, five fell in the 11-20 range, and two fell in the 31-40 range. Four participants are in the COGIC denomination, three are Baptist, two are non-denominational, and one is AMEZ. In terms of highest level of education completed, one participant completed high school; one completed a bachelor's degree, three completed master's degrees, and five completed doctorate degrees.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Overview

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b># of years as pastor</b>	<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Highest degree completed</b>
<b>DB</b>	Male	50-59	11-20	COGIC	Master's
<b>HK</b>	Male	50-59	21-30	Baptist	Doctorate
<b>MS</b>	Male	50-59	31-40	Baptist	Doctorate
<b>LJ</b>	Male	60-69	31-40	AME Zion	Doctorate
<b>WJ</b>	Male	40-49	1-10	COGIC	Master's
<b>MB</b>	Female	50-59	11-20	Non-denominational	Doctorate
<b>JR</b>	Male	30-39	1-10	Baptist	Master's
<b>PG</b>	Male	50-59	11-20	COGIC	Bachelor's
<b>LA</b>	Male	50-59	11-20	COGIC	High School
<b>CV</b>	Female	40-49	1-10	Non-denominational	Doctorate

### **Individual Profiles**

This section consists of an individual profile of each participant in order to provide the rich and thick description that is a distinguishing tenet of qualitative research. The use of aliases allows for the protection of the participant's anonymity. All participants allowed me to create their pseudonyms.

#### **Participant 1: DB**

DB is a high school English teacher in his fifties who has been a pastor for about 11 years. He has been pastoring in the COGIC denomination for the past seven years and pastored an interdenominational Christian church for four years prior to that. His overall experiences with professional school counseling range from awful to excellent.

DB describes the role of a pastor in the African American community as being a strong leader whose message "is one of liberation. His message is one of forgiveness. His message is one of progressive improvement. All of that is needed in the African American community." DB believes that the pastor is to foster and facilitate spiritual, social, and economic growth in the

community. Pastors “have to somehow make their messages relevant to what people are going through” and must have the ultimate goal to “make a change in their communities.”

When asked to define professional school counseling, DB says school counselors’ training is supported by academic research and practical, real-world experiences. The role of the school counselor is to guide students academically and to help prepare them for life after high school. Interestingly enough, DB acknowledged that while school counselors are trained to help students with emotional issues, they rarely get to exercise those skills.

DB described two negative experiences with school counselors. When he was a high school student, he dealt with counselors that did not encourage him to pursue his career dreams because he was a young African American male. He said the counselors “allowed their perceptions of my race to color what they did and their perceptions of me.” As a high school English teacher, DB expects the counselors to place students who can handle the rigorous work in his honors and Advanced Placement courses. A counselor placed a student in the Advanced Placement course who could not handle the work, and the child subsequently failed. DB describes this incident as “gross incompetence” on the counselor’s part.

DB describes most of his experiences with school counselors as positive pointing out one particular positive experience. He had some trouble with the parent of a student who plagiarized a paper. The counselor and principal supported him in how he dealt with the situation. He considered this to be a great example of teamwork between teachers and counselors. He would love to see a partnership between pastors and school counselors, “but the separation of church and state preempts quite a bit of that.”

#### **Participant 2: HK**

HK is in his fifties and has been a pastor in the Baptist denomination for 22 years. He also serves on a local school board. He describes the pastor's role as being interdisciplinary. He says pastors "have to be preachers, psychologists, economists, social workers, sociologists." Specifically in the African American community, "the Black pastor has had to address not just those spiritual issues, but those social and communal and economic and justice issues that also impact and affect our well-being and ability to survive and thrive in this country."

HK describes the role of a school counselor as one of guidance and support for students regarding appropriate coursework for "graduation and for the maximizing of their potential." He mentioned the wraparound services that address academic, personal, emotional, and physical needs. HK does not interact with the schools much as a pastor because there are others in the church who handle such situations on behalf of the students in the congregation. HK's son is the youth pastor of the church, and HK's wife is a social work doctoral student. HK entrusts the care of the children in the congregation to these two, although he has referred parents in the church to the school counselor if there were school concerns. He does not interact with the school counselors in his role as a school board member because the school board deals primarily with the school division leaders. HK's oldest grandchild is in middle school, and he has had an excellent working relationship with her school counselor.

HK believes there can be a great working relationship between schools, principals, school counselors, and the church. He says churches can provide resources such as "buildings where before and after school programs can be had and tutoring, to reading buddies, to mentors, to supplies, teacher supplies, back to school supplies, uniforms, as well as counseling for families, and parenting classes." HK also says, "Black pastors have never been exposed to, introduced to, or invited to engage at that level or in that particular arena with families directly with the

schools.” While he does not believe that a separation of church and state truly affects the school-pastor relationship, he does say that a partnership is difficult to create if a principal is uncomfortable or unwilling to work with a religious leader.

### **Participant 3: MS**

MS, a man in his fifties, has served as a pastor at places varying from universities to prisons to the Navy for approximately 26 years before his current pastoral assignment. He has been the pastor of his current Baptist church for 14 years. MS believes that a pastor is to be a leader in the African American church, but he or she needs to have a “pulse on the community” in order to efficiently serve its needs. MS’s church provides a myriad of services to the surrounding community, such as a clothing closet, a food bank, and medical care. MS’s church also provides monetary incentives to students for achieving excellent grades.

MS defines the role of a school counselor as handling the whole student, including academics and personal and physical needs. MS acknowledges the resources a school counselor has in order to refer a student for psychological or physical issues. He sees the school counselor as one who can assess aptitude scores and guide students through the “academic wilderness” into possible career paths. MS believes a school counselor can speak “with some measure of authority” to students’ spiritual needs if that counselor is a spiritual person.

MS recalls one negative experience with school counselors. While in high school, his son had an extremely high grade point average due to taking honors and Advanced Placement courses. However, colleges only looked at the unweighted average when considering admissions. MS’s son’s counselor was not aware of the weighted versus unweighted average practice, which was a disappointment to MS and his son, as they felt they had not been given adequate or accurate information. Other than that, experiences with school counselors have been

generally positive. MS has noticed school counselors referring the students back to him due to “the unique space that the pastor holds,” and the counselors acknowledge that the pastor’s voice “sometimes carries far more weight and authority than that of a person at school.”

MS served as a Navy chaplain in Japan and collaborated with the school there on occasion regarding troubled students. He describes these experiences as positive and helpful for the student and family. He would love to see school counselors reach out to area pastors for a day of training (one per semester) to come up with collaborative strategies and ideas to reach every African American student.

#### **Participant 4: LJ**

LJ is in his sixties and has been a pastor in the AMEZ church for 32 years. When asked about the role of the pastor in the African American community, he notes it is an “awesome task and responsibility.” LJ says the role is “multifaceted in terms of what he is expected and what he is called to do.” Particularly in the African American community, the role of the pastor is to deal with civil rights and social justice in the vein of Martin Luther King, Jr., because these kinds of fights have not ended “just because we have a Black president.” A pastor, according to LJ, must “know how to address the issues that are confronting our people.”

LJ’s familiarity with the school counselor is “the fact that the guidance counselor was only to steer young people in a direction to be able to formulate what they want to do for the future.” He reports having good experiences with school counselors, stemming from when his own children were in school. Although he has not personally referred his congregants to their school’s counselor, he has gone to schools to participate in behavior intervention meetings with the school officials concerning his young congregants. LJ notes he does not interact as much with the young

people of his congregation because he has youth directors, and he expects them to refer the congregants to the school counselors if needed.

LJ believes it “would be worthwhile for counselors to get out of their box,” meaning to venture out into the school’s surrounding community and interact with community leaders. He thinks periodic community meetings between clergy and school officials would be an ideal way to address issues affecting students.

### **Participant 5: WJ**

WJ is a man in his forties who was born and raised in the Church of God in Christ. He became a pastor three years ago after his father, who was the original pastor of the church, had medical issues that caused him to relinquish his pastoral duties. He describes the role of the pastor in the African American community as “the hope.” The African American community looks to the pastor to lead them through certain issues and situations. Having a presence in the surrounding community is important to WJ. He often walks through the community and is greeted by everyone, even those who are not members of his church.

WJ sees the role of the school counselor as being helpful to students academically and professionally. He reports having “decent” experiences with his children’s school counselors, but reports a very negative experience when he was in high school. WJ had acquired early acceptance and a scholarship from his first choice university, but they were rescinded due to his failure to take math his senior year. WJ said his counselor told him it was unnecessary to take math because he had already been accepted into this prestigious university. WJ also notes he was one of a small handful of African American students at a predominantly Caucasian private school.



As a pastor, WJ has had positive experiences with school counselors. His church once had a small music studio that was open to all, and he went to the schools to offer the studio as an alternative program to help troubled students. He has been to the schools on behalf of some of the students and families who took advantage of this community service and worked well with the school officials in those situations.

WJ believes the pastors should reach out to the schools and meet with the administration and school counselors to foster communication and collaboration. However, WJ notes one must “understand the balance of the fine line between the separation of church and state.” While operating the studio, WJ and his team ran into “a lot of red tape, bureaucracy type things” when trying to involve the schools.

#### **Participant 6: MB**

MB has been a co-pastor (along with her husband) of a non-denominational church for approximately 15 years. She is a woman in her fifties who happens to have a doctorate in counselor education. She says that “God will give people a pastor after His own heart,” therefore calling pastors out to be leaders in the community. MB says that she and her husband ask themselves “If our church closes, will the community miss us?” Her church provides the community with services such as a literacy program, a community resource center, substance abuse support groups, and empowerment groups.

MB describes a school counselor as one whose job is to “assist those children when they have not only social and emotional problems but also the problems that they develop in school and in knowing how to guide as far as education is concerned.” She has had positive personal experiences with school counselors, namely concerning her granddaughter. MB was contemplating having her granddaughter move from another state to come live with her and met

with the school counselor over the summer to discuss educational options. She has not referred her congregants to the school counselor. MB has “never had to go outside of the church” because of the teachers in her congregation. “If there was any question about something with some of the members of the church and their children, I would steer them to one of those teachers.”

However, MB says has no problem with referring congregants to the school counselor because “I have so much confidence in the system.” MB’s church has a youth ministry, and she tends to leave those kinds of concerns to the youth ministry leaders.

MB believes that collaboration with school counselors is more feasible if the churches know the purpose of the school counselor. As pastors, she and her husband are involved in her young congregants’ lives. Working more closely with the schools and counselors would provide a better wraparound service for the students and families.

### **Participant 7: JR**

JR is in his thirties and has been a pastor in the Baptist denomination for three and a half years. According to JR, one of the main roles of the African American pastor is to address the issues that affect African Americans as a whole. One ministry his church is working to establish concerns getting medical prescriptions to the elderly citizens of the neighborhood in which his church dwells. He believes the role of a pastor in the African American community is to have a prophetic voice, meaning one that “carries beyond the four walls of the church.”

JR’s experiences with school counselors have not been pleasant at all. He was not even aware that his school had counselors until his junior year. He did not learn what a school counselor’s purpose was until he became a senior and he was directed to the counselors for his impending college transition. Even at that point, JR says, the counselors were “absolutely no

help.” His oldest daughter is a high school senior, and JR does not know her counselor. He has two other children in middle and elementary school and does not know their counselors either.

As a pastor, JR has collaborated with school counselors in order to help get a student on the right track. He has also referred congregants to the school counselor to foster dialogue between the parents and the school. JR says his role in participating in meetings at school was to provide insight to the child’s spiritual training and behavior outside of school. He acknowledged there was no trepidation on the school’s part as far as separation of church and state; rather, they embraced having his professional expertise as part of the holistic plan for the student. JR asked a pointed question: “How does a counselor who may not have faith address the faith aspect in a child who has faith?”

JR is part of a professional coalition of local pastors who joined forces to try and address societal ills that plague the African American community. One of their main foci is education and how pastors can be more visible in the schools. According to JR, “It’s all right for the religious sector to be involved.”

### **Participant 8: PG**

PG is in his fifties and has been a pastor in the Church of God in Christ for almost 16 years. PG believes the pastor is expected to be a leader in the African American community, and should be above reproach when it comes to personal conduct and interaction with people.

PG seemed to be a bit skeptical regarding school counselors’ abilities to handle all situations because “unless they are spiritual and have a spiritual knowledge, it’s hard to deal with people that are carnal.” While he did acknowledge the role of the school counselor is a challenging one, he did not see them as being effective unless “they are spiritual or have the Holy Spirit.” PG continuously made comparisons between the spiritual and the secular realms

and was of the opinion that all issues within the schools are spiritual and should be approached as such.

PG has four children, the youngest of whom is eight years old. He has met with the school counselors at his children's school on different occasions and reports good experiences with them. PG and his wife are both members of the PTA, and have interacted with the counselors through that organization. While he cannot recall referring parents in his congregation to the school counselor, PG says he would have no problem doing so because "sometimes the parents don't have all the answers and you need an outside source."

#### **Participant 9: LA**

LA began pastoring in the COGIC church in his thirties and has been a pastor for nearly 20 years. He sees the role of the pastor in the African American church as being multifaceted, noting that "many times we have to be mama, daddy, sister, brother, counselor, and so many other things." LA believes the pastor in the African American community is not only supposed to address the spiritual element, but should address every need of the community. His church has many initiatives, from a food bank to a community day.

LA says that when he was a child in school, he believed the school counselor's role was to aid students in finding the right direction for life after high school by assessing gifts, talents, and interests. Although LA says, "Now I don't know really what they do in the school system," he reports a few positive collaborative instances with school counselors. One of his young congregants was having issues at school, and LA went to the school to meet with the counselor to devise a plan to help the student get back on track. LA reports parents in his congregation coming to him for help regarding school issues when they could not get results from working

with the school counselor. In those situations, LA spearheaded collaboration with the school to assist the student and the family.

LA desires more collaboration with schools and school counselors in the future, but a separation of church and state may inhibit such partnerships coming to full fruition. “We look at things pretty much from a spiritual point of view, and where the education system is going they’re looking at things totally different.” He would like to see conferences and meetings occur between the African American clergy and school officials to find common ground. LA believes the onus is on both school officials and the clergy to find common ground in order to help students.

#### **Participant 10: CV**

CV is a woman in her fifties who has been the pastor of a non-denominational church for four years. She sees the pastor and the Black Church as historical representations of the African American community whose jobs are to meet the needs of the people, spiritual or otherwise. Her church participates in several community initiatives throughout her city.

When asked about the role of a school counselor, CV differentiated between the role of the high school counselor and the role of the elementary and middle school counselor. According to CV, the high school counselor is “the person who guides the student through their secondary education, but also prepares them for what’s coming after they graduate,” whereas the elementary and middle school counselor handles “right now” situations instead of guiding them for the future.

CV recalled one negative experience with a school counselor. She was trying to advocate for one of her young congregants and his family but could not get anyone, including the counselor, to speak with her. Overall, CV reports positive personal and professional

collaborations with school counselors. Her church partners with two elementary schools and provides resources for families in need, and she works closely with the principal and counselor at both schools. At the time of our meeting, she had plans to meet with another elementary school counselor to discuss mentorship and summer reading programs. She also had plans to meet with one of the local school superintendents to discuss partnerships. On a personal note, CV reports her son's school counselor from years ago as being extremely helpful and informative regarding mentorship programs and graduation.

CV mentioned it took three years for one of the elementary schools to respond to her church's repeated offers of assistance. She says it is important for the school counselors to reach out to local churches and tap into their available resources to help the students and stresses that they should not always wait for the faith community to come and offer assistance. She acknowledges that separation of church and state can become an issue if the faith community's approach to the schools revolves around preaching rather than helping.

## **Results**

The following section presents the results from the data collection and analysis. The results are arranged into three themes and six sub-themes. The first theme, School Counseling Experiences, is supported by the sub-themes Personal Experiences and Professional Experiences. The second theme, Barriers to Collaboration, is supported by the sub-themes Separation of Church and State and Lack of Visibility. The third theme, Clergy-School Collaboration, is supported by the sub-themes Outreach and Invitations, and Resources. Each sub-theme is supported by two sections, which serve to further describe each theme.

### **Theme 1: School Counseling Experiences**

All ten participants recalled at least one type of experience with school counseling. The sub-themes and sections described below highlight the two types of participants' reported experiences.

### **Sub-Theme A: Personal Experiences**

Nine of the ten participants reported having a personal experience with school counseling and school counselors. The following sections describe these experiences in greater detail.

**Self.** JR, WJ, and DB were able to recall experiences from their own childhoods. JR said his experiences while in school were negative because not only was the counselor not visible, she was no help when it came to applying for school. "I didn't feel that they really reached out to students," says JR. WJ's high school counselor cost him admittance to a prestigious university due to ill-fated guidance. "... I had the opportunity to take a full year of math or not," says WJ. "My counselor told me that wasn't necessary for me to take it because I was already accepted and didn't need it." DB's high school counselors were prejudiced toward him, therefore not encouraging him to pursue his dreams.

**Offspring.** Eight of the participants spoke of their experiences with school counseling regarding their own children or grandchildren. MB's granddaughter faced the possibility of moving from another state to live with her. They met with the local high school counselor to plan an academic course of action should her granddaughter move. "That counselor was so thorough and patient, and it was the summer time. Normally you wouldn't even have staff there but she took time to sit down and talk to us." HK's granddaughter's middle school counselor recognized her honors level potential and placed her in those classes. CV's son had some academic and behavioral issues in high school, and the counselor worked with her to ensure his success. PG has successfully interacted with his children's counselors and joined the PTA to further interact

with them. LJ interacted with his daughter's counselor while she was in school and reported positive experiences. WJ's son had been disrupting class, and his counselor set up a parent-teacher conference. WJ was very pleased with the counselor's efforts as well as the outcome of that meeting. MS was disappointed with his son's counselor not being aware of the difference a weighted grade point average makes to colleges and scholarship committees but was overall pleased with the interactions. JR does not know the identity of his oldest daughter's twelfth grade counselor because neither he nor his wife has ever spoken with that person. He attempted to contact his middle school daughter's counselor but has yet to hear from that person.

### **Sub-Theme B: Professional Experiences**

Seven of the ten participants reported professional experiences with school counselors in their roles as pastors. DB's professional experience, however, occurred as a high school English teacher. He has had both positive and negative experiences as a high school English teacher. The following sections describe these experiences in greater detail.

**Advocate.** LA, MS, JR, and LJ have all gone to some of their young congregants' schools to act as advocates and to offer parental support. MS, JR, and LJ went to the school to meet with and assist the counselor with students in their congregations who were having behavioral issues. LA's collaborative experience resulted in a "work-study" program that had the particular student reporting to both LA and the school counselor. "He was supposed to get good grades, behavior, keep a report and just like on the job. You get written up for what you do well or not. And then he is to bring a report card to me. And I will look it over and that will determine how much he gets paid."

**Partner in education.** WJ's experience was a bit different in that he didn't meet with the counselors regarding specific students. Rather, he met with them to offer an alternative music



program for those students the counselor felt would benefit from those services. The students were not necessarily members of WJ's congregation. CV's professional experiences have been both positive and negative. Her positive experiences include partnerships with local elementary schools to provide resources for students in need. However, she experienced a severe lack of communication with one of her partner schools in that it took three years to get a response. She also had considerable trouble when trying to help one of her young congregants get back in school. She attempted to call the school counselor and could not get a response in order to help this student. She ended up calling the school superintendent to get results.

## **Theme 2: Barriers to Collaboration**

All participants mentioned some barriers that may inhibit collaboration between African American pastors and school counselors. The sub-themes and sections described below highlight the participants' reasons for potential barriers to partnership.

### **Sub-Theme A: Separation of Church and State**

Nine of the ten participants mentioned the separation of church and state. Some participants felt it made a difference, while others did not. The sections described below highlight the reasons for the two opinions as to whether or not the separation of church and state matters.

**Spiritual difference.** Five of the participants expressed some concern regarding spiritual differences between school counselors and themselves and their congregants. DB notes that his "philosophies and ways of thinking would be influenced by the Bible," and not by whatever the school's beliefs are regarding helping students. He also noted the difficulty a Christian pastor might have with students from non-Christian backgrounds. LA acknowledges that pastors "look at things pretty much from a spiritual point of view," which may be contrary to how the school

counselor views situations. PG does not believe a counselor can truly help students who “are spiritual and have a spiritual knowledge.” JK asked the question, “How does a counselor who may not have faith address the faith aspect in a child who has faith?” MS mentioned that sometimes students may have spiritual issues in addition to academic issues, and the counselor should not address those issues without being a spiritual person. Instead, the counselor should refer to a faith leader to aid in those areas.

**Mutual interest.** Six participants noted that the clergy and schools have a mutual interest when it comes to helping students attain success. WJ noted that he “kept running into a lot of red tape” regarding the programs he and his church were trying to develop in the schools. However, he felt the counselors understood what his non-profit organization was trying to do to help students. HK says the separation of church and state should not be a problem if the school counselors and leaders are eager to partner to provide resources for the staff, students, and families. CV notes that some of her clergy colleagues have had trouble gaining access to schools in order to form partnerships. Her response to them was, “What are you really trying to do? You can’t go in trying to convert people to Christianity.” CV notes she has had successful partnerships with school counselors because her intent is to help meet the needs of these students. LA believes the mutual interest and common ground should be reason enough for schools, school counselors, and clergy members to get together to help children. MS and LA have had school counselors refer students to them for certain issues. LJ has consulted and collaborated successfully with school counselors because of the “mutual understanding that we have a child’s best interest at heart.”

#### **Sub-Theme B: Lack of Visibility**

Nine of the participants mention visibility as an issue with clergy-school collaboration. Some participants see it as the role of the pastor to be visible, while others see it as the counselor's responsibility. The sections below go into further detail about each opinion.

**Counselor visibility.** LJ says that "it would be worthwhile for [school] counselors to get out of their box." Both he and PG believe the counselors should visit students in their environment, namely the church. PG says African American students of faith spend a lot of time with their pastors and in church, and the counselors should visit the churches to learn about the spiritual aspects of their students' lives. CV says school counselors should reach out to the African American pastors in the neighborhood instead of waiting for those pastors to offer services. JR attended a faith summit in his local school district similar to the one CV attended in her local school district, and there were no school counselors in attendance. He says, "I would've loved to see some counselors there and get their perspective on this faith partnership with the schools. How do they see that being a benefit?"

**Pastor visibility.** Seven of the participants say pastors should be more visible in the schools and the community. Given the social justice issues faced by African American children in the past, present, and future, it is important for pastors to be accessible to these students and their schools. WJ constantly stressed the importance of the African American pastor being visible and accessible in the neighborhoods and schools. JR visits his youngest son's school often, and the students and parents know him even though they do not attend his church. PG says pastors should visit the local schools' PTA meetings to offer their support to the school staff and parents that may not be members of their congregations. HK believes part of a pastor's role is to visit schools and meet with the school counselor to find out what the church can do to meet the needs of the students. LA and MS believe the African American pastor's place is to be in the

community, including the schools, to offer support to schools and students in every situation.

MB simply asked herself a question: "Will the surrounding area miss us if we close the doors [of the church]?"

### **Theme 3: Clergy-School Collaboration**

All ten participants shared their experiences with and/or ideas about successful clergy-school collaboration. The sub-themes described below highlight the areas contributing to the success of clergy-school collaboration.

#### **Sub-Theme A: Outreach and Invitation**

Eight of the participants mentioned outreach as a means to facilitate clergy-school collaboration. The participants varied on who should initiate the outreach. The sections below go into further detail.

**Counselor to pastor.** Six participants named pastor education as a barrier to successful collaboration and stated that the counselors should spearhead this education. HK noted that pastors need to be educated about interacting with schools and parents. In fact, he says most pastors have never been invited to collaborate with the neighborhood schools. CV mentioned her participation in a summit of school division leaders and clergy. The school leaders gave a presentation on the school division but did not invite clergy to partner with them. CV says the superintendent did not ask the clergy for anything, and she wondered what the purpose was for the entire meeting. LJ, JR, MS, PG, and LA mentioned meetings, trainings, and rap sessions to help facilitate successful partnerships between clergy and school counselors. MS also noted that clergy need to actually be educated on the actual role of a school counselor, and he had this to say:

"Hey, listen. This is what we do. This is who we are. If we can help you, let us know. If you need our help, then let us know." Just develop a partnership that they have training of sorts,

fall semester, spring semester--everybody can't make it so it's going to happen twice a year. I think that would really help to bridge a gap and debunk some of the--how can I say it--demystify some of the myths about what it is and take away their... "Look, we're real people. We go home at night and eat chicken just like everybody else. We have kids like them and we all want the best for our children." We bring a certain skill set to the table. As pastors, you bring a certain skill set to the table. We're not trying to do your job and we know you're not trying to do our job. Every now and then pastors do have to be shown and informed.

**Pastor to counselor.** Five participants believe pastors should invite school counselors and school personnel to special church events so the counselors can meet their students in their environment and so the counselors will become familiar with the church. PG believes it is important for school counselors to see their African American students' spiritual environment but believes the pastor should invite the counselors to worship services. LA, LJ, and MB have community days at their church. The community days include food, vendors, and activities for children of all ages. They believe it is their responsibility to invite local school personnel to these events to build relationships and partnerships. CV had a unique experience with the staff of one of the elementary schools her church sponsors.

A month ago, the entire... I won't say the entire staff. About twenty-four persons, staff persons from [the elementary school] worshipped with us. The principal, guidance counselor. We didn't ask them to. We have been doing so much for them. They just came and brought us a donation, and said, "Thank you."

### **Sub-Theme B: Resources**

Eight of the participants mentioned the resources their churches currently provide or are willing to provide to area schools. Seven of the eight also mentioned community partnerships as a way to collaborate. The following sections provide more detail.

**Church resources.** CV's church provides bags of food for hungry students and their families from her partner schools to have over the weekend. JR and LA also provide culinary services to needy families. JR partners with an area church to provide food on the weekends, and

LA's church has a food bank ministry. However, they do not provide these services directly to schools and students. LJ's church provides school supplies for his young congregants but does not go to the area schools and provide them directly. MB's church provides tutoring, school supplies, and literacy programs for the students in her area. MS's church provides many services including free medical care, a clothing closet, and a food bank to area families, and he has gone to the high school in his area to offer these services to those students and families. WJ's church has a mentorship program for young students interested in music. CV mentioned a program in her city called Men of Faith. "It's about seven or eight black churches in [a large city in Virginia]. What they do is they sponsor a program during the day for any African American boys that are suspended. They come to the center, which is on site at one of the churches, and they provide instructional care for them during the day, rather than sitting at home as a suspension."

HK's church holds a school supply drive at the beginning of each school year, and he partners with two area schools and directly provides resources to their student population.

However, he had this to say about the Black Church regarding partnerships with schools:

The Black Church has been referred to--many years ago I read this in a book--as a sleeping giant. I think that the Black Church--you could say the church at large; I want to speak specifically to the Black Church here--has a role, has a responsibility and has resources that are vital to the success of African American families, including African American children. One of the things that I'm going to commit myself even more fully to when I finish with the school board is to lead in this effort that we started in really developing our faith-based partnership, where the resources that churches bring to bear, from buildings where before and after school programs can be had and tutoring, to reading buddies, to mentors, to supplies, teacher supplies, back to school supplies, uniforms, as well as counseling for families, parenting classes--those services and more that churches can provide that the community so desperately needs. We've got to tap into that resource.

**Community partnerships.** Seven participants have formed relationships with community organizations and businesses. The free medical care MS's church provides to the community is fostered by medical professionals in the area. HK's church founded a community development

corporation and enjoys partnerships with various entities such as the YMCA. MB's church also has a community development corporation, and they work with local businesses to provide many of the programs available to her congregants and the surrounding area. The community days at LA, LJ, and MB's churches have community sponsors. JR works with the local city government to provide prescriptions to neighbors who cannot otherwise obtain their medicines. These partnerships could provide area schools with sorely needed resources for the low socioeconomic students and their families.

### **Essence of the Phenomenon**

Three themes and six sub-themes emerged from the data. A composite description of the phenomenon, or essence, is created by synthesizing the themes and sub-themes. School Counseling Experiences, Barriers to Collaboration, and Clergy-School Collaboration are the framework of how the participants experience professional school counseling; the textural sub-themes add descriptions about what the participants experience.

The theme of School Counseling Experiences provided the context in which the participants experienced different aspects of professional school counseling. All of the participants had personal and professional experiences with school counseling. The personal experiences centered on either themselves or their offspring. The professional experiences required the participants to be advocates for their congregants and partners in education with area schools. The findings show that while there were some negative experiences, the majority of the participants have had positive experiences with professional school counseling and counselors.

The theme of Barriers to Collaboration provides the participants' reasons for why pastors and school counselors may have issues working together. The separation of church and state is a barrier that some participants do not see as a problem, while others believe it to be a hindrance to

partnership. The findings show that although pastors seem to be wary of the spiritual knowledge of school counselors, the mutual interest shared by the counselors and pastors should enable all involved to transcend the separation between church and state.

The Clergy-School Collaboration theme describes participants' ideas for future partnerships between clergy and schools. The findings display the participants' beliefs that both school counselors and pastors should do a better job of outreach and invitation efforts and that pastors are willing to provide numerous resources and community partnerships to the schools in order to help all children meet with success.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the data collection and analysis procedures for this phenomenological study. Semi-structured interviews served to identify individual, group, and sub-themes in order to provide a thick description of participants' experiences and perceptions. The data analysis process yielded the following major categories: school counseling experiences, barriers to collaboration, and ideas for collaboration. In order to promote trustworthiness, I engaged in member checking, utilized a peer debriefer and auditor, practiced bracketing and reflexive journaling, and maintained an audit trail. Table 2 depicts each theme with corresponding sub-themes, and Appendix H depicts a within-case display example of the themes and sub-themes. Finally, this chapter provided an essence of the phenomenon.



Table 2: Major Thematic Analysis

<b>School Counseling Experiences</b>	<b>Clergy-School Collaboration</b>	<b>Barriers to Collaboration</b>
<i>Personal</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self</li> <li>• Offspring</li> </ul>	<i>Outreach and Invitation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor to counselor</li> <li>• Counselor to pastor</li> </ul>	<i>Separation of Church and State</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spiritual differences</li> <li>• Mutual interest</li> </ul>
<i>Professional</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate</li> <li>• Partner in education</li> </ul>	<i>Resources</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church</li> <li>• Community partnerships</li> </ul>	<i>Lack of Visibility</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor visibility</li> <li>• Counselor visibility</li> </ul>

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION**

### **Overview**

This chapter reviews the purpose, research questions, and methodology of the current study and connects its major findings to the existing literature. It will also identify the limitations of this study, which included researcher's bias, researcher's limited experience with the chosen methodology, and sample selection. This chapter presents implications for school counselors, school administration, pastors, and school counselor educators. Finally, this chapter provides suggestions for future qualitative and quantitative research studies as well as a brief personal reflection on the research process.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore African American pastors' experiences of professional school counseling and to examine how African American pastors experience referral, collaboration, and consultation.

### **Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative methodology because it sought to explore African American pastors' stories and truths with regard to the lived phenomenon of experiencing professional school counseling. Ten African American pastors from a metropolitan area in Virginia were recruited using a snowball sampling method. Each pastor participated in a semi-structured interview and completed a Demographics Information Form at a location of his or her own choosing. After bracketing my assumptions and biases, I analyzed each transcribed interview to identify the major themes and sub-themes that were present for each participant as well as for the group as a whole. A within-case analysis was conducted to develop individual themes and sub-themes for each participant and a cross-case analysis was conducted to develop

core themes and sub-themes for the participants as a whole. In order to enhance the trustworthiness of this study, I engaged in member checking, utilized a peer debriefer, provided a rich and thick description of participants' experiences and perceptions, practiced bracketing and reflexive journaling, and maintained an audit trail.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study attempted to answer the following questions: "How do African American pastors experience professional school counselors?" and "How do African American pastors experience referral/collaboration/consultation with professional school counselors?" Below is a summary of findings and how they compare to existing literature.

The first research question sought to explore how African American pastors experience professional school counseling. Theme one addresses the first research question.

#### **Theme 1: School Counseling Experiences**

**Personal.** Existing literature revealed the varying personal experiences of African Americans regarding school counselors. Owens et al.'s (2011) study showed that African American male students have positive yet limited experiences with school counselors. Davis, Davis, and Mobley (2013) noted the achievement gap regarding advanced courses and college enrollment and pointed out that some counselors can be very helpful while others are no help at all. Breland-Noble et al. (2006) and Moore et al. (2008) mentioned counselors giving differential treatment among student ethnicities regarding behavior issues, with African Americans getting the lesser treatment. Abidin and Robinson (2002) also noted differential treatment among student ethnicities with regard to behavior challenges. Nine participants had varying personal experiences with school counseling regarding either themselves or their offspring. Five participants had positive personal experiences, and four participants had negative

personal experiences. The participants' positive and negative personal experiences occurred in the context of students' post-high school plans and behavior challenges.

**Professional.** The current study's findings also reveal participants' professional experiences in terms of acting as advocates and partners in education. Six participants had positive professional experiences, and one had a negative professional experience. Three participants had negative personal experiences but positive professional experiences. There is no literature speaking to African American pastors' professional experiences with school counselors, thus only the findings surrounding the participants' personal experiences are supported.

The second research question sought to examine how African American pastors experience referral, collaboration, and consultation with professional school counselors. Categories 2 and 3 address the second research question.

## **Theme 2: Barriers to Collaboration**

**Separation of church and state.** State-funded public schools are wary of outsiders with religious affiliation coming into the schools due to the First Amendment; therefore, churches and other religious groups have not been welcomed with open arms for fear of hidden agendas (Darden, 2006). School counselors and African American clergy have a mutual interest in assisting African American students in attaining success. Two participants reported school counselors referring students to them for certain issues. Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) describe the importance of education to the African American community, and school counselors are mandated by law to address the achievement gap plaguing African American students (Capps et al., 2005). Six participants noted that while separation of church and state is a concern, they

had no problems working and consulting with schools due to the mutual interests of meeting students' needs.

**Lack of visibility.** Studies show that while African American churches may have counseling services available to their congregation, school counselors are often missing from the equation or are not as utilized as mental health counselors (Ennis et al., 2004; Molock et al., 2008). Four participants agreed supported McRae et al.'s (1999) study suggesting counselors develop relationships with African American pastors in order to reach their congregations. Although some African American churches have outreach programs that target schools (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991), seven participants believed pastors can do a better job of going to area schools to work with the school counselors.

### **Theme 3: Clergy-School Collaboration**

**Outreach and invitation.** Several studies have suggested training pastors in mental health counseling (Adksion-Bradley et al., 2005; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Ennis et al., 2004; Farris, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000). Ennis et al. (2004) mention in-services and trainings as a way to bridge the gap between African American pastors and mental health counseling services. This study's findings support the literature calling for pastoral trainings in that six participants have either participated in or desire trainings and in-services regarding the local school systems. Furthermore, LA, LJ, and MS desire trainings regarding school counselors and their roles. Eight participants desire a better mutual outreach between clergy and school counselors.

**Resources.** Eight participants mentioned specific resources that their churches provide to the community as a whole. CV and HK have formed partnerships with local schools and businesses to provide many resources for all kinds of needs. The eight participants whose

churches provide assistance to the community mention that most of their congregants are of a low socioeconomic status, which supports McRoberts' (2001) claim of most African American churches being in low socioeconomic areas. These congregants also face daily the issues Lee (2005) mentioned in his study, namely low academic achievement. Bryan (2005) noted that church resources are often overlooked and not utilized when it comes to closing the achievement gap. HK calls the Black Church "a sleeping giant" that has a wealth of resources that can assist schools, students, and families, yet these resources have not been fully utilized.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study have several implications for professional practice. Implications for the following will be discussed in detail: school counselors, school administrators, pastors, and school counselor educators.

#### **School Counselors**

The findings of this study as well as Owens et al's (2011) study indicate a lack of visibility in the African American community on the part of school counselors. School counselors should make an effort to visit the local churches and attend church sponsored events. This will give students and families the idea that school counselors are truly invested in their wellbeing and interested in their lives outside the school building. School counselors should also offer to speak to the congregations and make efforts to meet with the pastors individually to share their resources and offer support.

Part of a school counselor's job is to have access to community resources that are available to help students and families (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Compiling a list of local African American churches, particularly in low socioeconomic areas, will be beneficial to the school counselors as well as those students in need. This list should articulate the specific

services that each church provides to make it easier for the students and families. School counselors should also advocate for themselves to administrators and explain why connecting with faith communities is a necessity for student success. An important component of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) is meeting with community stakeholders. School counselors should strive to include African American pastors as stakeholders, especially in low socioeconomic areas. School counselors should meet with those interested pastors to share ways to engage with the students that do not violate separation of church and state.

### **School Administrators**

Many school divisions and school administrators are facing budget cuts, which serve to eliminate much-needed resources such as after school tutoring, supplies, and uniforms. Many families are also struggling financially and may not be able to provide the necessary items for their students to meet with academic success. Allowing neighborhood churches to supply these items will alleviate the monetary concerns of school officials. Churches can also provide free services such as mentoring, tutoring, and sponsorship of extra-curricular activities. These services can provide students and families an alternative to after school care that would cost more money. Tony Evans (2015) has created a National Church Adopt a School Initiative with The Urban Alternative, and together have produced resources necessary to foster these partnerships.

School division officials and faith leaders across the country are forming partnerships and having meaningful discussions about how to make these partnerships fruitful. However, school counselors have not been part of that conversation. Including school counselors in faith partnerships will serve to increase visibility of school counselors. School counselors have

knowledge of the needs of the students in the schools, and including them will give the faith leaders a better idea of how they can help students meet with success in school and beyond.

### **Pastors**

The current study's findings suggest African American pastors know the importance of being visible in the surrounding communities. The pastor's importance in the community is paramount, and visibility lends credibility to the pastor's place in society (Haight, 1998). Visiting schools and meeting with the principals and counselors is paramount to forming meaningful partnerships. Pastors should also attend local PTA meetings and school events so the school community becomes familiar with them and their churches.

African American pastors often invite people from the community to address the congregation regarding topics such as voting, educational resources, etc. (Giger et al., 2008). Pastors should invite the local school counseling division leader to speak to the congregation on the importance of getting to know their child's school counselor and the resources the school counselor can provide.

### **School Counselor Educators**

Many school counselors enter the field without knowing how to foster partnerships with faith-based leaders. Furthermore, they are not aware of the need to advocate for the school counseling profession when it comes to community leaders. Universities should have students create an agenda for a meeting for faith leaders and educating them about school counseling, and have this assignment as part of the master's level school counseling development course.

Separation of church and state is a cultural as well as a legal issue. Students need to be aware of this phenomenon and how it will affect their future work as school counselors. Universities should have students in a master's level legal and ethics course complete an



assignment on the separation of church and state regarding schools. Understanding how to navigate church and state is something school counselors tend to learn on the job without training (Wolf, 2004). This assignment will inform the students of the legal boundaries in the event they will desire faith-based partnerships when they enter the field.

### **Professional Associations**

Counselors and pastors often belong to associations that promote professionalism such as the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the National Association of Evangelicals. These associations invite certain experts to address the body during conferences. Pastoral associations should invite school counselors to address and present at their conferences, and school counseling associations should invite pastors to do the same. This will promote interprofessional collaboration and open the lines of communication between the two parties.

Professional associations also produce newsletters and peer-reviewed journals that help to disseminate new trends in that particular profession. At times, these publications address special topics pertinent to the field. For example, *Professional School Counseling*, the journal for ASCA, devoted an entire issue to spirituality in 2004. The newsletter for the National Association of Evangelicals devoted an issue to criminal justice reform in 2011. The editors of these publications should encourage submissions that address issues of clergy-school collaboration so others may gain ideas for their areas.

### **Limitations**

#### **Researcher Bias**

I was the main instrument for data collection as the primary researcher. The research process may have been inevitably affected by my personal biases and assumptions as a result of my experiences as both a practicing school counselor and a practicing Christian in the African

American church. I maintained a reflexive journal, discussed my biases with my peer debriefer, and engaged in epoche and bracketing. However, it is still possible that the results were somehow impacted. In addition, my peer debriefer is a practicing school counselor, a practicing Christian in the African American church, and a counseling doctoral candidate at another university. His experiences may have affected his participation in the data analysis process as well.

### **Researcher's Experience with Methodology**

I have taken qualitative research courses and completed qualitative projects as part of my doctoral coursework, yet I do not consider myself a qualitative research expert. While I did not find the actual data collection difficult, the data analysis proved to be cumbersome. Therefore, my limited experience with phenomenology in particular may have impacted the research process in some way. For example, when I first began the analysis process, I found it challenging to group the units of meaning into core themes. I am aware that my limited experience may have impacted the quality of the overall research process.

### **Sample Selection**

All ten participants came from the same metropolitan area of the Commonwealth of Virginia; therefore it was not possible to conclude if the current study's findings would be different if the participants came from other geographical areas. While I was able to get representation from the non-denominational sector of the Black Church, I was only able to get participants from three of the major denominations Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) describe as part of the Black Church; therefore some African American pastors' voices were not captured due to their involvement in one of the other four denominations.

### **Future Research**

A follow-up qualitative study would be the best way to address the limitations that were identified within the current study. The follow-up study would need to consist of a more diverse sample with regard to gender and denomination within the Black Church. It would also be advantageous to obtain a diverse sample from various geographic areas to increase validity.

An interesting study would examine the perceptions of professional school counseling with regard to other ethnicities and Protestant denominations outside the Black Church, then compare and contrast the findings of that study to those of the current study. Analyzing the results of both studies may fully describe the phenomenon of the school counseling profession's relationship with faith leaders across ethnicities.

Some of the pastors in the current study have a functioning youth ministry and youth ministry leaders, which limited the pastors' interaction with the young congregants of the church. Expanding the study to include those youth ministry leaders may give more insight to the perceptions of school counseling through the eyes of the African American church leader.

The current study is one-sided in terms of voice and perception in that only African American pastors were examined. Future research might explore school counselors' perceptions of African American pastors and faith leaders in general. Comparing and contrasting the results of that study to those of the current study might highlight areas of growth in terms of bridging the gap between the two entities.

This qualitative study could also provide a foundation for future quantitative research. Specifically, a survey instrument could be constructed that enables faith leaders to report their experiences with schools and school counseling in their geographic area. For example, the instrument could encompass a Likert scale in which faith leaders rate the degree to which they felt welcome to partner with the local school counseling departments.

### **Personal Reflection**

This research endeavor stretched me both as a professional school counselor and a qualitative researcher. I was able to serve as an advocate for the school counseling profession in a way I never anticipated. Meeting with these pastors has allowed me to form relationships I might have not otherwise formed were it not for this study. I was captivated by the details of participants' stories and examples of collaboration and school involvement because it gave me ideas on pilot studies and future research. Although I made an effort to ensure that participants felt validated during the interview, I must admit that I felt a sense of validation regarding my profession as I learned about some of their experiences and perceptions. Even the negative experiences my participants had helped me to realize that I am doing the right thing by my students.

I was also able to further enhance my qualitative research skills during the research process. I learned more about a phenomenological study, how to create a true research protocol, and how to keep my biases in check. In my role as the primary researcher, I learned how to utilize my debriefer, for I processed my biases with him after every interview. I was also able to hone my decision making skills.

It is my hope and prayer that this study will contribute to the existing literature and enhance professional knowledge of school counselors, pastors, and others who are closely related to the counseling profession. I also hope this is the beginning of several partnerships among clergy and school counseling personnel.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the purpose, research questions, and methodology of the current study and connected its major findings to the existing literature. It also identified the limitations

of this study, which included researcher's bias, researcher's limited experience with the chosen methodology, and sample selection. This chapter also presented implications for school counselors, school administration, pastors, and school counselor educators. Finally, this chapter provided suggestions for future qualitative and quantitative research studies as well as a brief personal reflection on the research process.

**CHAPTER VI**  
**MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION**

**African American Pastors and their Perceptions of Professional School Counseling**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Black Church and its pastors are important in the African American community, and influence many aspects of daily life including education. There is a gap in the literature concerning professional school counselors' specific interaction with African American pastors. This phenomenological study examined the experiences of ten African American pastors regarding professional school counseling, including referral, collaboration, and consultation. The results highlighted three emerging themes: school counseling experiences, barriers to collaboration, and clergy-school collaboration. School counseling experiences focused on personal and professional experiences. Barriers to collaboration included themes such as separation of church and state and lack of visibility. Finally, clergy-school collaboration included outreach and resources. The implications from this study suggest a lack of understanding of all involved. The implications also suggest a willingness to collaborate.

*Keywords:* African American pastors, Black Church, professional school counseling

### **African American Pastors and their Perceptions of Professional School Counseling**

The Black Church is described as “the pulse of the African American community, attending to the social, psychological, and religious needs of African Americans” (Adksion-Bradley, Johnson, Sanders, Duncan, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2005, p. 147). The Black Church is an institution capable of enacting social and political change, for it was the influence of the Black Church that sparked the Civil Rights movement and produced world leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, Sr., and United States Ambassador Andrew Young (Hawkins, 2005, Morris, 1984). Historically, the Christian church has been extremely central to the African American community, influencing how it tends to think, behave, and act (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991). African American worship styles and practices are unique and have roots in African traditions (Edwards, 2009). As a result, the African American pastor is extremely influential in the everyday lives of African Americans. Since the days of slavery, the African American community has turned to the leadership of the clergy to be a guide socially, politically, psychologically, and even financially (Taylor, 2002).

While research has been done on pastoral counseling and the role African American pastors play in their church mental health (Stansbury, Harley, King, Nelson, & Speight, 2010), no research speaks to professional school counseling and African American pastors. The missing piece is literature determining what influences their beliefs about professional school counseling. This phenomenological study attempted to begin the conversation between African American pastors and professional school counseling.

### **Importance of Church to the African American Community**

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) define the “Black Church” as being comprised of seven major Protestant denominations: African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist



Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. (NBC), the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA), the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Adksion-Bradley et.al (2005) gives a broader definition of the “Black Church”, noting it includes any predominantly African American congregation.

The church has provided “self-help, social and emotional support, spiritual leadership, financial support, opportunities for educational advancement, and empowerment through participation in social change activities” (Moore, 2003, p. 47) for the African American community since the days of slavery. Nearly nine out of ten African Americans claim the church is a positive aspect in their lives (Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2010) including the church leaders. While there are several leaders in the church, arguably the most important is the Pastor. The African American community has turned to the leadership of the clergy to be a guide socially, politically, psychologically, and even financially (Taylor, 2002). The church elders, most notably the pastor, are given special honors with regard to helping their congregants make daily life decisions (Farris, 2006). Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) state “the Black Church continues to hold the allegiance of large numbers of African Americans and exerts great influence over their behavior” (p. 428). If the church is such an influential medium in the African American community, the pastor would naturally command a large amount of respect. The pastor’s guidance is vital to the African American community (Farris, 2006).

### **African Americans and school counseling**

African American Christians learn spiritual values through the institution of the Black Church, which has a history of fundamental Protestantism (Marsden, 1991; Hannon & Howie, 1994). Spirituality has been recognized as a protective factor and coping mechanism for African

Americans throughout history (Taylor et al., 2000; Boyd-Franklin, 2010). As this cultural characteristic has been passed from generation to generation, it is not unusual for today's African American child to be spiritual (Braxton, 2011; Haight, 1998; Jett, 2010). Professional school counselors need to be aware of these spiritual values when dealing with these children, as well as how to work with the spiritual leaders of these children in the community (Lonberg & Bowen, 2004).

Lee (2005) notes that school counselors in urban areas often have to deal with issues such as low academic achievement, low family functioning, student transience, student absenteeism, and school violence. In situations like this, school counselors need to be creative in meeting the needs of African American children (Owens et al., 2011). Bemak and Chung (2005) note the importance of professional school counselors reaching out to community agencies in order to reach every student's need but do not mention the church as one of those community agencies. Meeting and collaborating with African American pastors can provide the professional school counselor with an option for disseminating essential information regarding academics and higher education to African American children throughout the neighborhood rather than neglecting the students' requests because of a heavy workload.

McCray, Grant, and Beachum (2010) discussed the importance of the church and religion to most African American schoolchildren, yet the role of school counselors was not broached. This is important because the distinct nature of professional school counseling and its role in the schools directly influences all children, including those African American children heavily involved in the Black Church. Copeland (2006) noted that African American youth are directly influenced by their families, community, and the church.

### **African American pastors' perceptions of counseling**

African Americans are an underserved population with regard to mental health (Constantine, 2000; Gary, 2005). The church is seen as a refuge in the African American community, where all needs can be serviced, including mental health (Allen et al., 2010). Due to this importance, pastors are seen as authority figures (Farris, 2006). The pastor's beliefs about mental health and help-seeking affect the congregation's beliefs about mental health and help-seeking (Neighbors, Musick, & Williams, 1998; Payne, 2008). Black clergy feel more qualified than mental health counselors to aid congregants due to the perceived ignorance of spiritual issues on the counselors' parts (Neighbors et al., 1998). Black clergy also see poor relationships with God as a major cause of mental health, rather than the biomedical concept of the professional mental health field (Neighbors et al., 1998). Payne's (2008) study examining 10 sermons given by African American pastors reiterated this phenomenon of seeking God rather than professional mental health services.

### **Role of Pastors in African Americans' Perceptions of Counseling**

Boyd-Franklin (2010) mentioned the spiritual resilience of African American Christians in times of hardship, many believing that "God will see me through" and "He never gives you more than you can carry" (p. 989). This brings to mind the idea of John Henryism, referring to the African American legend of a steel driver named John Henry who died of exhaustion after defeating a mechanical steel drill in a contest (Breland-Noble et al., 2006). The idea of John Henryism comes from overcoming obstacles at the expense of physical and psychological health. It makes sense, then, that African Americans would sooner perceive psychological distress as an obstacle that needs to be conquered rather than seek treatment for any psychiatric disorder. Boyd-Franklin's (2010) article included a case study of an African American Christian woman with suicidal ideations who was too ashamed and embarrassed to share her woes with church

members. Constantine (2000) said the extensive use of prayer in the African American church might reflect an attempt to minimize the stigma of mental health in the community. Adksion-Bradley et al. (2005) examined how counselors can work with the Black Church's strengths to aid its people.

### **Collaboration between Professional Counseling and African American Pastors**

Several studies classify the African American church and its pastors as gatekeepers (Farris, 2006; Neighbors, Musick, & Williams, 1998; Young, Griffith, & Williams, 2003). Molock, Matlin, Barksdale, Puri, and Lyles (2008) proposed a gatekeeper suicide prevention model for African American churches to use with the youth: HAVEN--Helping Alleviate Valley Experiences Now. The article showed how a conceptual model for counseling and suicide prevention can exist effectively in the African American church, but it does not provide information on the effectiveness of such a model. Another limitation of this model is that there is no mention of collaboration with professional school counselors.

Ennis, Ennis, Durodoye, Ennis-Cole, and Bolden (2004) provided a template of a successful counseling ministry at an African American church. The ministry provided resources for the following: encouragement, addiction, grief, money management, family living, and mental/emotional illness. The counseling ministry staff consists of a director (a professional master's-level counselor with a doctorate in theology and crisis intervention certification), four professional school counselors, one social worker, and a licensed professional counselor. Six staff members are paraprofessional human service providers. Although professional school counselors were on staff, the study does not mention how the professional school counselors used their precise expertise to collaborate with the pastor of that church or the surrounding community.

### **Collaboration between Schools and African American Pastors**

Title I schools are required to work jointly with family and community members to develop school-family-community involvement programs per the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Title I schools usually house groups protected by NCLB; African Americans and low-income students are specifically named (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Herwanto, 2005). These partnerships hold the key to meeting the overarching goal of NCLB, which is to shrink the achievement gap between White and poor and minority students in public schools, yet they are often overlooked (Bryan, 2005). Since African Americans place high value on a quality education and church is the cornerstone of the African American community (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991), it makes sense for schools to partner with African American churches to reach every African American student. Many African American churches are located in low socioeconomic neighborhoods (McRoberts, 2001), and many children residing in these areas are the targets of Closing the Gap plans mandated by the American School Counselor Association (Trusty, Mellin, & Herbert, 2008). Partnerships created by the African American pastors and the professional school counselors could prove to be vital to the academic success of African American children and adolescents.

### **Rationale for Study**

Prior research has examined African American pastors' beliefs with regard to mental health, education, and professional help-seeking (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Vassol, 2005). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning African American pastors' beliefs about professional school counseling. In fact, there are no studies examining this phenomenon. General counseling literature discusses the reluctance of African American Christians to seek professional services for mental health needs (Breland-Noble, Bell, & Nicolas, 2006;

Constantine, 2000; Lesser, Meyers, Lin, Mira, Joseph, Olmos, Schettino, & Poland, 2010; Williams, 2011; ). The topic for the current study came about as I studied the research and realized this large and important gap.

### **Method**

This study followed a qualitative phenomenological design. I used the phenomenological approach to seek out and understand the essence of the participants' lived experiences instead of seeking large samples (Van Manen, 1990). The codes and themes that emerged were used to create a description of the phenomenon in question.

### **Research Questions**

This study was designed to explore African American pastors' perceptions of professional school counseling, guided by the research questions:

- How do African American pastors experience professional school counselors?
- How do African American pastors experience referral/collaboration/consultation with professional school counselors?

### **Participants**

Snowball sampling allowed quick access to the community of African American pastors, and purposive sampling ensured the participants had some experience with professional school counseling. The main criteria for participants were the following: identify as African American and be a pastor of a church in one of the seven denominations acknowledged by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) as being part of the Black Church or a non-denominational church. Ten participants came from a large metropolitan area in Virginia. Eight participants were male and two participants were female. Seven participants fell in the 50-59 age range, and the 30-39, 40-49, and 60-69 age ranges had one participant each. In terms of years as pastor, three participants

fell in the 1-10 range, four fell in the 11-20 range, one fell in the 21-30 range, and two fell in the 31-40 range. Four participants are in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) denomination, three are Baptist, two are non-denominational, and one is African Methodist Episcopal Zion. In terms of highest level of education completed, one participant completed high school, one completed a bachelor's degree, three completed master's degrees, and five completed doctorate degrees.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Each participant completed a 60-120 minute semi-structured interview and a Demographics Information Form. Each interview was recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed via a transcription service. Data from the semi-structured interviews were coded by identifying the major themes and sub-themes for each individual participant as well as the entire group.

The interviews were digitally recorded and the files were uploaded to a secure drive shared only with the transcription service. The data, which consisted of the interview transcriptions, were then printed for analysis purposes. The data collection took place over a span of three months. Once I collected the data, I reviewed the interview transcripts of each participant separately. I began immersing myself in the data beginning the analysis process first by compiling piles of the raw data. I read the transcripts several times, engaging in epoche and bracketing out as many indicators of my personal experiences and identity as possible. I read through the data again to ensure my bracketing did not leave any of my assumptions and biases. After fully engaging in epoche, my focus was exclusively on the voices of the participants. Next, I used an undetermined amount of time to search the data for words, phrases, and other details and coded them into units of meaning. Significant statements were gathered into meaningful clusters according to their corresponding emerging themes. I used the horizontalization process

to reduce the data by eliminating overlapping and repetitive statements. The common statements were assembled into meaningful structural themes and textural sub-themes. The structural themes consisted of descriptions related to the participants' experiences with professional school counseling. The related sub-themes were narratives regarding how the participants experienced professional school counseling. These structural themes and textural sub-themes were synthesized to form an overall portrayal of the essence of professional school counseling from an African American pastor's perspective.

### **Trustworthiness Strategies**

**Member checking.** Member checking was done during and after the semi-structured interviews. Member checking allowed me to share findings with participants and receive their feedback to ensure that my interpretations were accurate (Merriam, 2009). While conducting the semi-structured interviews, I engaged in member checking by summarizing participants' responses to ensure that I was correctly capturing the true essence of their experiences and perceptions. As a final method of member checking I sent each participant a copy of their interview transcription via email and asked them to review them and let me know if any information needed to be added or changed.

**Bracketing and reflexive journaling.** Before collecting data, I bracketed my biases and assumptions to ensure that I was immersing myself within the participants' world with a new perspective (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2002). To further preserve the authenticity of participants' voice I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process so that I could separate my thoughts and gauge how I was being impacted by the research process (Hays & Singh, 2012; Watt, 2007).



**Thick description.** Deriving a thick description requires the researcher to look beyond participants' reported details and feelings to identify meanings and explanations (Hays & Singh, 2012). Due to this, I reflected upon my interpretation of participants' quotes and the details that they shared. Based on participants' reports of their backgrounds, I was able to understand the true essence of their experiences and perceptions.

**Audit trail.** I maintained a thorough audit trail to uphold various elements of the research process and provide a thick description of its findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). Also, the audit trail includes information about the data collection, analysis, and other important information concerning the research methodology (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The audit trail consisted of the following: semi-structured interview protocol, informed consent forms, participant demographics, bracketing documents, reflexive journals, participants' transcribed interview responses, proof of coding analyses, and the final codebook.

**Peer debriefer and auditor.** I utilized a peer debriefer and auditor. My peer debriefer was essential in helping me keep my biases and values in check throughout the process. I engaged my auditor once data collection and analysis were complete, as her purpose was to detect any bias from either me or my peer debriefer.

## **Results**

The results are arranged into three categories, themes, and sub-themes. The first category, School Counseling Experiences, is supported by the themes Personal Experiences and Professional Experiences. The second category, Barriers to Collaboration, is supported by the themes Separation of Church and State and Lack of Visibility. The third category, Clergy-School Collaboration, is supported by the themes Outreach and Invitations, and Resources. Each theme is supported by two sub-themes, which serve to further describe each category.

## **Theme 1: School Counseling Experiences**

All ten participants recalled at least one type of experience with school counseling. The themes and sub-themes described below highlight the two types of participants' reported experience: personal and professional.

**Sub-Theme A: Personal experiences.** Nine of the ten participants reported having a personal experience with school counseling and school counselors. The following sub-themes, *self* and *offspring*, describe these experiences in greater detail.

***Self.*** Three participants were able to recall experiences from their own childhoods. One participant said his experiences while in school were negative because not only was the counselor not visible, she was no help when it came to applying for school. Another participant's high school counselor cost him admittance to a prestigious university due to ill-fated guidance. "... I had the opportunity to take a full year of math or not. My counselor told me that it wasn't necessary for me to take it because I was already accepted and didn't need it." The third participant's high school counselors were prejudiced toward him, therefore not encouraging him to pursue his dreams.

***Offspring.*** Eight of the participants spoke to their experiences with school counseling regarding their own children or grandchildren. One participant's granddaughter faced the possibility of moving from another state to live with her. They met with the local high school counselor to plan an academic course of action should her granddaughter move. "That counselor was so thorough and patient, and it was the summer time. Normally you wouldn't even have staff there but she took time to sit down and talk to us." On the other hand, another participant does not know the identity of his oldest daughter's twelfth grade counselor because neither he nor his

wife has ever spoken with that person. He attempted to contact his middle school daughter's counselor, but has yet to hear from that person.

**Sub-Theme B: Professional experiences.** Seven of the ten participants reported professional experiences with school counselors in their roles as pastors. The following sub-themes, advocate and partner in education, describe these experiences in greater detail.

***Advocate.*** Four participants have all gone to some of their young congregants' schools to act as advocates and to offer parental support. Three participants went to the school to meet with and assist the counselor with students in their congregations who were having behavioral issues. One participant's collaborative experience resulted in a "work-study" program that had the particular student reporting to both the participant and the school counselor. "He was supposed to get good grades, behavior, keep a report and just like on the job. You get written up for what you do well or not. And then he is to bring a report card to me. And I will look it over and that will determine how much he gets paid."

***Partner in education.*** One participant's experience was a bit different in that he didn't meet with the counselors regarding specific students. Rather, he met with them to offer an alternative music program for those students the counselor felt would benefit from those services. Another participant's professional experiences were both positive and negative. Her positive experiences included partnerships with local elementary schools to provide resources for students in need. However, she experienced a severe lack of communication with one of her partner schools in that it took three years to get a response. She also had considerable trouble when trying to help one of her young congregants get back in school. She attempted to call the school counselor and could not get a response in order to help this student. She ended up calling the school superintendent to get results.

## **Theme 2: Barriers to Collaboration**

All participants mentioned some barriers that may inhibit collaboration between African American pastors and school counselors. The themes and sub-themes described below highlight the participants' reasons for potential barriers to partnership.

**Sub-Theme A: Separation of church and state.** Nine of the ten participants mentioned the separation of church and state. Some participants felt it made a difference, while others did not. The sub-themes described below highlight the reasons for the two opinions as to whether or not the separation of church and state matters.

***Spiritual difference.*** Five of the participants expressed some concern regarding spiritual differences between school counselors and themselves and their congregants. One participant does not believe a counselor can truly help students who “are spiritual and have a spiritual knowledge.” Another asked the question, “How does a counselor who may not have faith address the faith aspect in a child who has faith?” A third participant mentioned that sometimes students may have spiritual issues in addition to academic issues, and the counselor should not address those issues without being a spiritual person. Instead, the counselor should refer to a faith leader to aid in those areas.

***Mutual interest.*** Six participants noted that the clergy and schools have a mutual interest when it comes to helping students attain success. Two participants reported the school counselor referring students to them. One participant says the separation of church and state should not be a problem if the school counselors and leaders are eager to partner to provide resources for the staff, students, and families. Another notes that some of her clergy colleagues have had trouble gaining access to schools in order to form partnerships. Her response to them was, “What are you really trying to do? You can’t go in trying to convert people to Christianity.” A third

participant has consulted and collaborated successfully with school counselors because of the “mutual understanding that we have a child’s best interest at heart.”

**Sub-Theme B: Lack of visibility.** Nine of the participants mention visibility as an issue with clergy-school collaboration. Some participants see it as the role of the pastor to be visible, while others see it as the counselor’s responsibility. The sub-themes below go into further detail about each opinion.

***Counselor visibility.*** Two participants believe the counselors should visit students in their environment, namely the church. One participant says African American students of faith spend a lot of time with their pastors and in church, and the counselors should visit the churches to learn about the spiritual aspects of their students’ lives. Another participant attended a faith summit in his local school district, and there were no school counselors in attendance. He says, “I would’ve loved to see some counselors there and get their perspective on this faith partnership with the schools. How do they see that being a benefit?”

***Pastor visibility.*** Seven of the participants say pastors should be more visible in the schools and the community. Given the social justice issues faced by African American children in the past, present, and future, it is important for pastors to be accessible to these students and their schools. One participant constantly stressed the importance of the African American pastor being visible and accessible in the neighborhoods and schools. Another says pastors should visit the local schools’ PTA meetings to offer their support to the school staff and parents that may not be members of their congregations. A third participant believes part of a pastor’s role is to visit schools and meet with the school counselor to find out what the church can do to meet the needs of the students. One participant simply asked herself a question: “Will the surrounding area miss us if we close the doors [of the church]?”

### **Theme 3: Clergy-School Collaboration**

All ten participants shared their experiences with and/or ideas about successful clergy-school collaboration. The themes described below highlight the areas which contribute to the success of clergy-school collaboration.

**Sub-Theme A: Outreach and invitation.** Eight of the participants mentioned outreach as a means to facilitate clergy-school collaboration. The participants varied on who should initiate the outreach. The sub-themes below go into further detail.

***Counselor to pastor.*** Six participants named pastor education as a barrier to successful collaboration, stating that the counselors should spearhead this education. One participant noted that pastors need to be educated about interacting with schools and parents. In fact, he says most pastors have never been invited to partner and collaborate with the neighborhood schools. Five participants mentioned meetings, trainings, and rap sessions to help facilitate successful partnerships between clergy and school counselors. Another participant also noted that clergy need to actually be educated on the actual role of a school counselor:

"Hey, listen. This is what we do. This is who we are. If we can help you, let us know. If you need our help, then let us know." Just develop a partnership that they have training of sorts, fall semester, spring semester--everybody can't make it so it's going to happen twice a year. I think that would really help to bridge a gap and debunk some of the--how can I say it--demystify some of the myths about what it is and take away their... "Look, we're real people. We go home at night and eat chicken just like everybody else. We have kids like them and we all want the best for our children." We bring a certain skill set to the table. As pastors, you bring a certain skill set to the table. We're not trying to do your job and we know you're not trying to do our job. Every now and then pastors do have to be shown and informed.

***Pastor to counselor.*** Five participants believe pastors should invite school counselors and school personnel to special church events so the counselors can meet their students in their environment and so the counselors will become familiar with the church. Three participants have community days at their church, which includes food, vendors, and activities for children of all

ages. They believe it is their responsibility to invite local school personnel to these events to build relationships and partnerships. One participant had a unique experience with the staff of one of the elementary schools her church sponsors.

A month ago, the entire... I won't say the entire staff. About twenty-four persons, staff persons from [the elementary school] worshipped with us. The principal, guidance counselor. We didn't ask them to. We have been doing so much for them. They just came and brought us a donation, and said, "Thank you."

**Sub-Theme B: Resources.** Eight of the participants mentioned the resources their churches currently provide or are willing to provide to area schools. Seven of the eight also mentioned community partnerships as a way to collaborate. The following sub-themes provide more detail.

***Church resources.*** One participant's church provides bags of food for hungry students and their families from her partner schools to have over the weekend. Two participants' churches also provide culinary services to needy families. Another participant's church provides tutoring, school supplies, and literacy programs for the students in her area. A third participant's church provides many services including free medical care, a clothing closet, and a food bank to area families, and he has gone to the high school in his area to offer these services to those students and families. Another participant's church holds a school supply drive at the beginning of each school year, and he partners with two area schools and directly provides resources to their student population. However, he had this to say about the Black Church regarding partnerships with schools:

The Black Church has been referred to--many years ago I read this in a book--as a sleeping giant. I think that the Black Church--you could say the church at large; I want to speak specifically to the Black Church here--has a role, has a responsibility and has resources that are vital to the success of African American families, including African American children. One of the things that I'm going to commit myself even more fully to when I finish with the school board is to lead in this effort that we started in really developing our faith-based partnership, where the resources that churches bring to bear, from buildings where before and after school

programs can be had and tutoring, to reading buddies, to mentors, to supplies, teacher supplies, back to school supplies, uniforms, as well as counseling for families, parenting classes--those services and more that churches can provide that the community so desperately needs. We've got to tap into that resource.

***Community Partnerships.*** Seven participants have formed relationships with community organizations and businesses. The free medical care one participant's church provides to the community is fostered by medical professionals in the area. Two participants' churches founded a community development corporation and enjoy many partnerships with various entities such as the YMCA and other local businesses to provide many of the programs available to the congregants and the surrounding area. The community days at three of the participants' churches have community sponsors. These partnerships could provide area schools with sorely needed resources for the low socioeconomic students and their families.

## **Discussion**

This study attempted to answer the following questions: "How do African American pastors experience professional school counselors?" and "How do African American pastors experience referral/collaboration/consultation with professional school counselors?" Below is a summary of findings and how they compare to existing literature.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question sought to explore how African American pastors experience professional school counseling. Theme one addresses the first research question.

#### **Theme 1: School Counseling Experiences**

**Personal.** Existing literature revealed the varying personal experiences of African Americans regarding school counselors. Owens et al.'s (2011) study showed that African American male students have positive yet limited experiences with school counselors. Davis,



Davis, and Mobley (2013) noted the achievement gap regarding advanced courses and college enrollment and pointed out that some counselors can be very helpful while others are no help at all. Breland-Noble et al. (2006) and Moore et al. (2008) mentioned counselors giving differential treatment among student ethnicities regarding behavior issues, with African Americans getting the lesser treatment. Abdin and Robinson (2002) also noted differential treatment among student ethnicities with regard to behavior challenges. Nine participants had varying personal experiences with school counseling regarding either themselves or their offspring. Five participants had positive personal experiences, and four participants had negative personal experiences. The participants' positive and negative personal experiences occurred in the context of students' post-high school plans and behavior challenges.

**Professional.** The current study's findings also reveal participants' professional experiences in terms of acting as advocates and partners in education. Six participants had positive professional experiences, and one had a negative professional experience. Three participants had negative personal experiences but positive professional experiences. There is no literature speaking to African American pastors' professional experiences with school counselors, thus only the findings surrounding the participants' personal experiences are supported.

## **Research Question 2**

The second research question sought to examine how African American pastors experience referral, collaboration, and consultation with professional school counselors. Themes 2 and 3 address the second research question.

### **Theme 2: Barriers to Collaboration**

**Separation of church and state.** State-funded public schools are wary of outsiders with religious affiliation coming into the schools due to the First Amendment; therefore, churches and other religious groups have not been welcomed with open arms for fear of hidden agendas (Darden, 2006). School counselors and African American clergy have a mutual interest in assisting African American students in attaining success. Two participants reported the school counselor referring students to them for certain issues. Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) describe the importance of education to the African American community, and school counselors are mandated by law to address the achievement gap plaguing African American students (Capps et al., 2005). Six participants noted that while separation of church and state is a concern, they had no problems working and consulting with schools due to the mutual interests of meeting students' needs.

**Lack of visibility.** Studies show that while African American churches may have counseling services available to their congregation, school counselors are often missing from the equation or are not as utilized as mental health counselors (Ennis et al., 2004; Molock et al., 2008). Four participants agreed supported McRae et al.'s (1999) study suggesting counselors develop relationships with African American pastors in order to reach their congregations. Although some African American churches have outreach programs that target schools (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991), seven participants believed pastors can do a better job of going to area schools to work with the school counselors.

### **Theme 3: Clergy-School Collaboration**

**Outreach and invitation.** Several studies have suggested training pastors in mental health counseling (Adksion-Bradley et al., 2005; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Ennis et al., 2004; Farris, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000). Ennis et al. (2004) mention in-services and trainings as

a way to bridge the gap between African American pastors and mental health counseling services. This study's findings support the literature calling for pastoral trainings in that six participants have either participated in or desire trainings and in-services regarding the local school systems. Furthermore, LA, LJ, and MS desire trainings regarding school counselors and their roles. Eight participants desire a better mutual outreach between clergy and school counselors.

**Resources.** Eight participants mentioned specific resources that their churches provide to the community as a whole. CV and HK have formed partnerships with local schools and businesses to provide many resources for all kinds of needs. The eight participants whose churches provide assistance to the community mention that most of their congregants are of a low socioeconomic status, which supports McRoberts' (2001) claim of most African American churches being in low socioeconomic areas. These congregants also face daily the issues Lee (2005) mentioned in his study, namely low academic achievement. Bryan (2005) noted that church resources are often overlooked and not utilized when it comes to closing the achievement gap. HK calls the Black Church "a sleeping giant" that has a wealth of resources that can assist schools, students, and families, yet these resources have not been fully utilized.

### **Implications**

#### **School Counselors**

The findings of this study indicate a lack of visibility in the African American community on the part of school counselors. School counselors should make an effort to visit the local churches and attend church sponsored events. This will give students and families the idea that school counselors are truly invested in their wellbeing and interested in their lives outside the

school building. School counselors should also offer to speak to the congregations and make efforts to meet with the pastors individually to share their resources and offer support.

Part of a school counselor's job is to have access to community resources that are available to help students and families (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Compiling a list of local African American churches, particularly in low socioeconomic areas, will be beneficial to the school counselors as well as those students in need. This list should articulate the specific services that each church provides to make it easier for the students and families. School counselors should also advocate for themselves to administrators and explain why connecting with faith communities is a necessity for student success. An important component of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) is meeting with community stakeholders. School counselors should strive to include African American pastors as stakeholders, especially in low socioeconomic areas. School counselors should meet with those interested pastors to share ways to engage with the students that do not violate separation of church and state.

### **School Administrators**

Many school divisions and school administrators are facing budget cuts, which serve to eliminate much-needed resources such as after school tutoring, supplies, and uniforms. Many families are also struggling financially and may not be able to provide the necessary items for their students to meet with academic success. Allowing neighborhood churches to supply these items will alleviate the monetary concerns of school officials. Churches can also provide free services such as mentoring, tutoring, and sponsorship of extra-curricular activities. These services can provide students and families an alternative to after school care that would cost more money. Tony Evans (2015) has created a National Church Adopt a School Initiative with

The Urban Alternative, and together have produced resources necessary to foster these partnerships.

School division officials and faith leaders across the country are forming partnerships and having meaningful discussions about how to make these partnerships fruitful. However, school counselors have not been part of that conversation. Including school counselors in faith partnerships will serve to increase visibility of school counselors. School counselors have knowledge of the needs of the students in the schools, and including them will give the faith leaders a better idea of how they can help students meet with success in school and beyond.

### **Pastors**

The current study's findings suggest African American pastors know the importance of being visible in the surrounding communities. The pastor's importance in the community is paramount, and visibility lends credibility to the pastor's place in society (Haight, 1998). Visiting schools and meeting with the principals and counselors is paramount to forming meaningful partnerships. Pastors should also attend local PTA meetings and school events so the school community becomes familiar with them and their churches.

African American pastors often invite people from the community to address the congregation regarding topics such as voting, educational resources, etc. (Giger et al., 2008). Pastors should invite the local school counseling division leader to speak to the congregation on the importance of getting to know their child's school counselor and the resources the school counselor can provide.

### **School Counselor Educators**

Many school counselors enter the field without knowing how to foster partnerships with faith-based leaders. Furthermore, they are not aware of the need to advocate for the school

counseling profession when it comes to community leaders. Universities should have students create an agenda for a meeting for faith leaders and educating them about school counseling, and have this assignment as part of the master's level school counseling development course.

Separation of church and state is a cultural as well as a legal issue. Students need to be aware of this phenomenon and how it will affect their future work as school counselors. Universities should have students in a master's level legal and ethics course complete an assignment on the separation of church and state regarding schools. Understanding how to navigate church and state is something school counselors tend to learn on the job without training (Wolf, 2004). This assignment will inform the students of the legal boundaries in the event they will desire faith-based partnerships when they enter the field.

### **Professional Associations**

Counselors and pastors often belong to associations that promote professionalism such as the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the National Association of Evangelicals. These associations invite certain experts to address the body during conferences. Pastoral associations should invite school counselors to address and present at their conferences, and school counseling associations should invite pastors to do the same. This will promote interprofessional collaboration and open the lines of communication between the two parties.

Professional associations also produce newsletters and peer-reviewed journals that help to disseminate new trends in that particular profession. At times, these publications address special topics pertinent to the field. For example, *Professional School Counseling*, the journal for ASCA, devoted an entire issue to spirituality in 2004. The newsletter for the National Association of Evangelicals devoted an issue to criminal justice reform in 2011. The editors of

these publications should encourage submissions that address issues of clergy-school collaboration so others may gain ideas for their areas.

## **Limitations**

### **Researcher Bias**

The research process may have been inevitably affected by my personal biases and assumptions as a result of my experiences as both a practicing school counselor and a practicing Christian in the African American church. I maintained a reflexive journal, discussed my biases with my peer debriefer, and engaged in epoche and bracketing. However, it is still possible that the results were somehow impacted. In addition, my peer debriefer is a practicing school counselor, a practicing Christian in the African American church, and a counseling doctoral candidate at another university. His experiences may have affected his participation in the data analysis process as well.

### **Researcher's Experience with Methodology**

I have taken qualitative research courses and completed qualitative projects as part of my doctoral coursework, yet I do not consider myself a qualitative research expert. While I did not find the actual data collection difficult, the data analysis proved to be cumbersome. Therefore, my limited experience with phenomenology in particular may have impacted the research process in some way. For example, when I first began the analysis process, I found it challenging to group the units of meaning into core themes. I am aware that my limited experience may have impacted the quality of the overall research process.

### **Sample Selection**

All ten participants came from the same metropolitan area of the Commonwealth of Virginia; therefore, it was not possible to conclude if the current study's findings would be

different if the participants came from other geographical areas. I was able to get representation from the non-denominational sector of the Black Church, but was only able to get participants from three of the major denominations. Some African American pastors' voices were not captured due to their involvement in one of the other four denominations.

### **Future Research**

A follow-up qualitative study would be the best way to address the limitations that were identified within the current study. The follow-up study would need to consist of a more diverse sample with regard to gender and denomination within the Black Church. It would also be advantageous to obtain a diverse sample from various geographic areas to increase validity.

An interesting study would examine the perceptions of professional school counseling with regard to other ethnicities and Protestant denominations outside the Black Church, then compare and contrast the findings of that study to those of the current study. Analyzing the results of both studies may fully describe the phenomenon of the school counseling profession's relationship with faith leaders across ethnicities.

Some of the pastors in the current study have a functioning youth ministry and youth ministry leaders, which limited the pastors' interaction with the young congregants of the church. Expanding the study to include those youth ministry leaders may give more insight to the perceptions of school counseling through the eyes of the African American church leader.

The current study is one-sided in terms of voice and perception in that only African American pastors were examined. Future research might explore school counselors' perceptions of African American pastors and faith leaders in general. Comparing and contrasting the results of that study to those of the current study might highlight areas of growth in terms of bridging the gap between the two entities.



This qualitative study could also provide a foundation for future quantitative research. Specifically, a survey instrument could be constructed that enables faith leaders to report their experiences with schools and school counseling in their geographic area. For example, the instrument could encompass a Likert scale in which faith leaders rate the degree to which they felt welcome to partner with the local school counseling departments.

### **Conclusion**

Professional school counselors are faced with a myriad of challenges, and one of those challenges is serving all African American students. Partnering with African American pastors can serve to not only meet the students' needs but can also help to lighten the load of an overburdened school. African American pastors are more than willing to help students attain success and are excited about the possibilities of partnership. It is up to both school counselors and pastors to come together to ensure that all students are served and given the opportunity to become productive citizens.

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## Appendix A

### Initial Email to Potential Participants

Dear Pastor:

My name is Krystal L. Freeman; I am a doctoral candidate at Old Dominion University in the Counseling and Human Services department, and am completing my doctoral dissertation requirement. My dissertation topic is *African American pastors and their perceptions of professional school counseling*. I am respectfully requesting an in-person interview with you that would last about 60-120 minutes. This would aid me with my research on African American pastors' views of professional school counseling. My interest in this topic is directly related to my upbringing and current membership in a predominately African American congregation and my academic and clinical work in the professional school counseling field. I value and respect the role of the church in the lives of African American people. My desire is to help provide resources specifically for pastors to guide their congregants to spiritual, mental and social maturity.

Proverbs 4:7 states "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding". To that end, I am seeking to find out as much as I can about how pastors influence the lives of their congregants. Please remember your participation is strictly voluntary as well as confidential. An informed consent form signed by you is required for me to complete my research. My goal is to collect all data as soon as possible. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at (757) 348-7898. Dr. Kaprea F. Hoquee is my major professor and you may also contact her with questions or concerns related to this research project at (757) 683-3321.

Once again I would like to assure you that your responses are confidential. The protocols for data security and protection of human subjects ensure that your identity will be disguised via a randomly assigned identification number. Thank you so much for your cooperation and attention in this matter. Your help is truly appreciated.

Yours in the Gospel,

Krystal L. Freeman, M.S.Ed, NCC, NCSC

## Appendix B

### Human Subjects Review Board Approval



DARDEN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Human Subject Committee  
Norfolk, Virginia 23529-0156  
Phone: (757) 683-6695  
Fax: (757) 683-5756

November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014

Approved Application Number: 201501057

Dr. Kaprea Hoquee  
Department of Counseling and Human Services

Dear Dr. Hoquee:

Your Application for Exempt Research with Krystal Freeman entitled "Counseling Students Experience with Standardized Patients in a One Day Workshop" has been found to be EXEMPT under Category 6.2 from IRB review by the Human Subjects Review Committee of the Darden College of Education.

The determination that this study is EXEMPT from IRB review is for an indefinite period of time provided no significant changes are made to your study. If any significant changes occur, notify me or the chair of this committee at that time and provide complete information regarding such changes. In the future, if this research project is funded externally, you must submit an application to the University IRB for approval to continue the study.

Best wishes in completing your study.

Sincerely,

Edwin Gómez, Ph.D., CPRP  
Chair, Human Subjects Review, DCOE  
Associate Professor and Coordinator of PRTS Program  
Human Movement Sciences Department  
Darden College of Education  
Old Dominion University egomez@odu.edu

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

## INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

### OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

**PROJECT TITLE:** *African American pastors and their perceptions of professional school counseling*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

*The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES.*

#### **RESEARCHERS**

*Kaprea F. Hoquee, Ph.D. ~ Old Dominion University ~ Department of Counseling & Human Services  
Krystal L. Freeman, M.S.Ed ~ Old Dominion University ~ Department of Counseling & Human Services*

#### **DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY**

*Several studies have examined African American pastors and their views of mental health counseling. However, no studies have examined African American pastors' views of professional school counseling.*

*If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of African American pastors' and their perceptions of professional school counseling. If you say YES, then your participation will last for no more than 30 minutes.*

#### **EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA**

*You should have completed the demographics sheet describing your ethnicity, culture, and religion. To the best of your knowledge, you should not have any criteria that would keep you from participating in this study.*

#### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

***RISKS:** If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of discussing topics that may be emotionally difficult. The researcher tried to reduce these risks by not asking questions that would be too personal or too painful to answer. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.*

***BENEFITS:** The main benefit to you for participating in this study is aiding in research geared toward integrating the African American Christian culture with the counseling field. Others may benefit by this research providing a foundation for future partnerships.*

#### **COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

*The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.*

#### **NEW INFORMATION**

*If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.*

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

*The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as interview questions, confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from the information. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.*

#### **WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**



*It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.*

### **COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

*If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm, injury, or illness arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Kaprea Hoquee, Ph.D. at 757-683-3321, Dr. George Maihafer the current IRB chair at 757-683-4520 at Old Dominion University, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.*

### **VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

*By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them.*

*If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. George Maihafer, the current IRB chair, at 757-683-4520, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.*

*And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.*

<b>Subject's Printed Name &amp; Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
---	-------------

### **INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT**

*I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.*

<b>Investigator's Printed Name &amp; Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
--	-------------

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol

The purpose of the proposed study is to examine the experiences of African American pastors regarding professional school counseling. The research questions guiding this study are: “How do African American pastors experience professional school counselors?” and “How do African American pastors experience referral/collaboration/consultation with professional school counselors?” The participants in this study will be African American pastors. I will explain the purpose of the study to the interviewee, thank him/her for participating, and begin with the questions listed below:

1. How long have you been the pastor of your church?
2. Would you consider your church to be fundamental in its beliefs and teachings? Why or why not?
3. To what extent do you see the role of a pastor as being a leader in the African American community? *(prompt: what are some of the ways pastors take charge in the community?)*
4. How do you define professional school counseling? *(prompt: you might know it as guidance counseling)*
5. What experiences have you had, either personally or professionally, with school counselors? *(prompt: perhaps with your own children or yourself during your school years)*
6. Have you referred any of your congregants to their school counselor? Why or why not? *(prompt: if any of your congregants have had issues at school)*

7. Tell me about your experiences collaborating and/or consulting with professional school counselors. (*prompt: meeting with them, talking with them, etc.*)
8. Tell me about your best experience with professional school counselors.
9. Tell me about your worst experience with professional school counselors.
10. Is there anything you would like to add?

Some questions may be added throughout the interview to get further information or in response to the participant's answers to questions. At the end of the interview, I will thank the interviewee for agreeing to participate.

## Appendix E

## Participant Demographics Form

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please circle the item that applies to you.

**Gender:**

Male

**Female**

**Age:**

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60-69

70-79

80+

**Level of Formal Education:** Less than HS diploma/GED

**Bachelor's degree**

HS Diploma/GED

**Master's degree**

Some college

**Doctorate degree**

**Denomination:**

**Baptist**

**COGIC**

**AME**

**Episcopalian**

## Methodist

### Non-denominational

If other, please write in the name of your denomination here:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Number of years as pastor:**

1-10

11-20

21-30

**31-40**

40+

## **Appendix F**

### **First Follow-Up Email to Participants**

Dear Pastor,

Thank you so much for participating in my study. Your responses are invaluable to my research. I have attached the transcript of our interview to this email. Please review it and let me know if there is anything you would like to add or change. I will be using an alias to protect your anonymity in the write-up of the study. Please let me know if you would like to provide an alias or if you would rather I create the alias. Once again, thank you so much for your incredible help. May God continue to bless you and your family.

Yours in the Gospel,

Krystal L. Freeman, M.S.Ed., NCC, NCSC

## **Appendix G**

### **Second Follow-Up Email to Participants**

Dear Pastor,

Once again, thank you for participating in my study. After careful review of your interview's transcript, my research team and I have created a list of themes that emerged from your interview. I have attached it to this email for your review. Your feedback is important, for without your voice this research would not be possible. I want to make sure I have captured the essence of your experiences with professional school counseling. I cannot begin to express my gratitude to you for your help. May God bless you abundantly and increase your territory.

In the Gospel,

Krystal L. Freeman, M.S.Ed., NCC, NCSC

## Appendix H

### Within Case Display

<b>Participant Characteristics</b>	<b>School Counseling Experiences</b>	<b>Clergy-School Collaboration</b>	<b>Barriers to Collaboration</b>
~Age Range: <b>50-59</b> ~Gender: <b>Female</b> ~ # of years as pastor: <b>1-10</b> ~Denomination: <b>Non-denominational</b> ~Highest degree completed: <b>Doctorate</b>	<b>Personal</b> <i>Self</i> **None recalled  <i>Offspring</i> **Experiences with son **Recommended mentorship program for son **Aided in graduation  <b>Professional</b> <i>Advocate</i>  **Met with school on behalf of young congregant **Had difficulty with administrators **Meeting with school superintendent  <i>Partner in education</i>  **Two elementary schools **Possible 3 <sup>rd</sup> school **Took 3 years for one school to respond	<b>Outreach and Invitation</b> <i>Pastor to counselor</i>  **Visit schools **Provide materials for students **Adopt staff for holidays  <i>Counselor to pastor</i>  **Suggestions for faith summits **Include counselors in faith summits **Suggestions for counselors to visit communities **Community liaison  <b>Resources</b> <i>Church</i>  **Provide food for students and families **Options for African American male students who have been suspended  <i>Community partnerships</i>  **Tutoring services **Connections with local food banks	<b>Separation of Church and State</b> <i>Spiritual differences</i>  **Pastors should not try to convert, only serve needs **Counselors should refer if uncomfortable  <i>Mutual interest</i>  **Best interests of students **Ensure academic success  <b>Lack of Visibility</b> <i>Pastor visibility</i>  **Pastor must know the surrounding community ** Visit schools to offer support and resources  <i>Counselor visibility</i>  ** School staff visited church one Sunday ** Meet with faith community leaders regularly

### **Vitae**

Krystal L'Trice Freeman earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from the University of Virginia in 2005 and a Master of Science in Education degree in school counseling from Old Dominion University in 2008. She is a nationally certified counselor, a nationally certified school counselor, and a licensed school counselor for grades K-12 in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Ms. Freeman has served as a professional school counselor on the elementary and secondary levels for a total of five years in Washington D.C., Prince William County, Virginia, and currently in Norfolk, Virginia. She has taught undergraduate courses in human services and special education, and has co-taught master's level courses in school counseling. She has also provided supervision to master's level students during their practicum and internship experiences.

Ms. Freeman is a member of several organizations including Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Chi Sigma Iota Counseling and Academic and Professional Honor Society International, the American Association of Christian Counselors, the American School Counselor Association, and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. She has presented several times locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally regarding African American Christians, innovative school counseling strategies, biases, and cross-cultural counseling. Currently Ms. Freeman serves on the board of the Virginia School Counselor Association as its Graduate Student Vice President.