

HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT EXPERIENCES: A SOCIAL CAPITAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to record and analyze students' experiences with dropping out of high school within a social capital framework. Discussing the stories of high school dropouts provided valuable information related to the root causes of dropout behaviors in a social capital context. This information can be used to develop programs designed to increase social capital in schools, families, and communities, which can contribute to a decrease in dropout behaviors.

This phenomenological study took a narratological research approach that focused on collecting the lived experiences of high school dropouts within a social capital framework. The context of this study was a high school in an urban school division in Southwestern Virginia. The participants were five high school dropouts who speak English as a primary language and were a part of the general education population at the high school. Triangulation of data sources included field notes, interviews with the participants, and archival documents. A three-iteration code mapping procedure was used for data analysis to provide an audit trail.

Narrative descriptions of the life histories of each participant were written. The overarching themes resulting from the analysis across the narratives were that none of the students had relationships with members of their families or communities who had the capacity to assist them in their endeavors to complete school; students had the desire to complete school or obtain a GED, but did not have a relationship with any person outside of the school setting who was persistent with encouragement and knowledge; and the students had access to social capital, but did not understand how to use it effectively. Results and conclusions are included in

two articles, one written for publication in *Sociology of Education*, and the other written for publication in *Professional School Counseling*.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Lee Slover, who has endured many nights and weekends of writing and has given me the love, support, hope, and patience to make this work possible, and to my parents, George and Carol Drewry, who continue to love and encourage me each and every day.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sheila was a 19 year-old eleventh grader when she dropped out of high school. After months of searching by the school's intervention specialist and three visits from school resource officers, Sheila was located and informed that she and her mother had to attend a meeting at the school to reenroll. I was amazed when she walked into my office on February 22, 2006, with two blackened eyes. Her mother claimed that Sheila's ex-boyfriend had hit her when she refused to move back in with him. During our conversation, I learned that Sheila's mother, Tammy, had dropped out of school when she was in the eighth grade because she was pregnant with Sheila's older sister, Becky. Becky dropped out of school when she was 17. Sheila had moved out of her mother's apartment at the beginning of the school year to live with her 27 year-old boyfriend. While living with her boyfriend, Sheila dropped out of school and developed an addiction to crack cocaine. Tammy was unable to look for her daughter to bring her home because she held two jobs. Sheila finally moved back home after her boyfriend beat her severely.

When Sheila left my office, she did not know whether she would return to school or try to pass the GED test. She left knowing that the school had personnel who could provide counseling for her drug addiction and any mental issues she might have. She also understood the guidelines of the after-school tutoring program where she would be able to receive additional instruction and assistance for passing the SOL tests. Her school counselor had given her a plan of study that will allow her to graduate from high school soon after she turns 21. Most of all, Sheila left with hope for the future and assurance that someone cared about her.

Context for the Study

The Dropout Prevention Act, part H of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB),

provides federal grants to provide funding for programs designed to encourage students, like Sheila, to stay in school and to provide support for students to reenter school (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). In addition, this federal law holds local school divisions and local schools accountable for their graduation rates. Understanding components of social capital associated with the reduction of dropout tendencies can provide strategies useful in developing programs designed to lower dropout rates in order to meet the requirements of NCLB.

A 2002 document from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that the national status dropout rate, the percent of individuals who were not enrolled in school and did not have a high school diploma or its equivalent, was 10.7% in 2001 (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004). In that same year, 5% of all U.S. students dropped out of school (Kaufman et al.). Data from the NCES also showed that the number of 16 to 24 year olds who have a high school degree or its equivalent has increased little in the past three decades, but the status dropout rate has decreased from 14.6% since 1972 (Kaufman et al.). The event dropout rate, the number of students who drop out of school in any particular year, has fluctuated greatly between a low of 4.1% in 1987 and 1991 and high of 6.7%, which was first seen in 1974 (Kaufman et al.). A decrease in the event dropout rate was seen until 1987, but has since leveled for all racial and ethnic groups, except Hispanics (Kaufman et al.). The status dropout rate for Hispanics has declined slightly to 27.0%, but fluctuated greatly for the past thirty years from a high of 35.8% in 1989 to a low of 27.0% in 2001 (Kaufman et al.). The gap between the dropout rate for African American students and white students is narrowing, but the rate for Hispanics remains significantly higher than the rate for other racial and ethnic groups (Kaufman et al.).

Other trends in dropout rates are also bleak. In 2002, the dropout rate was lower for 16 to 17 year olds than 18 to 24 year olds (Kaufman et al., 2004). As age increases, the tendency to

drop out of school increases is a trend that has been confirmed by several researchers (Allensworth, 2005; Gottfredson, Fink, & Graham, 1994; Roderick, 1994; Rumberger, 1995). Income level and socioeconomic status are also related to dropout rates. Results from research indicate that students from low income families and lower socioeconomic status families are more likely to drop out of school than their higher income and higher socioeconomic status peers (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Rumberger, 1983; Steindberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984).

The dropout problem seems have an effect on all areas of the United States, for no significant differences in dropout rates were noted when students were separated into groups based on the region of the country in which they live (Kaufman et al., 2004). Unfortunately, dropout data gathered from different states is inconsistent due to different reporting methods and to the vocabulary involved, such as *event dropout*, *status dropout*, and *cohort dropout* (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). For example, the Virginia event dropout rate in 2001 was reported by the NCES to be 3.5% (Kaufman et al.); but according to the Virginia Department of Education, the event dropout rate in 2001 was 2.02% (Virginia Department of Education, 2003).

Due to the federal requirement for state and local education agencies to decrease dropout rates, research to define reasons students drop out of school is timely. Since 1988, researchers have provided support for a relationship between social capital and dropout rates. Prior to 1988, several social factors that contributed to a student's tendency to drop out of school were identified. Rumberger (1983) pointed to parents' educational attainment, family structure and size, and family socioeconomic status as strong influences on the probability that a student will drop out of school. Pittman and Haughwout (1987) found a positive correlation between school size and dropout rate, but the authors attributed their findings to the social effects of a larger school having a negative influence on the tendency for a student to drop out of school. Steinberg,

Blinde, and Chan (1984) concluded that a higher dropout rate for language minority students was associated with low socioeconomic status and poor academic achievement.

In 1988, James Coleman brought many social factors together to define social capital and how it is related to dropout rates. Coleman (1988) found that as the level of social capital increased, a student's tendency to drop out of school decreased. According to Coleman (1988), social capital is an aggregate of trust and obligations developed within networks of various people. It is a resource available to individuals, much like monetary capital. The obligations form a type of social credit. A variety of social circumstances that influence a student's tendency to drop out of high school may be related to the level of social capital found in a student's family, school, or community.

Coleman's (1988) findings in his landmark study showed that attendance at Catholic schools increased social capital and thereby decreased the tendency to drop out of school. Further research has added to Coleman's findings. Studies of student mobility and social capital concluded that for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, changing residences and schools several times during the course of a student's high school years decreased social capital and may have increased the tendency to drop out of school (Coleman, 1988; Hofferth, Boisjoly, & Duncan, 1998; Swanson & Schneider, 1999). Many researchers concur in their conclusions that attendance improved with increased networking among school personnel, parents, students, and community members because levels of social capital increased (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hofferth et al., 1998; Israel & Bealieu, 2004; McNeal, 1999; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997; Yan, 1999). Furthermore, strengthening social capital within communities has been shown to have an association with a decrease in dropout tendency within the community (Crowder & South, 2003; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Smith, Beaulieu, & Israel,

1992). Recent studies have shown that high parental expectations are associated with a decrease in the tendency to drop out of school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Bejinez, 2002; Qian & Blair, 1999). Finally, school social capital has been associated with an increase in student achievement and a decrease in dropout rates (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

We know little about the lived experiences of individual students who have dropped out of high school. Qualitative components to the research have been lacking and could lend more insight into the reasons students drop out of school. Studies on social capital and dropouts found to date in the literature are primarily quantitative in nature (Carbonaro, 1998; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; McNeal, 1999; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997). These researchers tend to use large national databases, such as the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) database and the High School and Beyond (HSB) database, because of the scope, magnitude, and longitudinal nature of the studies. Unfortunately, national databases are not designed to address specific concepts associated with social capital and limit the usefulness of such studies. Many fields of data are combined to loosely approximate the aspects of social capital defined by individual study authors. Depending upon the definition of dropout utilized by the author of each study, subjects' dropout status may have changed after the survey for the database was completed. An NCES issue brief indicated that 63% of students who drop out of school eventually earn a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or high school diploma equivalent (Hurst, Kelly, & Princiotta, 2004). By utilizing qualitative methods, student perceptions of their dropout experience were described and analyzed. The stories the students told were examined to determine how aspects of social capital related to the students' decisions to drop out of school.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to record and analyze students' experiences with dropping out of high school within a social capital framework.

The questions guiding the research were as follows:

1. What stories do former high school students tell about decisions to stay in school or drop out?
2. What aspects of social capital as defined in this study appear in these stories?
3. How do social influences beyond those generally recognized as components of social capital emerge in these stories?
4. What other common themes emerge across the stories?

Definition of Terms

In this section, the definition of the term *social capital* as developed by James Coleman is presented. Coleman used his 1988 landmark paper, *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*, to discuss the relationship between social capital and dropout rates. In addition, the term *dropout* is defined.

Social Capital

Social capital, as defined by Coleman (1988), includes multiple concepts. Each of the included concepts produces a desirable outcome within a relationship among different people. Each person included in the relationship places value on the desired outcome. This value is the intangible resource that Coleman refers to as social capital.

According to Coleman (1988), the most basic components of social capital are the numerous relationships and interactions among various people who are associated with one another. Within the setting of education, these interactions may take various forms, including

parent-child interactions, parent-school interactions, child-school interactions, and parent-parent interactions. Multiple overlapping interactions whereby parents develop relationships with the parents of their children's friends are known as *intergenerational closure* (Carbonaro, 1998).

Inherent to interaction between people who know one another is a component of social capital called the *information channel* (Coleman, 1988). Information channels provide a mechanism for gaining knowledge, which is a resource leading to action. The actor in the interaction must determine how to react to the information based on the perceived trustworthiness of the channel through which it was obtained.

Other important components of social capital are *norms* and *sanctions* developed through relationships (Coleman, 1988). Norms and sanctions provide a rationale for certain actions, promoting some and inhibiting others. Within the confines of relationships, rewards and consequences are established based on the accepted value placed on the actions of the parties within the relationships.

The final components of Coleman's (1988) definition of social capital are *trust* and *obligations*. As a high level of trust is recognized by parties within the same network, support and positive interactions are established. Within relationships in the network, expectations of reciprocity evolve from the interactions and the development of trust and obligations arises. The expectations of reciprocity promote actions within the relationships that result from the feelings of obligation.

Coleman (1988) explained all aspects of his definition in a description of attendance at Catholic schools. Attendance at a particular church promoted closure of social networks within the scope of different types of interactions. Parents of students attending Catholic schools tended to know their children's teachers. Parents interacted with their children, their children's friends,

and the parents of their children's friends to create a series of information channels. Community norms allowed acceptance of the parochial school as an appropriate avenue for a solid education. The tradition of authority engendered by the faculty and staff of the typical Catholic school permitted the institution certain sanctions for unacceptable behavior. Within the school, the norms of the community established high expectations of academic excellence. These expectations and a sense of trust created obligations for the faculty to provide the best education possible. Thus, Coleman found that students attending Catholic schools tended to possess high levels of social capital. Coleman concluded that students who attend Catholic schools exhibited a lower tendency to drop out of school than students at their public school counterparts.

Since 1988, several other researchers have added to Coleman's definition of social capital. In a 1996 study, Teachman, Paasch, and Carver confirmed each of Coleman's findings, and emphasized the strength of the relationship between changing schools and the tendency to dropout of school. Teachman et al. (1997) included dynamics of financial and human capital and interactions with social capital to examine links to dropout tendencies. Carbonaro (1998) added intergenerational closure to the equation. Israel and Beaulieu (2004) broke social capital into three dimensions: family social capital, school social capital, and community social capital. McNeal (1999) defined parental involvement as an aspect of social capital.

Dropout

Dropout, for the purposes of this paper, is defined according to the definition provided in information accompanying the NELS database. *Event dropout* describes the student who has committed the mere act of leaving high school before graduating. *Status dropout* describes the person of school age who was not in school at the time of the survey. *Cohort dropout* uses a base year and describes a person who did not obtain a high school equivalency degree, high school

diploma, or failed to attend school for 20 consecutive unexcused days during the base year in which the individual should have graduated.

Status dropout rate is used most often to describe the proportion of persons who have dropped out of school. Event dropout rate describes the percent of students who drop out of school in any particular year. Cohort dropout rates show the difference in dropout rates for particular groups of students. Due to the confusing nature of the definitions, states often report differing types of dropout percentages, leading to unreliable conclusions when comparing state dropout rates. These rates are quantitative measures that group students into categories describing their status with respect to school completion. Knowing about the individual experiences of students who have dropped out of school can help to clarify the reasons students have dropped out of school and provide another way to define dropouts.

Significance of the Study

In my opinion, the objectives of NCLB are noble and just. However, realizing the goal of having every student meet certain levels of proficiency in mathematics and reading requires more than a commitment of highly qualified teachers to educate students. In order to meet the goals and deadlines established in NCLB, teachers must be equipped with data-based knowledge to create an atmosphere that is safe and supportive in which students may learn (Guisbond & Neill, 2004). Students must be present in their classrooms if teachers are to educate them. Establishing arenas for education in the community in which learning is the norm and students feel obligated to learn would expedite this process (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Parental communication with students, teachers, and other parents to develop networks and support systems has been shown to generate social capital (McNeal, 1999; Carbonaro, 1998). Teacher-based components of social capital provide incentives for students to develop the desire to

achieve high standards across the curriculum (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Social capital theory may provide a framework for establishing such an environment for learning and promotion of student matriculation.

A deep understanding of how social capital is evident in the stories students tell about their dropout experience provides a qualitative component that has been lacking in the body of research focused on social capital and dropouts. Quantitative studies designed to identify specific risk factors to predict student dropout behavior place the behaviors in several categories: attendance problems, academic problems, socioeconomics, family factors, and demographics (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). Each of these categories of risk factors contain variables which can be thought of as symptoms of an underlying disease, much as a cough and stuffy nose are symptoms of a viral infection known as the common cold. Qualitative research methods provide a forum for gaining insight into how social capital contributes to the development of risk factors related to increased dropout rates.

Very few qualitative studies have been completed to examine the reasons for students dropping out of school (Chinien & Boutin, 2001; Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988; Suh & Satcher, 2005; Wells, Miller, & Clanton, 1999). Chinien and Boutin studied the results of a cognitive-based instructional program as a dropout prevention strategy in a Canadian school system. Farrell et al. conducted an ethnographic study of students who were at risk of dropping out of school. Suh and Satcher identified characteristics of Korean American students that contributed toward dropout behavior. Wells et al. observed how accurately school counselors could predict dropout tendencies. Of these studies, only one focused on the underlying factors promoting dropout behavior, but the level of social capital inherent in each subject was not associated with the characteristics identified by Suh and Satcher. A qualitative perspective

substantiates claims made by quantitative researchers who have contributed to the discourse on social capital and dropout rates. Individual stories told from the perspective of the individuals who dropped out of school provide support for the need to determine ways in which families, schools, and communities can increase positive social capital.

As Stephen Covey (1990) wrote in his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, in order to develop solutions to a problem, one must first understand the problem. The development of a more complete definition of social capital as it relates to the tendency for students to drop out of school would provide a foundation for the increase of social capital constructs that specifically address the dropout problem. By identifying aspects of social capital which contribute to the tendency for students to drop out of school, both negative and positive, families, schools, and communities are able to better understand the problem and design programs to increase the levels of social capital within their social networks.

Overview of the Method

This researcher assumed students who have dropped out of school had something important to say about the social components they perceived as being lacking from their educational process and that student views had the potential to enrich discourse about social capital. My experience as an administrator responsible for dealing with students who have attendance problems contributed to my desire to tell the stories of such students.

Five students who dropped out of school, were at least 18 years old, and had not completed any type of high school equivalency degree were chosen as a purposeful sample for this study. The individuals selected satisfied two primary criteria. They spoke English as their primary language and were a part of the general education population of a local high school. A list of names of students who fit the profile for the study was obtained from the school's

intervention specialist. Five students were purposefully selected and each was contacted by telephone to request their participation in the study. Each student was interviewed following a semi-structured format. A series of in-depth questions was developed to elicit information about each student's perceived level of social support and to provide data that were analyzed within a social capital framework. Students' responses to the questions and the stories resulting from additional questions were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were coded according to the aspects of social capital represented by the responses and other factors that emerged. The essence of each student's dropout experience was described and themes across all of the stories were presented and discussed.

Limitations

This qualitative study was limited in its scope of inquiry. For the purposes of this study, general limitations of phenomenological qualitative study may make transferability of the results of this study restricted to school systems similar to the one in which these students were enrolled. Although the methodology associated with qualitative research elicits rich, in-depth responses, the information gathered was not intended to represent the views of other high school dropouts. The location for the study, an inner city high school located in Southwestern Virginia, should be kept in mind when trying to extrapolate the results to another area. The information elicited from the individuals participating in the study was limited to that which they were willing to reveal. Finally, differences in definitions of dropouts may also limit transferability.

Document Organization

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter one provides background information on the topic of social capital and dropouts, a statement of the problem, the purpose and research questions, definitions of the terms *social capital* and *dropout*, the significance of the study, an

overview of the research methods, and limitations of the study. In chapter two, a review of literature provides support for the study through an analysis of previous research on social capital and dropouts. Chapter three includes the methodology utilized in this study, including the research questions, a description of the participant selection process, and the procedures for collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing the data. Chapter four contains a presentation of the results of the study, including life stories of the participants with regard to dropping out of school and themes found across the cases in the form of a manuscript submitted for publication in *Sociology of Education*. Chapter four is written in American Sociological Association format instead of American Psychological Association format due to the publication requirements of the journal. Chapter five is a manuscript submitted for publication in *Professional School Counseling* that includes an examination of the results as they relate to school social capital and conclusions that provide suggestions for enhancing school counseling programs by providing venues for increasing social capital. Chapter six includes general conclusions from the study, implications for future study, and thoughts about publication of scholarly articles.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Scope

One of the mandates of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is that states are to require more stringent graduation requirements (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). A document produced by a school system in Virginia states that in order to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), as defined by NCLB, high schools must meet stringent requirements for numbers of students who take Standards of Learning (SOL) end of course tests and graduation rates. As a result, Virginia has been phasing in the requirement of *verified credits*, credits for courses in which the student passes SOL end of course tests, for graduation. In order to earn a standard diploma in Virginia, students who have entered the ninth grade since the 2000-2001 school year must earn at least six verified credits among the 22 credits earned in their programs of study. These graduation requirements at the state and federal levels provide support for the timeliness of this study which tells the lived stories of students who have dropped out of high school.

The application of social capital theory to the dropout problem has been discussed since James Coleman introduced the connection in 1987 and provided support for the connection in a study on social capital and attendance in Catholic schools in 1988. Studies to further define social capital theory as it relates to dropouts have verified the association of the two concepts (Carbonaro, 1998; McNeal, 1999; Teachman et al., 1996; Teachman et al., 1997). Many researchers analyzing the role of social capital in the decision to drop out of school have focused on minority populations (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002; Qian & Blair, 1999; White & Glick, 2000; Yan, 1999; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). Other studies have focused on specific realms in which social capital may be found and the effects of social capital in these realms on the tendency to

drop out of school, such as family social capital (Hofferth et al., 1998), community social capital (Crowder & South, 2003), school social capital (Croninger & Lee, 2001), and a combination of types of social capital (Bowen, Bowen, & Ware, 2002; Furstenburg & Hughes, 1995; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Smith, Beaulieu, & Israel, 1992),

This chapter is divided into five sections: the scope of the issue, the literature search and review process, the discussion of the literature, a summary and synthesis of the literature, and the research direction. The actual discussion of the literature related to social capital and high school dropouts has three main parts. In the first part, literature related to the development of the social capital theory is discussed. In the second part, literature related to factors contributing to the decision for students to drop out of school is presented. In the third part, literature relating the social capital theory and high school dropouts is discussed. After presenting the literature, an analysis is put forward to provide a foundation for this study

Literature Search and Review Process

Searches for this review of literature focused on the volume of research associated with social capital and high school dropouts. Searches were completed to find information on social capital theory, dropout theories, and social capital and dropout theories. In order to obtain a clear picture of the magnitude of the body of work on social capital in the context of education, a search was conducted for literature reviews on social capital using Education Full Text and the keywords “social capital” and “literature review.” This search yielded four returns. In addition, searches using the terms “social capital,” “dropout,” and “qualitative” were conducted using JSTOR, Education Full Text, and InfoTrac OneFile to determine the extent to which qualitative research had been completed in this area. Multiple hits resulted from the search in JSTOR, but upon examination of the articles, no studies of dropouts with a social capital perspective were

found to be qualitative in nature.

In order to gain information about the history of the social capital theory, the terms “social capital,” “theory,” and “origin” were used to search the JSTOR database and InfoTrac OneFile. Six articles relating to the origins of social capital and the application of the theory to education were obtained. Additional articles of interest were located by utilizing the reference pages of articles from the JSTOR search. These articles were obtained through the Virginia Tech library microfiche and online journal database.

In order to gather background information on the literature about the development of the dropout problem and theories about why students dropout of school, the terms “dropout” and “history” were used as keywords for a search in the JSTOR database. Five articles were gleaned from among the 880 hits. Three of the articles were research studies; two were historical articles documenting the history of the dropout problem. Another search of the JSTOR database was completed using the terms “dropout,” “theory,” and “high school.” Seven research articles and one literature review were chosen from 24 articles with at least 55% relevance due to the focus on high school dropouts. The same search was completed using Wilson Web and resulted in 14 hits. Four articles were selected to add to the body of literature selected for this review. These four were chosen based on their relevance to this study and focus on reasons for students dropping out of high school in the United States.

To meet the purpose of this study, InfoTrac OneFile and the Ovid database were searched using keywords “social capital” and “dropout.” Eleven research articles were retrieved for this review. A later search of the JSTOR database utilizing the same terms and limited to articles in education or sociology journals provided 97 returns. The focus was narrowed to seventeen articles with at least 40% relevance and related to dropouts in the United States, two of which

were discarded on the basis of the lack of content related to education. While compiling articles for consideration, the reference pages of articles of interest found in previous searches were examined. InfoTrac OneFile and Education Full Text databases were used to obtain copies of articles not obtained from the JSTOR search for information related to the topic.

Discussion of the Literature

Social Capital Theory

Development of the Social Capital Theory

The theory utilized in this study was social capital theory. Glen Loury provided the first use of the term “social capital” in the early 1980s. Loury developed social capital theory as a refinement of social exchange theory, which is the idea that an exchange takes place between individuals as a result of a “rational calculation of costs and benefits” (Astone, Nathanson, Schoen, & Kim, 1999, p. 2). Furthermore, Astone et al. stated that social capital is best explained in the context of social exchange because “investing in social capital emerges as a major motivation for human behavior” (p. 2).

Loury provided a critique of policy implications of racial income inequality (Portes, 1998). Social capital theory continued to evolve with the help of other social scientists, including Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman. In the mid 1980s, books written by Bourdieu and Coleman contained information related to defining social capital. Bourdieu linked the term to the obligations resulting from membership in a social network created out of deliberate investments of capital and social status recognition (Portes). Bourdieu’s definition was fairly rigid and linked to institutionalized relationships. For example, Bourdieu (1996) defined social capital in the context of the family unit by stating that social capital “can be shown to be the condition and the effect of successful management of the capital collectively possessed by the

members of the domestic unit” (p. 24).

Coleman (1988) defined social capital by describing its basic components. According to Coleman, social capital is a resource available to individuals, much like human capital or monetary capital. The most basic components of social capital within Coleman’s definition are the relationships available to individuals in all aspects of life: home, work, school, church, and community, among others. Within these relationships, individuals develop networks of information channels for gathering data upon which action is based. Whether an individual acts upon the information depends upon the level of trustworthiness placed on the source. Trustworthiness is established and maintained through norms and sanctions accepted by individuals and networks. Through relationships, individuals develop a sense of whom they should trust. Groups form as individuals learn to trust others in their social network. In addition, individuals build up obligations to others based on the needs met by other individuals in the social network. These obligations form a type of non-monetary credit that can be called social capital.

Controversy

There has been some controversy associated with the social capital theory. One issue is that “there is a gap between the concept of social capital and its measurement” due in part to “the use of questionable indicators of social capital” (Paxton, 1999, 89-90). Paxton indicated that no single indicator of social capital may be used to capture the concept. “The current debate over social capital in the United States amounts to a great deal of arguing over selective pieces of information, drawn from different sources and analyzed with weak statistical techniques” (Paxton, p. 91). Astone et al. (1999) stated that there has been a fundamental problem in studies that utilize social capital as a basis in that “scholarship that uses the social capital concept suffers

from fuzziness and inconsistency” because of “conceptual confusion about whether social capital is an attribute of an individual or a group” (p. 2). Portes (2000) supported this problem statement by examining social capital as an individual and a group concept, but went one step further by arguing that attributing positive social effects in some context to social capital “is premature because observed effects may be spurious or because they are compatible with alternative explanations arising from different theoretical quarters” (p. 10). In an earlier work, Portes (1998) stated that “the point is approaching at which social capital comes to be applied to so many events and in so many different contexts as to lose any distinct meaning” (p. 2).

While controversy continues to exist, social capital theory has maintained its popularity among social scientists. Sociologists, including Robert Putnam and Mark Granovetter, have furthered the body of research on the development of a definition for social capital outside of the field of education (Putnam, 1995). Putnam developed his definition in the context of civic participation. Granovetter, drawing on his 1973 paper in which he argued that “the degree of overlap of two individuals’ friendship networks varies directly with the strength of their tie to one another” (p. 1360), framed his definition in an economic development context (Granovetter, 1995). In addition, Frances Fukuyama (2001) drew on Coleman’s work to further the definition of social capital in the political realm. She defined social capital as a measure of norms that promote cooperation and trust between two or more individuals (Fukuyama). Her research focused on the use of social capital in the development of public policy (Fukuyama). Lin (1999) developed the concept of *mobilized social capital*, the manner in which the status of an employment position may have an effect on others, and *accessed social capital*, resources to which one has access in a social network, within an economic context. Lin (2000) also examined the inequality of access to social capital that is dependent upon sex and race in an economic

context.

The Dropout Problem

History of the Dropout Problem

The dropout problem in the United States has been a subject of many research studies. However, the problem did not begin until long after compulsory education laws came into being in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Dorn, 1993). As the United States moved from an agrarian society to an industrialized society, and from rural to urban, increased education levels were seen as a necessity for a skilled labor workforce (Dorn, 1993; Richardson, 1980). States that relied primarily on farming enacted compulsory education laws later than those that relied upon manufacturing. For example, Virginia, a state dependent upon the tobacco industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, did not enact a compulsory education law until 1908 (Richardson, 1980).

Societal turmoil after World War I created a need for consistency in behavioral norms and expectations and reinforced the need for compulsory education (Richardson, 1980). Development of the dropout problem was identified in the 1940s and 1950s. After World War II, completing high school became the expectation and dropping out of school became unacceptable to society in general (Dorn, 1993). In fact, J. Edgar Hoover linked an increase in the high school dropout rate to the increase in crime in the 1950s (Dorn). Others connected the dropout problem to an increase in the unemployment rate (Dorn). In the 1960s, the term “dropout” became commonplace (Dorn). Popular magazines, including *Life*, *Ebony*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*, described dropouts as a “waste” (Dorn).

In 1972, the National Center for Education Statistics began tracking dropout rates. Since that time, many trends have been noted. A decrease in the dropout rate was seen until 1987, but

the rate has since leveled for all racial and ethnic groups, except Hispanics (Kaufman et al., 2004). There is a gap among white students and other racial and ethnic groups; the dropout rate for white students is much lower than that of other racial and ethnic groups (Kaufman et al.). As age increases, the tendency to drop out of school increases (Kaufman et al.). As income increases, the tendency to drop out of school decreases (Kaufman et al.). No significant differences in dropout rates were noted when students were separated into groups based on the region of the country in which they live (Kaufman et al.).

Dropout Theories

Multiple theories have been related to the dropout problem. Many of these theories contain strands relating to social capital theory. Life course theory presents the idea that schooling outcomes are based on the paths individuals follow throughout their lives (Entwistle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004). Human capital theory states that the desire for a person to contribute to enhancing the economy will increase the desire for an education (Stallman & Johnson, 1996). Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) presented five different theories. Academic mediation theory states that the relationships between general deviant behaviors, associations with other students practicing deviant behaviors, lack of social bonding in school, lack of parental expectations and education, and being an African American male of low socioeconomic status contribute to the tendency for a student to drop out of school (Battin-Pearson et al.). General deviance theory predicts dropout tendencies based on deviant student behaviors (Battin-Pearson et al.). Deviant affiliation theory provides an explanation for the tendency to drop out of school based on bonding with antisocial peers (Battin-Pearson et al.). Poor family socialization theory relates that the tendency to drop out of school is due to lack of high expectations from parents and/or lack of parental education (Battin-Pearson et al.). Structure strains theory states that demographic

indicators of dropout tendency are based on gender, socioeconomic status, and race (Battin-Pearson et al.).

Coleman's (1988) landmark paper on social capital in the field of education led to the creation of a body of literature exclusively addressing the relationship between social capital and dropout tendencies. Coleman stopped short in his analysis of social capital and dropouts by narrowly defining the scope of the term. His analysis left room for future studies in the development of the definition of social capital and the refinement of the relationship between social capital and high school dropout rates.

Research on High School Dropouts

Factors related to reasons for students to drop out of high school tend to fall into three categories, which are similar to the types of social capital: school-related, social-related, and family-related. School-related factors include school size, school climate, policies, practices, location, programs, teacher quality, curriculum, absenteeism rates, and grade retention rates (Allensworth, 2005; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Roderick, 1994). Social-related factors include substance abuse, race, sex, and language (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Krohn, Lizotte, & Perez, 1997; Mensch & Kandel, 1988; Rumberger, 1983; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984). Family-related factors include socioeconomic status, mobility, family structure, parental education, and parental involvement (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Rumberger, 1983; Rumberger & Lawson, 1998; Swanson & Schneider, 1999).

School-related factors.

Bryk and Thum (1989) completed an extensive study on the effects of structural and normative features of schools on absenteeism and dropping out of school using hierarchical

linear model analysis. In their absenteeism model, Bryk and Thum found that the variability among schools' absenteeism rates was in large part due to the type of school (Catholic versus public), rather than the demographics of the students. Furthermore, they found that students from a low socioeconomic background with weak academic skills were more likely to be absent (Bryk & Thum). Other qualities associated with high absenteeism included schools with higher incidences of disciplinary problems, schools where the administration reports problems with staff, schools with students who come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and schools with diverse student academic experiences (Bryk & Thum). On the contrary, schools that are perceived as being safe, having fair rules, emphasizing the importance of homework and grades, and perceived to have strong teachers with an interest in promoting academics were associated with having low absenteeism rates (Bryk & Thum).

Bryk and Thum (1989) also established a multi-factored model related to dropout rates. When comparing demographics to dropout rates, sex was the only factor that was significant; female students tended to drop out of school at a higher rate than expected (Bryk & Thum). Low dropout rates were found in schools with a high concentration of students in academic programs who were given more homework than the average school and perceived to have a safe environment (Bryk & Thum). High dropout rates were associated with schools that were socially diverse, had a variety of course offerings, and where discipline was perceived as fair (Bryk & Thum). A very low correlation between school size and dropout rate ($r = .14$) was found.

Pittman and Haughwout (1987) affirmed the effects of participation in school, attendance, and satisfaction with the school climate in their study, but their primary interest was in determining the influence of school size on the dropout rate. Pittman and Haughwout found that larger schools tended to have higher dropout rates ($r = .31$), which was much higher than the

correlation found in the Bryk and Thum study. Furthermore, they concluded that larger schools “appear to produce a less positive social environment, less social integration, and less identity with the school” (p. 343). They indicated that an increase of 400 students is associated with a 1% increase in the school’s dropout rate (Pittman & Haughwout).

Roderick (1994) investigated the effect of grade retention on the tendency for students to drop out of school. She examined the interaction effects of age, school performance, and timing of retention with grade retention on the tendency to leave school early (Roderick). Students, regardless of age, who were retained, were three times more likely to drop out of school than their nonretained counterparts (Roderick). Students who were retained prior to the seventh grade for performance reasons were significantly more likely to drop out than those who were never retained (Roderick). Roderick found that students who were overage due to late school entering or grade retention were more likely to disengage from school and drop out or have attendance problems. She cited attendance problems as a factor for grade retention (Roderick).

Allensworth (2005) studied the effects of high stakes testing retention policies on high school dropout rates. Using matched-pairs tests and hierarchical generalized linear models to compare retention rates before and after enacting a retention policy in Chicago, Allensworth found that the enactment of the policy resulted in a 7% increase in eighth grade retention. However, contrary to Roderick’s findings, Allensworth found that the dropout rates did not increase statistically after the retention policy was put into place. Her conclusion was that implementation of grade promotion based on the results of high stakes tests increases achievement, but does not increase dropout rates (Allensworth).

Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) assessed multiple factors related to dropout rates. They found that private high schools had significantly lower dropout rates than public high schools.

While the location of the school (urban, suburban, or rural) had no effect on dropout rates, the average socioeconomic status of the community and the average level of education in the community were found to significantly increase the odds that a student would drop out of school (Goldschmidt & Wang). With respect to school policy and practice, Goldschmidt and Wang found that the number of students retained and student referrals were strongly correlated with the dropout rate. Interestingly, middle schools with diverse student bodies had higher dropout rates, but not so with high schools (Goldschmidt & Wang). Finally, school attendance was a strong indicator of dropout rate (Goldschmidt & Wang).

Social-related factors.

Mensch and Kandel (1988) examined the extent to which drug use contributes to dropping out of school. Mensch and Kandel used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Young Adults for their research and defined a dropout as an event dropout. They found that dropouts reported significantly higher rates of cigarette, marijuana, and other illicit drug usage than students who graduated from high school (Mensch & Kandel). In addition, they found that, for females in particular, the younger the child was when introduced to alcohol, cigarette, or drug usage, the more likely the student was to leave school early. Interestingly, dropouts who were using drugs were more likely to obtain a GED (Mensch & Kandel).

Krohn, Lizotte, and Perez (1997) confirmed the findings of Mensch and Kandel (1988). Krohn et al. focused on early illegal substance use and how it contributed to transitions into adulthood that are generally thought to be negative, which they termed *precocious*, including dropping out of school, moving out of the parental household, teenage pregnancy, and teenage parenting. They found substance use to be significantly correlated with all precocious transitions into adulthood, except for female teenage pregnancy (Krohn et al.). They also found that the

precocious transitions were correlated with drug and alcohol use later in life (Krohn et al.).

Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) identified two main student-level factors for students leaving school early. At the middle school level, race was a significant factor; African Americans were significantly less likely to drop out than whites (Goldschmidt & Wang). At both the middle and high school levels, females were found to be significantly more likely to drop out than males (Goldschmidt & Wang).

Steinberg, Blinde, and Chan (1984) documented the prevalence of dropping out of school among minorities for whom English is a second language and possible causes and correlates for this phenomenon. They found that Hispanic students tend to drop out at higher rates than non-Hispanic minorities, and that non-Hispanic language minorities tend to drop out at higher rates than students whose primary language is English (Steinberg et al.). In addition, they found that when socioeconomic status is held constant, Hispanic language minority students drop out at a higher rate than students from other ethnic and racial minority backgrounds (Steinberg et al.). Finally, Steinberg et al. found that higher levels of grade retention and low academic achievement is characteristic of Spanish-speaking minorities at a much higher level than other language minorities.

Family-related factors.

Rumberger's (1983) study focused on how family background affects the tendency for students to drop out of school, and how race and sex contributes to the effect of family background. Rumberger found that "widespread differences in dropout rates among [members of all race and sex groups], particularly between whites and minorities, can be explained mostly by differences in family origins" (p. 211). The most uniform indicator across race and sex groups of dropout behavior was *cultural index*, or the amount of reading material in the household

(Rumberger). Rumberger found that more reading material in the household was correlated with a lower dropout rate. Higher socioeconomic status tended to be a factor for staying in school for white students only (Rumberger). The tendency for all females and African American males to stay in school increased as their mothers' level of education increased, while the tendency for all males to stay in school increased as their fathers' level of education increased (Rumberger). Rumberger found that an increased number of siblings correlated with increased dropout rates for white students only. Living outside of the United States until age 14 had different effects based on race; dropout rates increased for Hispanics, decreased for whites, and stayed the same for African Americans (Rumberger). Residence location, urban, suburban, or rural location, was also found to be significantly related to dropout rates for males (Rumberger). High levels of educational aspirations were associated with lower dropout rates for all race and sex groups (Rumberger). Teenage pregnancy and marriage tended to be an indicator of early school leaving (Rumberger). In all cases, students with lower socioeconomic status tended to drop out at higher rates than other students (Rumberger).

Astone and McLanahan (1991) focused on family structure and parental practices as factors for high school completion. They found that children in families with two birth parents receive more parental encouragement and attention with respect to educational activities than children from non-intact families (Astone & McLanahan). In addition, Astone and McLanahan found that children from single-parent and step-parent families are more likely to exhibit signs of school disengagement than children who live with both birth parents. Finally, differences in parenting practices between non-intact and intact families were found to be insignificant with respect to dropout rates; parenting practices accounted for less than 10% of the differences in graduation rates (Astone & McLanahan).

Rumberger and Larson (1998) utilized the NELS 88-94 database to develop a series of models to examine the consequences of student mobility during high school. The first model examined school, family, and student characteristics resulting from mobility based on the students' mobility and dropout status in the twelfth grade. The second and third models were used to predict high school completion status based on student mobility. The results of the study showed that approximately one-fourth of all students changed schools during their high school years (Rumberger & Larson). Rumberger and Larson found that student mobility resulted in differing degrees of educational disengagement, including high absenteeism rates, high incidences of disciplinary referrals, and low educational expectations, which lead to a higher level of dropout behavior. Students with lower levels of access to family social capital exhibited greater negative effects of mobility. Their results supported the notion that student mobility leads to a greater tendency to drop out of school (Rumberger & Larson).

Swanson and Schnieder (1999) examined the effects of educational and residential mobility at all school levels on educational outcomes. In order to assess the effect of mobility on dropping out of high school, Swanson and Schnieder also utilized the NELS 88-94 database and logistic regression modeling and the event dropout definition. They found that higher numbers of school changes and residential movements prior to eighth grade were significantly associated with dropping out of school (Swanson & Schneider). However, if the students are able to remain in high school until the tenth grade, they are significantly less likely to drop out of school (Swanson & Schneider). Swanson and Schneider found that students who have early academic problems and move soon after these problems are identified have only a 20% chance of dropping out of school, but students who do not move are 70% more likely to drop out of school. Swanson and Schneider concluded that "the period immediately following a school change is a

particularly critical time during which the impact of the transition on a student's long-term academic success may be determined" (p. 62).

Synthesis of the Research on Dropouts

Many school-related factors for high school dropout tendencies have been reported in the literature. Bryk and Thum (1989) conclude that low absenteeism and dropout rates are associated with small, orderly school environments where behavior problems are dealt with in a prompt, effective manner and all students are engaged in learning. Pittman and Haughwout (1987) found a higher correlation with the size of high schools and the dropout rate than did Bryk and Thum (1989), which was odd considering that they both used the HSB database. Roderick (1994) and Allensworth (2005) both studied the effects of retention policies on the dropout rate and found contrasting results. However, the more recent Allensworth study was focused on a more specific case. Further research could be done to compare the effects of retention policies requiring remediation to improve academic achievement, such as those based on high stakes testing, versus retention policies that merely require students to retake those courses they failed. Finally, the Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) study provided a clear correlation between school attendance and dropout rate.

Social-related factors focus on deviant behaviors and effects of being a racial or language minority. Research from Mensch and Kandel (1988) seemed to indicate that drug use prevention, or delaying the onset of deviant activities involving drugs or alcohol, might increase the probability of high school graduation. Krohn et al. (1997) supported Mensch and Kandel's research, but also assessed other deviant behaviors. The precocious transitions analyzed by Krohn et al. may also be factors in and of themselves that may lead to leaving school early. Goldschmidt and Wang's (1999) finding that females are significantly more likely to drop out of

school may be directly related to those reasons found by Krohn et al. In particular, female dropout rates may be higher due to teenage pregnancy and teenage family situations. Many of the factors identified by Bryk and Thum (1989) associated with high absenteeism and dropout rates fall into the category of social-related factors, which supports the findings of Goldschmidt and Wang. They found that schools with high racial diversity tend to have high absenteeism and high dropout rates and that female students tend to drop out at a higher rate than male students (Bryk & Thum). The review of literature presented by Steinberg et al. (1984) leaves little doubt that being a language-minority youth is a critical risk factor for dropping out of school. This finding supports the assertion of Bryk and Thum that schools with high racial diversity tend to have higher dropout rates.

Family-related factors associated with dropout behaviors were varied. Rumberger's (1983) findings on the effects of sex and race on the tendency for students to drop out of school is supported by the findings of Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) and Krohn et al. (1997). The findings of Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) supported the findings of Astone and McLanahan (1991) in that they found that "parent education, single-parent household, and parent checking homework have a greater effect in increasing the odds that a student drops out of high school" (p. 726). Rumberger and Larson (1998) showed that student mobility in high school increased the probability of dropout behavior. Swanson and Schneider (1999) expanded the scope of the notion of the impact of mobility on dropping out of school. They found that timing and amount of residential and educational mobility have a profound effect on a student's tendency to drop out of school (Swanson & Schneider).

Social Capital and Dropout Research

The first study to combine the fields of social capital theory and dropout research was

carried out by James Coleman in 1988. Coleman (1988) identified a correlation between the level of social capital possessed by a student and the tendency to drop out of school. Since 1988, studies have added to the definition of social capital theory as it relates to dropouts (Carbonaro, 1998; McNeal, 1999; Teachman et al., 1996; Teachman et al., 1997). Other studies combining the fields of social capital theory and dropout research typically center around three areas: family social capital (Hofferth et al., 1998), school social capital (Croninger & Lee, 2001), community social capital (Crowder & South, 2003), and a combination of types of social capital (Bowen, Bowen, & Ware, 2002; Furstenburg & Hughes, 1995; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Smith, Beaulieu, & Israel, 1992). There is another body of literature related to social capital and dropouts in minority communities (Gibson & Bijenez, 2002; Qian & Blair, 1999; White & Glick, 2000; Yan, 1999; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). In this section, each of the studies on social capital theory and dropouts will be examined individually, except for the literature related to minorities, which will be analyzed as a whole body.

Landmark Study

In his landmark article, Coleman (1988) defined the term “social capital” and introduced the concept to the field of education. He used his definition in conjunction with an analysis of data from the HSB database to examine how a lack of social capital may be related to the tendency to drop out of high school. The purpose of Coleman’s (1988) study was to define social capital and to provide a concrete example of social capital in the field of education, which was the relationship between social capital and dropout rates.

Coleman (1988) used his study to establish a relationship between social capital and high school dropout rates. Coleman compared percentages of different measures of social capital and the dropout rates associated with each category. He used a logistic regression model for his

analysis of the data. Coleman used a random sample of 4000 public school students chosen from the HSB database to assess the relationship between family structure and the high school dropout rate. He developed several conclusions about these two variables based on the logistic regression model he established. First, Coleman concluded that students living with one parent are more likely to drop out of school than students living with two parents. Second, he concluded that as the number of siblings a student has increases, the amount of contact a student has with a parent decreases and the likelihood that a student will drop out of high school will increase for each additional sibling. Third, Coleman found that students who have mothers who expect them to go to college are more likely to complete school than those who have mothers with no expectations of college attendance. Finally, Coleman combined traits associated with family structure and found that the likelihood of a student completing school will decrease by about 12.5% when a student only has one parent and multiple siblings and by about 22.5% when all three negative family structure factors (single-parent, multiple siblings, and no maternal college attendance expectations) are present.

Coleman (1988) also found that moving from one geographic location to another correlates with the likelihood that a child will drop out of school. If the child moves to a location resulting in a loss of intergenerational closure, there is a loss of social capital. In this instance, Coleman concluded that the dropout rate is related to the number of times the family moves. Coleman (1988) used many of his findings related to dropout rates in Catholic schools to establish a relationship between the existence of increased levels of social capital and a decrease in dropout rate. For Coleman, information related to the dropout rate for religious schools provided support for his idea that social capital within the community provides strong support for students to stay in school.

*Development of the Definition of Social Capital**Financial and human capital interactions.*

In 1997, Teachman, Paasch, and Carver published a study concerning how attending Catholic school and having a two-birth parent family structure strongly decreases the likelihood of dropping out of high school. Teachman et al. argued that there were shortcomings in Coleman's (1988) findings related to the impact of social capital on the tendency to drop out of school in that Coleman did not examine the interaction of social, human, and financial capital. However, the authors' findings regarding interactions involving social capital and financial and human capital support Coleman's initial theory.

The purpose of this study was to examine how various measures of human, financial, and social capital are related to the tendency to drop out of school (Teachman et al., 1997). The authors found that the odds of dropping out of school are related to most measures of social capital, except parent-school networks (Teachman et al., 1997). The data analysis performed supported Coleman's (1988) findings that attending Catholic school and a two-birth parent family structure have a strong positive influence on the tendency to drop out of school, though the authors suggested that further research should be done to identify more specific measures of social capital that could be used to explain these findings (Teachman et al.). Teachman et al. added to Coleman's definition of family structure as it related to the interaction of social capital and the dropout rate. They concluded that all types of family structures except divorced-mother families exhibit a significant negative effect on high school graduation rates when compared to traditional biological two-parent families (Teachman et al.).

The authors of this study identified interaction effects found between financial and human capital and social capital that influence dropout tendencies (Teachman et al., 1997). High

parental income and education levels were associated with a greater tendency to complete high school. Students who had siblings who dropped out of school exhibited a greater tendency to drop out as well. When joint effects were examined, parent-parent interactions were not significant in the equation. However, the authors found that parent-child interactions decreased the tendency for students to drop out of school. Finally, while Coleman (1988) suggested that greater interaction between parents and schools should be related to a decrease in tendency to drop out of school, Teachman et al. concluded that lack of parent-school interaction was not related to the tendency for a child to drop out of school and speculated that this factor may be due to the changing nature of interactions at different stages of the dropout process.

Levels of intergenerational closure.

Carbonaro (1998) added to Coleman's research on social capital by determining that increased levels of intergenerational closure substantially decrease the odds of a student dropping out of school. Carbonaro defined intergenerational closure as the degree to which parents know their children's friends' parents. He discussed how this particular type of intergenerational closure can impact students' educational outcomes. The purpose of Carbonaro's study was to determine the degree to which the level of intergenerational closure impacts students' educational outcomes.

Carbonaro (1998) found that high levels of intergenerational closure are significantly associated with high levels of academic achievement in mathematics ($p < .05$ for all variables except urban location), but not significantly associated with high levels of academic achievement in other core areas ($p \geq .130$ for all variables). However, when closure was controlled for, R^2 changed only .004, indicating that little variation in mathematics achievement is explained by intergenerational closure. When controlling for parental expectations and involvement and at-

risk behaviors, the association between intergenerational closure and mathematics achievement became less significant. According to Carbonaro, the lower significance level may indicate that parental expectations and the presence of fewer at-risk behaviors may be associated closely with increased mathematics achievement. This relationship is seen independent of intergenerational closure.

Carbonaro (1998) found a positive relationship between high school seniors' GPA and intergenerational closure, but the relationship was not statistically significant ($p = .335$). He also found that as the level of intergenerational closure increases, the tendency for dropout behavior decreases (Carbonaro). Carbonaro further surmised that increased levels of intergenerational closure will decrease the tendency for students to drop out regardless of student demographics, parental expectations, and at-risk behaviors exhibited.

Parental involvement.

McNeal (1999) defined parental involvement as social capital based on the networks established between parent, child, and school; obligations and norms established by natural family structure and rules; and other forms of capital that provide familial resources. Additionally, McNeal discussed inconsistencies in previous research, including definition differences and discrepancies in studies related to the impact of race and socioeconomic status on student achievement and dropout tendencies. McNeal determined that social capital is associated with increased achievement and decreased deviant behavior. In fact, McNeal found that social capital had a more positive relationship with behavioral outcomes than cognitive outcomes. In many circumstances, the positive outcomes associated with the existence of social capital were only seen in white, middle to upper socioeconomic status, intact households.

The purpose of McNeal's (1999) study was to determine which parental involvement

practices help to increase academic achievement and decrease truancy and dropout tendencies.

The social capital components associated with parental involvement McNeal defined and utilized were parent-child networking, parental involvement in school-related activities, monitoring the child's behaviors, and parent-school networking (McNeal).

While McNeal's findings were very useful, in many circumstances, the positive achievement and behavioral outcomes were only seen in white, middle to upper socioeconomic, intact households; limited in African American households; and virtually nonexistent in Asian or Hispanic households. McNeal (1999) found that parent-child communication networks were the only aspect of social capital examined that was consistently associated with improvement in achievement, truancy, and dropout rates. Parent-child communication networks were associated with increased academic achievement and decreased truancy rates ($p < .01$), but the networks were not significantly related to a decrease in dropout rates ($p > .10$). McNeal found a significantly negative association with achievement and parent-teacher organization involvement ($p < .01$), but the decrease in truancy and dropout rates was also found to be significant ($p < .01$). Similar findings were seen with respect to monitoring of students. A significant negative relationship was found between monitoring and achievement ($p < .10$), while a decrease in truancy and dropout rates was also found to be significant ($p < .01$ and $p < .05$, respectively). McNeal found that there was a negative relationship between educational support strategies and achievement and a positive relationship with dropout rates, but neither relationship was statistically significant ($p > .10$ in each case). However, McNeal found a statistically significant positive relationship between educational support strategies and truancy ($p < .01$).

Additional factors.

Teachman, Paasch, and Carver (1996) completed an early study to determine the effects

of changes of school and attendance at Catholic schools on dropping out of school. In addition, they used interactions between parents, parent and child and parent and school as measures of school capital to offer an explanation for the magnitude of effects of change of schools and attendance at Catholic schools (Teachman et al., 1996). Coleman (1988) had noted that changes of schools and attendance at Catholic schools were strong measures of social capital. Teachman et al. wanted to find a more direct measure of intergenerational interaction resulting in a better measure of social capital.

Teachman et al. (1996) found that children who attend Catholic school have more social capital available to them than those who attend another type of private school or public school. Attendance at Catholic school and living with both biological parents was associated with high levels of social capital (Teachman et al.). Family structure was found to be associated with social capital. Students living with a divorced father typically had access to lower levels of social capital than those living in other family situations (Teachman et al.). Compared with two biological parent families, all except never-married mothers had smaller levels of social capital (Teachman et al.).

Teachman et al. (1996) showed that all measures of social capital developed in this study, except parent interaction with other parents, are related to the odds of dropping out of school. Living in the south was associated with an increase in odds of dropping out of school (Teachman et al.) These odds are reduced if the child attends a Catholic school (Teachman et al.). Interactions between parents and children and parents and schools were negatively related to dropping out of school (Teachman et al.). Living in the south and having siblings increased the odds of dropping out of school (Teachman et al.). Teachman et al. found that social capital measures operate similarly in African American families. Finally, it was noted that when

considering the effects of all measures of social capital examined in this study, the number of school changes is responsible for most of the reduction in effect size of family structure (Teachman et al.).

Summary of the definition refinements.

Teachman et al. (1997) closely examined the interaction of financial and human capital in the context of social capital. They concluded that the mere presence of human and financial capital may not be solely sufficient for the production of human capital in the next generation (Teachman et al.). Furthermore, the authors determined that the existence of social capital is influential in promoting the development of human capital (Teachman et al.). The authors did note that further research in this area should be done to more clearly define measures of social capital.

Carbonaro (1998) was able to determine that intergenerational closure is related somewhat to students' educational outcomes. Intergenerational closure was found to be strongly correlated with mathematics achievement, but not with achievement in other core areas. Closure was not significantly related to GPA or the tendency to drop out of school. Carbonaro concluded that more research needed to be performed to determine the degree to which the relationship between intergenerational closure and dropout rates may be related to the extent that parents have common norms and values.

McNeal (1999) concluded that social capital is associated with increased achievement and decreased deviant behavior, but the association is greater for behavioral outcomes than achievement outcomes. He also noted that as the level of parental involvement in school related matters and parental monitoring of behaviors increases, achievement decreased in some cases. In McNeal's final analysis, he stated that the relationship of social capital to positive educational

outcomes at the high school level might not be as strong as the data would indicate due to inconsistencies across racial and socioeconomic boundaries. Differences in the major findings were noted for different racial groups, household structures, and groups of varying socioeconomic status.

Teachman et al. (1996) built upon Coleman's (1988) findings and expanded them by looking at multiple variables. The major finding of Teachman et al. was that changing schools seems to have the greatest effect on dropping out of school. This supports the studies of Rumberger and Lawson (1998) and Swanson and Schneider (1999). This study provided a capstone for the definition of social capital as it relates to dropouts by developing the nature of many different types of interactions that build social capital in the family, school, and community.

Family Social Capital

Hofferth, Boisjoly, and Duncan (1998) sought to develop a measure of extrafamilial resources to address a gap in understanding the process of school completion. The purpose of their study was to determine how parents' education, family structure, family income, parents' reported access to time or monetary help from friends and relatives, and geographic mobility are linked to the amount of schooling children complete in early adulthood (Hofferth et al.). They utilized data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics and t-tests and regression analysis to perform their study.

Hofferth et al. (1998) found that access to time or monetary assistance from friends or relatives was not significantly related to completion of high school. Furthermore, access to time or money did not significantly increase the likelihood that the student would attend college for low income students (Hofferth et al.). They did concur with numerous studies in determining that

moving twice or more significantly reduced the probability that a student would not complete high school (Hofferth et al.). For students from low income families, mobility reduced the chance that they would attend college (Hofferth et al.). An interesting contrast in results was that moving once reduced the probability of attending college for students from low income families, but actually increased the probability for students from high income families (Hofferth et al.).

Hofferth et al. (1998) concluded that parental access to assistance from friends is important to school completion, more so for students from high income families than low income families. “Consequently, friend-based social capital may be more likely to distinguish families who invest from those who do not and to make a greater difference for the outcomes of their children” (Hofferth et al., 263-264). They also concluded that parental access to assistance from family has no effect on schooling, regardless of family income level (Hofferth et al.). “Strong family ties are not sufficient to ensure that children complete high school and attend college” (Hofferth et al., p, 263). Finally, Hofferth et al. found that when families disrupt social capital levels established in a community, neighborhood, or school by moving, the level of schooling attained by students may be negatively affected.

School Social Capital

Croninger and Lee (2001) examined data from the NELS database to determine if teachers provide students with increased levels of social capital. In addition, they wanted to establish whether the social capital provided by teachers increases the likelihood that students complete high school (Croninger & Lee). They measured social capital in two ways, student opinions and beliefs about the efforts of their high school teachers to help them in school and self-reported incidences of teachers guiding students about school or personal matters (Croninger & Lee).

The findings from the study showed that dropouts are more likely than graduates to be at risk academically and socially, but the presence of social capital increases the likelihood that children stay in school (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Dropouts tended to receive less support from teachers than graduates; however greater access to teacher-based social capital increases the probability that an at-risk student will complete high school (Croninger & Lee). As was expected, graduates tended to model better academic behaviors while in school (Croninger & Lee). In agreement with other studies, Croninger and Lee found that female students are more likely to drop out of school than males once risk factors and social capital are taken into account.

Croninger and Lee (2001) concluded that students gain access to social capital from relationships developed with teachers. At-risk students tended to gain the most benefit from access to social capital (Croninger & Lee). Croninger and Lee state that “even when students enter high school with a history of academic difficulties, direct guidance and support from teachers can make an important difference in their willingness to persist through graduation” (p. 570). Another interesting conclusion of Croninger and Lee was that no results of their analysis pointed to the students themselves as a reason for dropout behavior. They concluded that the quality of the school and neighborhoods in which socially disadvantaged students lived were the primary contributors to the discrepancy between graduation rates of socially advantaged and disadvantaged students (Croninger & Lee).

Community Social Capital

Crowder and South (2003) provided an exploration of the effect of neighborhood distress, which includes high poverty levels and crime rates, on the risk of dropping out of school. Utilizing data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics and discrete-time event-history models and logistic regression modeling, Crowder and South looked at how the influence of

neighborhood distress on the tendency to drop out of school varies by race, sex, and socioeconomic level. Event-history modeling was an interesting approach for this study, for it allowed the analysis to be more sensitive to the timing of the dropout event.

Crowder and South (2003) found that, when all other variables were controlled for, white students were more at risk of dropping out of school than African American students. They also found that students from families with higher incomes and levels of education were less likely to drop out of school and that household stability reduced the likelihood of dropping out of school (Crowder & South). When neighborhood distress was added into the equation, Crowder and South found that African American students from disadvantaged neighborhoods were over twice as likely to drop out of school as white students from similarly disadvantaged neighborhoods, a finding which was independent of individual- and family-level characteristics. This effect was more pronounced for male African American students as the level of neighborhood distress increased, and was exacerbated by living in a single-parent household (Crowder & South). Among white students, females were more likely to drop out of school than males as the level of neighborhood distress increased (Crowder & South). A final result found by Crowder and South was that the impact of mobility in distressed neighborhoods on the tendency to drop out of school for white students was much more profound than for African American students.

Crowder and South (2003) concluded that the impact of socioeconomic factors in neighborhoods on the tendency for students to drop out of school was substantial, particularly for African American males in single-parent households and white females. Short-term residents in distressed neighborhoods were more likely to be effected than long-term residents, supporting a social capital perspective of the influence of networks established from residing in an area (Crowder & South). Finally, Crowder and South concluded that “the impact of neighborhood

socioeconomic disadvantage on school discontinuation has remained consistently strong for white adolescents and has actually increased substantially among black adolescents” (p. 693).

Family, School, and Community Social Capital Combined

Dropout behavior in the South.

Smith, Beaulieu, and Israel’s (1992) study on dropout behavior in the South had a threefold purpose. First, they examined the effects of human and financial capital on dropout behavior. Second, they wanted to determine the strength of social capital on the dropout behavior of students. Finally, they investigated the impact of community social capital as a supplement to family social capital on dropout behavior. In order to perform their study, Smith et al. utilized the HSB database and logistic regression analysis.

In addressing the first part of their purpose, Smith et al. (1992) found that as family socioeconomic status decreased, the likelihood of dropout tendencies increased. Community factors related to human and financial capital were not related to dropout behavior (Smith et al.). When determining the strength of social capital on dropout tendencies, Smith et al. found that the number of times a student moved was the variable that accounted for the greatest variance in dropout rates. Church activity involvement was also found to be statistically significantly related to dropout behavior; high levels of church activity involvement were associated with lower levels of dropout behavior (Smith et al.). Smith et al. found that number of siblings, whether the mother worked, both parents in the household, and mother’s college expectations were statistically significant indicators of dropout behavior. Finally, Smith et al. found that the interaction between community and family social capital is important. High levels of family and community social capital were associated with a predicted dropout rate of 2.6%, while low levels of both family and community social capital were associated with a predicted dropout rate of

47.7%.

Not surprisingly, Smith et al. (1992) concluded that financial and human capital, measured in the form of socioeconomic status, had a sizeable effect on dropout behavior. Further, they concluded that community social capital and family social capital could have an effect on the tendency for students to drop out of school (Smith et al.). Students in families who participated in church activities and never moved were not as likely to drop out of school as those who did not participate in church activities and were mobile (Smith et al.). Finally, high levels of family social capital can compensate for low levels of community social capital, and vice-versa, but high levels of both virtually assure graduation (Smith et al.).

Successful outcomes.

Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) studied the effects of family and community social capital on the successful school and social outcomes of disadvantaged youth. Utilizing a longitudinal study of teenage mothers and their children and Coleman's measures of social capital, Furstenberg and Hughes developed logistic regression models for analysis of the data. While this study focuses on positive outcomes, instead of negative outcomes for disadvantaged youth, one of the areas of investigation is high school graduation.

Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) found the following measures of social capital were statistically significantly positively associated with graduating from high school: family cohesion, support to and from own mother, biological father in home, parents' expectation for school performance, educational aspirations for child, mother encourages child, strong help network in community, sees close friend weekly, and school quality. Furstenberg and Hughes also tentatively established support for the assertion that availability of social capital early in life increases the odds of socioeconomic success in early adulthood.

In assessing social capital as a method of generating conceptual understanding of the patterns of development of at-risk youth, Furstenberg and Hughes found that many of the measures of social capital were clear indicators of socioeconomic success in adulthood. Many of the measures were associated with graduating from high school, but few predicted teenage pregnancy for females or legal problems for males (Furstenberg & Hughes). Furstenberg and Hughes conclude that “our results suggest that social capital may indeed be a useful tool in accounting for how and why certain poor children manage to beat the odds” (p. 590).

Neighborhood social distress.

Bowen, Bowen, and Ware (2002) examined the contribution of community characteristics to family influence on the school performance and behavior of secondary school students. They used a multistage sampling design of secondary school students from a national sample and structural equation modeling to look at how neighborhood and family influences are interrelated to affect school outcomes (Bowen et al.).

Bowen et al. (2002) found that the relationship between neighborhood and family environments on the educational behavior of middle and high school students was not significant ($X^2 = 9.35$ with 10 degrees of freedom, $p > .05$). As the level of negative social behaviors increased, students were less likely to perceive parenting practices as supportive (Bowen et al.). In addition, they found that social disorganization was not attributed to socioeconomic status or race (Bowen et al.).

Neighborhood social disorganization was strongly perceived to have a substantial effect on how the family affects educational behaviors. Bowen et al. (2002) concluded that when the neighborhood contains negative social influences, the parents are less able to respond to the affective needs of adolescents. Furthermore, supportive family relationships encourage support

for students' education endeavors and produce positive effects on educational behaviors (Bowen et al.). Finally, Bowen et al. concluded that the demographics of the neighborhood have a greater influence on the educational outcomes of adolescents than general demographics of students (Bowen et al.).

Three dimensions of social capital.

Israel and Beaulieu (2004) separated social capital into three dimensions for their study. The first dimension, family social capital, involved aspects of social capital related to the relationships between parents and children that impact educational attainment. The aspects of social capital included parental aspirations for child, family mobility, family structure, and rules and norms established in the household. The second dimension, school social capital, involved aspects of social capital related to the structure and resources available to the student through the school. Factors included the demographics of the student body, school size, budget and funding distribution, expectations and discipline norms, relationships between students and teachers, and parental involvement with the school. The third dimension, community social capital, was defined by demographics of the community and the social networks that existed.

The purpose of the Israel and Beaulieu (2004) study was to determine how different types of social capital may add to the development of human capital and how types of social capital may contribute to the decrease in students' tendency to drop out of school.

Israel and Beaulieu (2004) concluded that a lack of positive family social capital may hinder academic achievement and correlate with higher dropout rates. In single-parent homes and when the number of siblings increased, there was little correlation with staying in school ($p = .443$ and $p = .354$, respectively). In addition, high parental expectations were found to strongly influence students to stay in school ($p \leq .011$ in all cases). Unfortunately, demographics were

related to the tendency to stay in school. African American females and Hispanic males were less likely to stay in school than other populations ($p = .338$ and $p = .198$, respectively).

Positive school social capital was found to have a slight correlation with high student achievement and lower dropout rates (Israel & Beaulieu, 2004). In schools where enrollment was less than 30% minority, core expenditures and emphasis on academics were significantly related to staying in school ($p = .006$ and $p < .001$, respectively) (Israel & Beaulieu). Unfortunately, in schools with a minority population of 30% or greater, core expenditures and emphasis on academics were not related to staying in school ($p = .413$ and $p = .167$, respectively) (Israel & Beaulieu). A significant relationship was seen between the extent of school problems and staying in school in schools with a minority population of 30% or greater ($p < .001$) (Israel & Beaulieu). As the extent of school problems decreased, the tendency for students to stay in school increased. Parental contacts with the school exhibited significant relationships in all cases ($p < .03$ in each case, except “parents involved in parent-teachers organization in schools with 30% or more minority enrollment” $p = .082$). Thus, as parental contacts increased, the tendency for students to stay in school also increased.

With respect to community social capital, networks between parents, students, and schools were found to contribute to the development of social capital, which strengthens the community and leads to decreased dropout tendencies (Israel & Beaulieu). All relationships related to community social capital and staying in school were found to be significant ($p < .04$ in all cases). Israel and Beaulieu concluded that long term investment in the development of social capital leads to an increase in human capital in communities due to higher graduation rates.

In their study, Israel and Beaulieu (2004) concluded that dropout rates increased if the availability of school-based human and financial capital was not accompanied by social capital.

They found that a lack of human and financial resources available at the school might be balanced by social capital that is school, community, or family based. In addition, the authors provided suggestions for school and community leaders to use to promote positive educational outcomes for students.

Social Capital, Dropouts, and Minorities

The body of literature related to social capital theory and dropout behavior for different minority groups focuses on all aspects of social capital. Qian and Blair (1999) examined how social capital affects the educational aspirations of minorities. Yan (1999) looked at family social capital and how parental involvement contributes to successful academic outcomes for African American students. One aspect of the White and Glick (2000) study was to examine how family social capital affects high school participation and graduation for recent immigrants to the United States. Gibson and Bejinez (2002) explored the effects of school and community social capital produced via the Migrant Education Program on educational outcomes of Mexican-descent migrant students in California. Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) provided a literature review focused on how family and community social capital affects the academic success of Latina students.

With respect to social capital, Qian and Blair (1999) concluded that one measure of social capital has a significant effect on educational aspirations of African American and Hispanic students: parental involvement in school activities. They explained that African American and Hispanic parents tended to encourage their children to move ahead for future economic success (Qian & Blair). Yan (1999) came to similar conclusions as Qian and Blair. He found that African American parents demonstrated higher levels of parental interactions with the child, school, and other parents than white parents, which contributed to positive school outcomes (Yan). Contrasting with Qian and Blair, Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) found that the close family

networks in which Latina students live allow them to transmit culture effectively between and among generations. This family social capital translates into poor academic achievement because of the lack of community social capital and value placed on the potential of women in Latino society to produce economic wealth (Zambrana & Zoppi).

Gibson and Bejinez (2002), in the only qualitative study obtained for this review, found that school social capital has a very positive effect on Mexican-descent migrant students' educational outcomes. The Migrant Education Program (MEP) is a federally-funded program designed to specifically alleviate those educational disruptions which are traditionally associated with a migrant population (Gibson & Bejinez). Migrant teachers in the MEP work to establish caring relationships with students to increase the students' sense of belonging to the school and community, which increases social capital and increases student academic motivation, participation, and achievement (Gibson & Bejinez). White and Glick (2000) also observed positive academic outcomes related to social capital. They found that recent immigrants to the United States of low socioeconomic status and disrupted family structure are more likely than students born in the United States to complete high school (White & Glick). Furthermore, they identify the presence of familial social capital in the form of parental involvement as the primary reason for student academic success (White & Glick). Unfortunately, the presence of social capital was not found to influence recent immigrants to pursue educational opportunities beyond high school (White & Glick).

Summary of the Research

The body of work presented to document the development of social capital theory as it relates to dropout research in this section of the literature review was selected for the purpose of determining how the components of social capital are related to high school dropout rates in the

United States. Coleman (1988) presented a definition of social capital as a basis for understanding aspects of human relationships that can relate to the tendency for students to drop out of high school. Teachman et al. (1996) expanded upon the notion of residential and educational mobility as a factor which is significantly associated with higher dropout rates. Teachman et al. (1997) included dynamics of financial and human capital and interactions with social capital to examine links to dropout tendencies, which gave further support to Coleman's theory. Carbonaro (1998) added to Coleman's definition of intergenerational closure by finding that quantity and quality of social networks are important in the development of social capital. McNeal (1999) defined parental involvement as an aspect of social capital. In contrast with Coleman's definition, McNeal used financial capital and human capital as resources to define social capital in association with parental involvement. McNeal's findings added support to Carbonaro's conclusions of the importance of intergenerational closure by extending the definition of closure in parental networks. Examined together, the four studies present a basis for the understanding of social capital as a factor in the tendency for students to drop out of school.

Many of the findings found in Coleman's landmark study were supported in later studies. Coleman's (1988) findings on mobility were supported in a later paper by Hofferth et al. (1998) who found that the impact of family mobility on the tendency to complete high school and/or college differs based on income level, number of times the family relocates, and when the relocation occurs. Crowder and South (2003) and Smith et al. (1992) also supported Coleman's findings. In addition, while they did not utilize social capital theory, Swanson and Schneider's (1999) study refined how residential and educational mobility at different points in the student's education, based on different SES levels, and frequency of movement are associated with different educational outcomes. In their final analysis, Swanson and Schneider found that

changing schools is an indicator of an increased tendency to drop out of school, which also supports Coleman's findings. The conclusions gathered by Teachman et al. (1997) about attendance at Catholic school and interaction effects between financial and human capital and social capital generally supported Coleman's previous findings. While Coleman suggested that greater interaction between parents and schools should be related to a decrease in tendency to drop out of school, Teachman et al. found that parent-school networks are not related to the odds of a student dropping out of school. Israel and Beaulieu (2004) broke social capital into three dimensions, family, school, and community. By showing how human and financial capital interacted with social capital in families, schools and communities, Israel and Beaulieu provided further support for the findings of Teachman et al. and of McNeal (1999).

Hofferth et al. (1998) found that a mother's educational attainment is significantly associated with completion of high school by her children, even when the effect of family income is added to the model, which adds to the findings of Israel and Bealieu (2004) with respect to family social capital. The findings related to family structure of Teachman et al. (1997) were consistent with findings of Astone and McLanahan (1991) who did not use social capital as an underlying theory in their work. McNeal's (1999) findings were supported by Yan (1999) who also concluded that high levels of parental involvement are generally present in families of African American students who are successful in school. McNeal's findings were also confirmed by Epstein and Sheldon (2002) who concluded that attendance improves with increased networking between school personnel, parents, students, and community members.

The findings of Israel and Beaulieu confirmed many prior studies. Israel and Beaulieu's (2004) assertion that strengthening social capital within communities should have an association with a decrease in dropout tendency within the community supported the finding of Goldschmidt

and Wang (1999) that community socioeconomic status is a broader indicator of dropout potential than individual socioeconomic status. The assertion that high parental expectations are associated with a decrease in the tendency to drop out of school supports Qian and Blair's (1999) findings (Israel & Beaulieu). Israel and Beaulieu's conclusions parallel those of Gibson and Bejinez (2002) in the Hispanic community. Finally, Israel and Beaulieu's school social capital findings supported the research of Bryk and Thum (1989).

Carbonaro's (1988) findings contrasted with Hofferth et al. (1998) who found that parental access to time or money from friends had little impact on the education attainment in low-income families. Further, Hofferth et al. found that assistance from other family members had no impact on educational attainment no matter what the income level. The findings of the two may have differed due to the difference in data sources and the interpretation of the definitions of aspects of social capital used in the research.

Synthesis and Summary

Overall, the body of literature related to social capital and dropouts is extensive, yet lacking a qualitative component. The articles presented in this chapter indicate that social capital, as an overarching scheme, has an impact on a student's desire to drop out of school. Much of the literature obtained that focused solely on dropouts attributed the tendency to drop out of school to factors that have been ascribed to the social capital theory, such as mobility, family structure, and parental involvement in schooling. The controversy over questionable indicators associated with social capital theory may inhibit some scholars who may choose not to endorse social capital in their studies (Patton, 1990).

One theme that arose across the body of literature relating social capital and dropouts was that a lack of social capital in some areas may be overcome by abundance in other areas (see for

example Smith et al., 1992; Yan, 1999). Mobility was seen as a negative influence on dropout behavior (see for example Hofferth et al., 1998; Teachman et al., 1996), while parental involvement was seen as a positive influence (see for example McNeal, 1999; White & Glick, 2000). Unfortunately, further generalizations about the impact of social capital on dropout rates are difficult to make. Different aspects of social capital impact students differently depending on their demographics. Clear trends have yet to be established empirically.

Research Direction

Research about social capital and dropping out of school varies in focus from history to theory to correlates associated with dropout tendencies. To date, very few qualitative studies have given a voice to students who have dropped out of high school. The one study found for this review of the literature had the merits of the Migrant Education Program as the main focus and highlighted the import of social capital in the introduction (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002).

This study focused on gathering the stories of dropouts and determining what aspects of social capital were included in the phenomenon of dropping out of school. Social factors beyond those generally recognized as components of social capital were also examined. Common themes described in the stories of dropouts were discerned to establish their place in future literature related to social capital and dropouts. Chapter 3 provides a clear framework of the methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to record and analyze students' experiences with dropping out of high school within a social capital framework. This study had a phenomenological design used to examine the stories of selected high school dropouts to determine how they experienced their high school years. Emphasis was placed on understanding the level of social capital each student attained while in high school and how that level of social capital influenced the desire to drop out of school. The narrative of each student was developed and highlights were used to expand upon the current definition of social capital as it relates to dropouts. The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. What stories do former high school students tell about decisions to stay in school or drop out?
2. What aspects of social capital as defined in this study appear in these stories?
3. How do social influences beyond those generally recognized as components of social capital emerge in these stories?
4. What other common themes emerge across the stories?

From this study, I examined how the level of social capital in each participant's life affected the decision each made to drop out of school. Furthermore, I was able to develop a more complete definition of social capital as it relates to dropouts. Through this study, I gave a voice to the high school dropout and provided a context for the improvement of the level of social capital found in families, schools, and communities.

This chapter contains details about the methodology utilized for this study. The research

design is described, including the role of the researcher, the student selection criteria and process, the setting for the inquiry, and the participants. Next, the informed consent procedures are explained in conjunction with the measures taken to insure confidentiality of the participants and how access to the subjects and entry into their world was achieved. Finally, the data collection process, analysis procedures, and method of results representation is described.

Research Design

This study was a phenomenological study using a narrative research approach. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), this tradition focuses on the utilization of the stories individuals tell to make sense of their lived experiences. Narrative research is a way to generate knowledge by reconstructing the meaning of the lived experience of the subjects (Hopkins, 1994). Patton (1990) stated that “the final dimension that differentiates a phenomenological approach [is] the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience” (p. 70). When utilizing a narrative approach, long, extended interviews are required (Rossman & Rallis).

Interviews are a means to “understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). The shared experiences of high school dropouts provided insight into the aspects of social capital that may contribute to the decision for the student to leave school. Storytelling allows individuals to explain their personal situation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). An examination of the stories of dropouts obtained in interviews gave a voice to those who were unable or unwilling to complete high school. In addition, it provided a forum for utilizing social capital theory to develop a dialog for reduction of the dropout problem.

In addition to using a narrative approach, this study used a psychological approach. This focus on individual experiences, as described by Creswell (1998), utilizes a suspension of judgments and bias called epoché or bracketing. The role of the researcher was significant in

developing a context for this study. As Hein and Austin (2001) stated, “To understand a particular phenomenon, the phenomenological researcher makes every effort to suspend or set aside his or her presuppositions, biases, and other knowledge of the phenomenon obtained from personal and scholarly sources” (p. 5). This approach allowed the essence of the stories of high school dropouts to emerge.

Role of the Researcher

Currently, I am a doctoral student in the Education Leadership and Policy Studies Department. After spending 12 years as a mathematics teacher at a specialized school for science and technology, I decided to pursue a career in public school administration. I have been working as Assistant to the Principal in a large urban high school since July of 2004.

As part of my experience as Assistant to the Principal, one of my charges has been to overhaul the school’s attendance policy and to decrease the school’s dropout rate. During the course of an average day, the school’s intervention specialist and I met with six to eight at-risk students, and, when available, their parents. These meetings, called *student attendance support meetings*, focused on determining why each of the students was not coming to school and developing a plan to get each student back on track for graduation. I have heard stories of family problems, academic difficulties, substance abuse, mental illness, and bad habits that shaped students’ perceptions of their realities in school. Each of the stories I have heard, in some way, has shaped my approach to this study.

My having heard the lived experiences of over 400 adolescents who have either dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out of school may have influenced how I understood the phenomena related to me by those high school dropouts that I interviewed for this study. However, the importance of phenomenological reduction, as described in Hein and Austin

(2001), increased my awareness of the need to be mindful of biases and to rely upon the stories of the participants to guide my analysis. Hein and Austin stated that as a result of this awareness of biases, “our understanding of the phenomenon being investigated is broadened” (p. 6).

Selection Process

The primary focus of this research was examining the lived experiences of dropouts to determine the underlying motivation for students who leave school prior to graduation. The interviews of five students, the field notes of observations documented while interviewing the subjects, and the archival data obtained from the school’s intervention specialist made up the data for this study.

The students interviewed for this study were selected as a purposeful sample. Patton (1990) defined *intensity sampling* as a method of selecting “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)” (p. 171). Cases chosen for this study were those who satisfied the given criteria and were willing to be interviewed for this study. The names of those individuals who satisfied the given criteria were identified and randomly ordered. Phone calls were made to the selected individuals requesting participation until five students were identified. A description on the selection criteria is provided in the *Participants* section of this chapter.

Setting

For this research, I studied the perceptions of students who dropped out of a particular school in Southwest Virginia. I hoped to examine how the levels of social capital students possessed had an influence on their desire to stay in school. The chosen school is the larger of two high schools in an urban inner city area. It is a fully accredited comprehensive high school with a career and technical education component, dual enrollment options, and a full range of

academic curricular offerings. Approximately 1850 students attended this school during the 2005-2006 school year. The student body is extremely diverse, racially (approximately 60% white, 40% minority populations), socioeconomically (drawing students from both low income housing and the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city), and academically (126 students attend the regional governor's school and 326 are served by the school's special education programs). During the 2004-2005 school year, 80 students were labeled event dropouts.

The setting described was ideal for this study, because it met the four criteria outlined by Rossman and Rallis (2003):

The ideal site is one where entry is possible; there is a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, structures of interest, or all of these; you are likely to be able to build strong relations with the participants; [and] ethical and political considerations are not overwhelming, at least initially (p. 136).

As an administrator at the school, I was able to gain access to information about the students who dropped out of the school in the 2005-2006 school year. The diverse student population provided a mixture of dropouts who were as diverse as the student body itself. Due to my position, those students who dropped out were familiar with me. My relationship with those students may have had some advantages, but may also have posed some limitations. It was easy to develop a rapport with the study participants. I had prior knowledge of many of the students and had talked with them and, in many cases, their parents or guardians. Unfortunately, my position as an administrator may have meant that the students who dropped out of school were hesitant to fully disclose their stories. The students may have had some negative contacts with me which may have affected their interaction with me. Finally, because I had authority to access all such records, reviewing the required records for contacting the possible participants was possible once

institutional review board approval was granted for the study and school system approval was obtained.

Participants

The potential participants for this study included approximately 200 students, age 18 and over, who dropped out of the school included in the setting for this study during the 2005-2006 school year. Students who were selected from this cohort satisfied three criteria. First, each student must have been a part of the general education population and not have had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed for them. Students with disabilities were not included in this study. There are a disproportionate number of dropouts with disabilities. According to a report of findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, approximately 30% of all students with disabilities dropped out of high school in 2003 (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). The nature of the disability might be a reason for the dropout behaviors and may confound the data. Second, the primary language of each student who was chosen was English. Data on dropout rates for the English Language Learner population were not readily available, but data from NCES indicate that the dropout rate of Hispanics is approximately 27% (Kaufman et al., 2004). The language barrier encountered by students who are learning English as a second language might be a confounding variable. Finally, each student chosen must not have pursued any other type of degree equivalency, such as a GED.

Participants for this study were purposefully selected from the group of possible students who satisfied each of the selection criteria. Phone calls were made to candidates to solicit their cooperation in the study (see Appendix A for telephone call script). Each candidate was informed of the nature of the study and asked of his or her level of willingness to participate.

Informed Consent and Permission Procedures

According to the Belmont Report, research requires a respect for those individuals who are subjects (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). One aspect of this respect is the opportunity to voluntarily consent to those procedures in which they will be taking part during the research without being subjected to coercion (Hatch, 2002). As such, the persons who are taking part must be provided with information that describes the complete nature of the study, including the procedure, purpose, and any risks or benefits if they exist. These requirements are also delineated in the Institutional Review Board policies of Virginia Tech.

The ethical considerations described in the Belmont Report require that information provided to the possible participants must be written in such a manner that it is comprehensible to any participant (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). For this study, an eighth grade reading level was assumed for each of the participants. Full disclosure of the complete study, including its purpose, guiding questions, risks, and benefits, was provided in the forms used to obtain informed consent for this study. The subjects were supplied with information to insure that they understood that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could have withdrawn from the study at any point in time. Access to their school records was also requested in the informed consent document (see Appendix B for informed consent form).

The required documentation was submitted and request for expedited approval of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board was made for this study. Once approval had been obtained, informed consent was sought from each of the possible subjects. Participants were given a copy of the informed consent form in person. After each had been allowed a sufficient

amount of time to read the form, questions were answered for clarification of procedures, risks, and benefits. After each agreed to participate in the study, a copy of the consent form and the interview protocol was provided for the subject to keep.

Assurance of Confidentiality

In order to obtain candid data, researchers must develop a rapport with their subjects (Polkinghorne, 2005). One aspect of developing a rapport in order to establish an open relationship with the research subject is gaining the confidence of the participant (Polkinghorne). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), maintaining confidentiality of subjects requires withholding identities and roles and assurance that names will not be associated with stories. I transcribed each interview as soon as possible after the conclusion of the interview. It was stated in the informed consent procedures that the only people who would have access to the transcripts of the interviews with the participant were members of my dissertation committee and me. Pseudonyms were used to identify each participant in all written evidence of the interview. Permission to use direct quotes of the participants was requested in the informed consent forms. While the attempt to maintain confidentiality was made as earnestly as possible, there was minimal risk that the identities of the participants could be identifiable due to the content of their stories. This possibility was outlined in the informed consent forms.

Every effort was made to mask any identifiers related to the participants. Havercamp (2005) pointed to the identification of third parties mentioned in the interview process as an often overlooked means of breaching confidentiality. In order to try to minimize the possibility of identifying any third parties, pseudonyms were used for any names provided in the interviews in any printed materials. Furthermore, no mention of the actual identity of the school was made in any printed material.

Gaining Access and Entry

Although each of the potential subjects were no longer students, access to school records was necessary to obtain demographic data to establish contact. My position as Assistant to the Principal provided this access to me. In addition, I gained the complete support of my supervisor and members of the senior administration of the school division for this research by completing the school district's institutional review board procedures. A current focus on providing extensive support to overage at-risk students (students who have failed at least one grade level and who fall into a category which may indicate a possibility of dropping out of school, such as low achievement, poor attendance, or multiple disciplinary referrals) within the system made this topic relevant to key gatekeepers. In addition, I supervised this school's intervention specialist. The primary responsibility of the intervention specialist is to work with students who are at risk of dropping out of school. This individual keeps detailed data on all at-risk students and has firsthand knowledge of each student who dropped out of the school during her tenure.

Once contact data was obtained, communication was established with each participant by phone. Arrangements were made to interview each participant. Participants were allowed to select a location for the interviews if the suggested location was not acceptable to them. Students suggested their homes, a local library, and the local higher education center. Appropriate transportation to and from the site was provided as necessary. In addition, at the conclusion of the interview, each participant was given information about the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) programs offered in the local area.

Data Collection

Polkinghorne (2005) stated that the interview is the most widely used method of data collection for phenomenological research. Given my close interaction with at-risk students,

interviewing subjects for this study was favorable. “The primary advantage of phenomenological interviewing is that it permits an explicit focus on the researcher’s personal experience combined with those of the interviewees” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 113). Creswell (1998) added that field notes, in the form of descriptive and reflective notes, should be kept during the interview to augment the transcript. For this study, interviews and field notes were the primary means of data collection. In addition, archival data in the form of information on each student participant maintained by the school’s intervention specialist was utilized for the study.

Interview Method

According to Creswell (1998), in-depth interviews are the hallmark to phenomenological research. Rossman and Rallis (2003) highlighted Seidman’s interview method for phenomenological studies that called for three iterative interviews to fully understand the lived experiences of the subject. Seidman (2006) noted that alternatives to the three-interview structure and duration may be used successfully as long as the subjects’ life histories, details of their experiences, and reflections of the meaning of their experiences are obtained within the conducted interviews. Unfortunately, many of the students who exhibit dropout behaviors with whom I have worked are very transient. I believe that it would have been very difficult to organize a series of three such interviews with the participants in this study. For that reason, I chose to utilize a method of interviewing which centered around a single lengthy interview. Miller and Crabtree (2004) stated that, “The creative depth interview is an entranceway to narrative understanding” (p. 200). Depth interviews provided a venue for gaining thick, rich descriptions of the lives of dropouts, for the primary focus is on the researcher and the subject gaining a mutual understanding of a topic (Miller & Crabtree).

The semi-structured nature of depth interviewing allows the interviews to be organized

around a group of open-ended ideas (Miller & Crabtree, 2004). For the purposes of this study, the interview guide was organized around four grand tour prompts:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your high school experience.
3. Please share some stories about how you used the support systems that existed at your high school.
4. Describe the ways you were encouraged to stay in high school.

The first prompt was designed to develop a rapport with the interview subject. Fontana and Frey (2003) noted that focusing on developing a relationship with the subject by asking biographical questions allows the researcher to fully engage the subject in the interview. The subject is thereby more likely to provide an opening for access to the knowledge he or she possesses (Fontana & Frey). The other three prompts were intended to elicit stories that would provide information to answer the research questions. They were written to extract responses based on the main components of social capital found in the literature.

Miller and Crabtree (2004) encouraged the use of other types of prompts: *floating prompts*, which are used to maintain the flow of the interview; *category questions* and *contrast questions*, which are used for clarification of responses; *steering probes*, which are used to link the conversation back to the research questions; *depth probes*, which help the subject expend on the topic of conversation; and *housekeeping probes*, which are used to enhance details. The other questions in the interview protocol were used as depth probes and housekeeping probes to elicit responses that related to the research questions.

Interview Protocol

Below is a list of interview prompts that were used to gather information necessary to

answer the research questions. The interview was of a semi-structured nature, so the research subjects were able speak about many of the topics without being prompted to do so.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself: Name, age, description of living conditions, current familial structure (two birth-parents, one step-parent, single-parent, etc.), number of siblings, highest level of education attained by siblings, highest level of education attained by mother or father, rules in the household, conversations had with parents, approximate household income, church attendance, highest level of education student attained, participation in any type of illegal activity during high school, i.e. illegal drug use or dealing, alcohol use, or gang membership, effect of illegal activity on desire to go to school, job, job while in school.
2. Tell me about your high school experience: Skipping school or classes, education ability, desire to stay in school, attribution of desire to drop out of school, number of times moved while in school, reasons for moving while in school, participation in extracurricular activities, interaction with parents while in school, parental expectations for education, student feelings of expectations, parental knowledge of student's friends and friends' parents, parental discussions with teachers or any other people at high school, parental volunteerism at high school, parental knowledge of academic progress, parental knowledge of behavior, parental participation in PTSA.
3. Please share some stories about how you used the support systems that existed at your high school: Relationship with school counselor, other adults at school interested in student's education, description of exhibition of adult interest, reasonableness of rules established at high school, opinion of high school,

positive aspects of school, negative aspects of school, adequacy of facilities, skill of teachers at teaching, skill of teachers at classroom management, description of favorite teacher, hindrances to access to supports.

4. Describe the manner in which you were encouraged to stay in high school:

Encouragement from members of your community, encouragement from school employees, mentors in or out of school, family, was leaving school a good decision, anything that would have kept you from leaving school, anything that would have led to a different decision.

At the conclusion of the interviews, each subject was thanked for participating in the study. The interviews were transcribed as soon as is possible after each was completed.

Field Notes

In her recommendations for conducting qualitative research, Morrow (2005) wrote, “Field notes taken from observation in the field or during and after interviews are essential to exploring and expressing the content of the study” (p. 259). While conducting this study, copious notes were taken while listening intently to the stories told by the participants. Note taking began from the moment the participant was contacted. Rossman and Rallis (2003) encouraged the use of thick description and providing elaborate details in the field notes to enhance future analysis. During the interview itself, observations were made about each participant’s demeanor and comfort level, physical movements and perceived stress levels, and any other nuances or stumbling blocks presented by the participant. Specific words used in the stories told by the participants about their experiences were highlighted in the field notes. Documentation of the activities taking place to maintain the integrity of the research process was also kept in the field notes.

In addition to recording observations, field notes promote reflexivity on the part of the researcher. The researcher then recognizes personal biases, values, and experiences as they become a part of the study (Creswell, 1998). Kleinsasser (2000) noted that qualitative researchers value reflexivity “because they have reason to believe that good data result” (p. 155). Due to my extensive prior interaction with students who have attendance problems, reflexivity was crucial to my comprehension of the data. Hein and Austin (2001) described a process known as bracketing as a method used by phenomenological researchers to be self-reflective and set aside personal assumptions held about a particular phenomenon. I made every effort to comprehend the stories related by the participants, as they understood them in their reality apart from my own biases and beliefs. Through bracketing and making a conscious effort to be reflexive in my examination of the data, I was able to articulate the stories of the students who dropped out of school and document how aspects of social capital influenced their desire to drop out of school.

Archival Data

Archival data on students who have attendance problems is maintained by the school’s intervention specialist. This data included attendance records, grade reports, notes from student support meetings, records of home visits, telephone contacts, discussions with other support agencies, and other information relevant to the students’ cases. Rossman and Rallis (2003) wrote that studying aspects of the material culture provides supplementary information to interviews and field notes. This information supported, in some cases, and, in other cases, contradicted the information provided by the participants, but provided valuable insight for all aspects of this study.

Data Quality Procedures

Credibility

Patton (1990) stated that, “Systematic data-collection procedures, rigorous training, multiple data sources, triangulation, external reviews, and other techniques ... are aimed at producing high quality data that are credible, accurate, and true to the phenomenon under study” (p. 56). Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) wrote that credibility may be obtained through “prolonged engagement in the field, use of peer debriefing, triangulation, member checks, and time sampling” (p. 30). Of the methods recommended, multiple data sources, triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing were utilized for the purpose of this study to assure credibility.

In his discussion of triangulation, Creswell (1998) wrote that multiple data sources may be used to provide “corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or prospective” (p.202). Patton (1990) noted that four different comparison types may be made in the triangulation of data sources:

1. comparing observational data with interview data;
2. comparing what people say in public with what they say in private;
3. checking the consistency of what people say over time; and
4. comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view (p. 467).

Three primary data sources were utilized for this study – interviews, field notes, and archival data. Triangulation was attained by comparing the field notes to the interview transcripts to determine if the subjects exhibited any feelings of discomfort at certain times during the interview to indicate that they were unsure of the information related or if the subjects displayed a sense of ease with the interview material. Comparing the interviews with the archival data ensured the consistency of the stories over time as told by the subjects and made the comparison

of the perspectives of the subjects and the school's intervention specialist possible. Conflicting information was presented in the results of the study.

Member checks are described as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314). Creswell and Miller (2000) stated that “the participants add credibility to the qualitative study by having a chance to react both to the data and the final narrative” (p. 127). After an interview was transcribed, each participant was asked to read the transcript of his or her interview to confirm that the data was accurate. Each participant was called to arrange a time that was convenient for him or her to read the transcript of the interview. A place was provided for the transcript to be read in my presence. Time for the participant to correct or amend the transcript was also provided.

Creswell (1998) wrote that peer debriefing “provides an external check of the research process” (p. 202). He continues to state that the peer is a person who “keeps the researcher honest” and “asks the hard questions” (Creswell, p. 202). Fortunately, my doctoral advisor naturally assumed this role as she critiqued my methods and questioned my interpretation and analysis of data. Her support and feedback were critical to the research process.

Transferability

In order to promote transferability of the results of the study, Anfara et al. (2002) encouraged the researcher to use purposeful sampling to determine subjects for the study and thick descriptions when gathering data. The sampling method utilized was intensity sampling, a purposeful method designed to elicit excellent examples of the phenomenon to the interview (Patton, 1990). The field notes included thick descriptions in order to “make analysis and interpretation possible” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 275). A focused effort was made to provide rich details of all aspects of the interview, including setting, mood, tone, word usage, and actions

used by the participants when relating their stories.

Dependability

Anfara et al. (2002) stated that creating an audit trail, using a code-recode strategy of analysis, triangulating data sources, and engaging peer examination are methods that may be used to enhance dependability of research. Creswell and Miller (2000) promoted the establishment of an audit trail so that “researchers provide clear documentation of all research decisions and activities” (p. 128). Morrow emphasized that maintaining the audit trail may be accomplished by tracking “a detailed chronology of research activities and processes; influences on the data collection and analysis; emerging themes, categories, or models; and analytic memos” (p. 252). The audit trail for this study was documented carefully in the researcher’s field notes as the study was taking place. All activities for data collection were recorded, as well as the data analysis procedures. A combination of Hatch’s (2002) interpretive analysis method and the three-iteration strategy of code mapping described by Anfara et al. (2002) was employed for data analysis. Triangulation of data sources was utilized to ensure dependability in the same manner as this method was used to ensure credibility. My advisor examined the methods and the results of the analysis of the data to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement of the analysis.

Confirmability

In order to ensure confirmability of the research, Anfara et al. (2002) promoted the use of triangulation and the practice of reflexivity. Triangulation was utilized in order to increase the depth of the stories provided by the participants by using multiple data sources. Kleinsasser (2000) stated that, “Bracketing provides a visual reminder that the researcher observes and comments on self and is, in fact, part of the text” (p.155). The incorporation of bracketing my own thoughts in my field notes was practiced to elevate the level of reflexivity in the data

collection and data analysis processes.

Morrow (2005) asserted that confirmability may be achieved only when qualitative researchers acknowledge the fact that by its very nature qualitative research is never objective. As such Morrow believes that the data, data analysis process, and findings must be tied together “in such a way that the reader is able to confirm adequacy of the findings” (p. 252). The maintenance of an audit trail was the means of tying the data, data analysis, and findings together.

Data Management and Interpretation

“One of fieldwork’s temptations is that it presents the unsuspecting researcher with so much data that might possibly be of use, data often relatively easy to collect, that newcomers risk losing sight of what they are getting data for” (Wolcott, 2005, p. 195). Due to the great responsibility to thoroughly portray the stories of the participants without losing sight of the purpose of this study, the data analysis and data management methods were designed carefully. This section presents the method utilized for the management and interpretation of the data.

Data management

Creswell (1998) underscored the importance of creating and organizing files for data. As each interview was conducted, a folder was generated. Each folder contained the following documentation: interview transcripts, attendance and transcript data from the most recent school year during which the student dropped out of school, copies of attendance support meeting documents, and copies of notes retained by the school’s intervention specialist about telephone calls, home visits, or other agency interventions. In addition, field notes specific to each participant were placed in the appropriate folder.

As soon as possible after each interview, the interview was transcribed by the researcher.

Upon completion of the transcription and printing of multiple copies, the document was read as a whole. The first step in interpretive analysis, according to Hatch (2002), is to read the data as a whole. Seidman (2006) tells the researcher to read the transcript and mark interesting passages to reduce the data to what is important in the context of the study. Analytic memos of the essence of the stories were made about the transcripts using NVivo software. These memos were included in the documentation maintained in each participant's folder. In addition, bracketed information was recorded in the appropriate participants' folders. As the data was reduced through iterative coding, the essence of the stories of the participants was documented in the findings.

Data interpretation

As a result of the purpose of this study and the research questions guiding the inquiry, an analytic framework centered on social capital theory provided the backdrop for the interpretation of data. The primary codes and themes developed during the analysis of the data were based on the literature on social capital and dropouts. Other codes and themes that were found in the data were scrutinized to ascertain how they fit or did not fit into the framework of social capital theory. The three-iteration strategy of code mapping as described by Anfara et al. (2002) was used for the ongoing process of data analysis. The method illustrated by Anfara et al. utilizes a combination of methods defined by various researchers including Tesch, Merriam, Creswell, Glaser and Strauss, and Miles and Huberman.

Interviews and field notes were the primary means of data collection for this study. In addition, archival documents obtained from the school's intervention specialist were collected as data. At the completion of each interview, transcripts were typed and labeled with line numbers, page numbers, subject, and date. Field notes were also typed and labeled according to date and

subject. Information from archival documents was copied and labeled according to date and subject. In addition, notes on the archival documents were kept in the field notes.

The first iteration described by Anfara et al. (2002) is to perform a surface analysis of the content of the data and to break the data into “manageable chunks” (p. 32). Miles and Huberman (1984) depicted the first iteration as a means of summarizing the data. Initial codes developed to categorize the data identified certain words and ideas in the data that tended to stand out in the context of the study. These words and ideas served as the coding categories. Social capital theory provided a context for the coding categories. Codes include familial structure, parental education level, sibling education level, deviant activity, movement, parental expectations, parental involvement, parental knowledge of friends, mentor, community involvement, and school experience. Other codes were used as they arose in the data.

The second iteration described by Anfara et al. (2002), also known as the constant comparative method, is to look for patterns among the initial codes. Patterns should be identified among and within the categories (Anfara et al.). Miles and Huberman (1984) described this stage as a way to group segments of data into smaller constructs. It is at this stage that themes emerged as a way to categorize the data further. Patton (1990) defined two criteria for judging the themes, “internal homogeneity,” the extent to which the data may be related to one another in some meaningful way, and “external homogeneity,” the extent to which differences may be found among the categories (p. 403). In addition to the two criteria for judging the themes, Patton provides a test for the completeness of the categories that includes the following criteria: a) inclusiveness of the existing data, b) reproducibility of the categories, and c) credibility of the category set.

The final iteration described by Anfara et al. (2002) is hypothesis or theory development

as it applies to the context of the problem. Miles and Huberman (1984) stated that memoing occurring at this stage is the precursor to developing explanations or propositions. It is at this stage that I used the experiences described by the participants to relate the essence of the students' experiences with dropping out of high school within the framework of social capital. Each of the themes developed was explained from a social capital perspective.

The process of code mapping provided an audit trail of the data analysis process which enhanced the dependability of the study. At this point, a draft summary of the findings was written. Hatch (2002) recommended rewriting the summary several times, each time refining and clarifying the interpretation of the data. Throughout the data interpretation process, the multiple data sources were analyzed to promote data triangulation. This process promoted credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research.

Conclusion

The researcher used this phenomenological study to analyze stories of high school dropouts within a social capital framework. The lived experiences of high school dropouts from an urban school district in Southwestern Virginia obtained through interviews imparted a voice to a population that has been missing in the literature. The literature contains many quantitative studies on social capital and dropouts, but no qualitative studies were found. Field notes and archival data allowed triangulation of the data, which promoted transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research. Data was analyzed through a three-iteration code mapping strategy which helped provide an audit trail for the study. The results are presented as narrative descriptions of the life histories of each of the participants and the themes resulting from analysis across all of the narratives. Results are discussed using the framework of social capital in two articles that were written for journal publication.

CHAPTER 4

ARTICLE 1

A Tripartite Perspective of Social Capital and its Access by High School Dropouts

Note: This document has been written for publication in *Sociology of Education*.

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to document and analyze students' experiences with dropping out of high school using a social capital framework. Examining the stories of high school dropouts provided valuable information related to the root causes of dropout behaviors. The context of this study was a high school in an urban school division in a southeastern state. The participants were five high school dropouts who spoke English as a primary language and who were a part of the general education population at the school. Triangulation of data sources included field notes, interviews with the participants, and archival documents. Three-iteration code mapping was used for data analysis and was included in an audit trail of all the study procedures. Results of this study are presented as narrative descriptions of the dropout histories of each participant. Themes resulting from the analysis across all of the narratives are discussed within the social capital framework. Conclusions include suggestions for the development of programs to increase social capital in the family, school, and community.

To meet the goals and deadlines established in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education 2002), teachers must be equipped with data-based knowledge to create a safe and supportive atmosphere in which students may learn (Guisbond and Neill 2004). Establishing arenas for education in the community in which learning is the norm and students feel obligated to learn would further engage students in the education process (Epstein and Sheldon 2002). Parental communication with students, teachers, and other parents develops networks and support systems for students (McNeal 1999; Carbonaro 1998). Teacher-based networks provide incentives for students to develop the desire to achieve high standards across the curriculum (Croninger and Lee 2001). Social capital theory may provide a framework for establishing such an environment for learning and promotion of student matriculation.

In 1988, James Coleman brought many social factors together to define social capital and how the concept relates to student dropout rates. According to Coleman (1988), social capital is an aggregate of trust and obligations developed within networks of various people. It is a resource available to individuals, much like monetary capital. The obligations form a type of social credit. A variety of social circumstances that influence a student's tendency to drop out of high school may be related to the level of social capital found in a student's family, school, or community. Coleman (1988) found that as the level of social capital increased, a student's tendency to drop out of school decreased.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The dropout problem in the United States has been a subject of many research studies. The problem did not begin until long after compulsory education laws came into being in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Dorn 1993). With the emphasis on increasing graduation rates as outlined in the NCLB legislation, determining factors associated with dropout tendencies will

continue to increase in importance.

Dropout Studies

Factors for high school dropout tendencies fall into three main categories: school-related, social-related, and family-related. School factors that have an effect on dropout tendencies include school size, school environment, discipline policy effectiveness, racial diversity, retention policies, and attendance rates (Allensworth 2005; Bryk and Thum 1989; Pittman and Haughwout 1987; Roderick 1994). Social factors which have been shown to affect student dropout tendencies include teenage pregnancy and teenage family situations, drug usage, moving out of the family household, and being a language minority youth (Goldschmidt and Wang 1999; Krohn, Lizotte, and Perez 1997; Mensch and Kandel 1988; Rumberger 1983; Steinberg, Blinde, and Chan 1984). Issues related to the family that contribute to dropout tendencies include parent education, family structure, parental involvement with the school, and residential and educational mobility (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Rumberger and Larson 1998; Swanson and Schneider 1999).

Dropout Studies from a Social Capital Perspective

From Coleman's (1988) landmark study, attendance at Catholic schools was shown to increase students' social capital and thereby decreased the tendency to drop out of school. Subsequent studies of student mobility and social capital concluded that for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, changing residences and schools several times during a student's high school years decreased social capital and could increase the tendency to drop out of school (Coleman 1988; Hofferth, Boisjoly, and Duncan 1998; Swanson and Schneider 1999; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1996). Student attendance improved with increased networking among school personnel, parents, students, and community members because levels of social capital

increased (Epstein and Sheldon 2002; Hofferth et al. 1998; Israel and Beaulieu 2004; McNeal 1999; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1997; Yan 1999). Furthermore, strengthening social capital within communities has been shown to have an association with a decrease in dropout tendency within the community (Crowder and South 2003; Goldschmidt and Wang 1999; Israel and Beaulieu 2004; Smith, Beaulieu, and Israel 1992). Recent studies have shown that high parental expectations, parental involvement in the school, parental education, and parental knowledge of their children's friends are associated with a decrease in the tendency to drop out of school (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Bejinez 2002; Carbonaro 1998; Hofferth et al. 1998; Israel and Beaulieu 2004; McNeal 1999; Qian and Blair 1999; Yan 1999). Finally, social capital has been associated with an increase in student achievement and a decrease in dropout rates (Bryk and Thum 1989; Israel and Beaulieu 2004).

The application of social capital theory to dropout tendencies has been discussed since James Coleman provided support for the connection in his study on social capital and attendance in Catholic schools (1987, 1988). Studies to further define social capital theory as it relates to dropouts have verified that as social capital decreases, dropout tendency increases (Carbonaro 1998; McNeal 1999; Teachman et al. 1996; Teachman et al. 1997). The role of social capital, including high levels of parental involvement in the schools and teacher interest in the student, is critical in the decision to stay in school for minority populations (Gibson and Bejinez 2002; Qian and Blair 1999; White and Glick 2000; Yan 1999; Zambrana and Zoppi 2002). Other studies have focused on specific realms in which social capital may be found and the effects of social capital in these realms on the tendency to drop out of school, such as family social capital (Hofferth et al, 1998), community social capital (Crowder and South 2003), school social capital (Croninger and Lee 2001), and a combination of types of social capital (Bowen, Bowen, and

Ware 2002; Furstenburg and Hughes 1995; Israel and Beaulieu 2004; Smith, Beaulieu, and Israel 1992). The overarching themes found throughout the body of literature relating social capital and dropouts included the following: decreased access to social capital in some areas may be overcome by abundance in other areas, such as community-based daycare facilities providing support for families who need childcare and increased parental involvement in school providing support for teachers (for example see Smith et al. 1992; Yan 1999), mobility as a negative influence on dropout behavior (for example see Hofferth et al. 1998; Teachman et al. 1996), and parental involvement in social development as a positive influence on behavior and achievement (for example see McNeal 1999; White and Glick 2000).

According to Paxton (1999), “there is a gap between the concept of social capital and its measurement” due in part to “the use of questionable indicators of social capital” (89-90). Paxton indicated that no single indicator of social capital may be used to capture the concept. This issue has implications on the study of social capital as it relates to students who drop out of school. The body of literature related to social capital and dropouts is extensive, yet lacking a qualitative component. Little is known about the lived experiences of individual students who have dropped out of high school and qualitative components to the research could lend more insight into situations in which dropouts have a tendency to limit their access to various forms of social capital. The stories of dropouts are very compelling. Unfortunately, studies on social capital and dropouts found to date in the literature are primarily quantitative in nature (Carbonaro 1998; Israel and Beaulieu 2004; McNeal 1999; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1997). These researchers tend to use large national databases, such as the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) database, because of the scope, magnitude, and longitudinal nature of the studies. National databases are not designed to address specific concepts associated with social capital

and many fields of data are combined to loosely approximate the aspects of social capital defined by individual study authors.

PURPOSE AND METHOD

Purpose of Study

By utilizing qualitative methods, student perceptions of their dropout experience were described and analyzed. The stories the students told were examined to determine how aspects of social capital related to the students' decisions to drop out of school. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to record and analyze students' experiences with dropping out of high school within a social capital framework. The primary focus was reporting lived experiences of dropouts to determine the themes that emerged from their stories and to give a voice to those students.

Method

For this research, a narratological research approach was used to study the perceptions of students who dropped out of a high school in one southeastern state. The chosen school is the larger of two high schools in an urban inner city area of a small city. It is a fully accredited comprehensive high school with a career and technical education component, dual enrollment options, and a full range of academic curricular offerings. Approximately 1850 students attended this school during the 2005-2006 school year. The student body is extremely diverse, racially, socioeconomically, and academically.

The shared experiences of high school dropouts provided insight into the aspects of social capital that contributed to the decision for the students to leave school. An examination of the stories of dropouts obtained in interviews gave a voice to those who were unable or unwilling to complete high school. In addition, it provided a forum for utilizing social capital theory to

develop a dialog for reduction of the dropout problem. It was assumed that students who have dropped out of school have something important to say about the social components they perceived as being lacking from their educational process. Furthermore, it was believed that student views have the potential to enrich discourse about social capital.

Five students who dropped out of school, were at least 18 years old, and had not completed any type of high school equivalency degree were chosen as a purposeful sample for this study. The individuals selected satisfied three primary criteria. They spoke English as their primary language, were a part of the general education population of a local high school, and were willing to be interviewed for this study. Of the 200 students labeled as dropouts, only 39 satisfied the given criteria. The 39 students were ordered randomly and phone calls to invite involvement in the study were made until five participants were obtained.

After Institutional Review Board approval was gained, full disclosure of the complete study, including its purpose, guiding questions, risks, and benefits, was provided to the participants in the materials used to obtain informed consent. The subjects were supplied with information to insure that they understood that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. Access to their school records was also requested in the informed consent document.

Interviews of five students, field notes of observations documented while interviewing the subjects, and archival data obtained from the school's intervention specialist comprised the data for this study. Unfortunately, many of the students who exhibit dropout behaviors with whom I have worked are very transient and would be difficult to locate over time. For that reason, a method of interviewing which centered on a single lengthy interview was utilized. Depth interviews provided a venue for gaining thick, rich descriptions of the lives of dropouts,

for the primary focus was on the researcher and the subject gaining a mutual understanding of a topic (Miller and Crabtree 2004). The semi-structured nature of depth interviewing allowed the interviews to be organized around a group of open-ended ideas (Miller and Crabtree 2004).

The interview was semi-structured with multiple interview prompts used to gather information to answer the research questions. The research subjects introduced many topics without being prompted. Students' responses to questions and stories resulting from additional questions were recorded and transcribed; pseudonyms were used for identification. The transcripts were coded according to the aspects of social capital represented by the responses and other factors that emerged. The primary codes and themes developed during the analysis of the data were based on the literature on social capital and dropouts. Any other codes and themes that were found in the data were scrutinized to ascertain how they fit or did not fit into the framework of social capital theory. Triangulation was attained by comparing field notes to interview transcripts and archival data. Archival data gathered included attendance records, grade reports, notes from student support meetings, records of home visits, telephone contacts, memos about discussions with other support agencies, and other information relative to the students' cases. The audit trail for this study was documented carefully in field notes as the study was taking place. The maintenance of an audit trail was the means of tying the data, data analysis, and findings together to ensure confirmability. The essence of each student's dropout experience was described and themes across all of the stories were presented and discussed.

DROPOUT STORIES

Joshua

Joshua was a 19-year-old white male who left school when he was in the eleventh grade. He appeared to have strong deviant tendencies, including heavy drug and alcohol use, leaving

school without permission, and general mischief, which led him to make poor decisions. In addition, he had difficulty complying with directives enforced by authority figures. Joshua had average academic ability. He gave many reasons for dropping out of school, including students and teachers annoying him and the difficulty of waking up on time after staying online on the internet until early in the morning. In addition, Joshua thought that his jobs may have affected his desire to go to school. He worked two jobs and did not have time to do homework or get an adequate amount of sleep. Joshua also stated that his age was another reason he dropped out of school. He felt like the students picked on him and that the younger students were too immature.

Joshua seemed to have little interest in staying in school. He said he was "hell bent on getting out [of school]." He also said that he had decided by the eighth grade that he would drop out when he was able to legally. The only reason Joshua gave for staying in school was to be able to purchase health insurance. Joshua did state that he occasionally wished that he had stayed in school, but he seemed to feel that his job as a telemarketer, making money, and purchasing things he desired made up for the advantages he would have if he completed high school.

Katie

Katie was a 20-year-old white female, the only child of a single mother. She moved four times when she was younger. Each move was due to the inability of her mother to pay bills. As a result, Katie also changed schools many times. When she was in high school, she changed schools three times. She had a comfortable relationship with her school counselor.

Unfortunately, she had established friendships with others who influenced her to leave school without permission.

Katie stated a few school related reasons for her dropout behavior. While she mentioned that transportation was a problem for her and made it difficult for her to make up time that she

had missed due to skipping school, Katie said that it was not a primary reason for her dropout behavior. Katie felt that the lack of transportation may have contributed to her lack of understanding in her classes because it limited her access to receive additional help from teachers. She stated that she had trouble making passing grades and that she was tired of making the effort to understand the material she had missed in class. She blamed her bad grades on sleeping through classes. Because she often went to bed extremely late, Katie did not like waking up early in the morning to go to school. When she did go to school, she slept through classes. Katie also attributed her poor grades to poor study skills and stated that school was difficult for her.

Katie listed many reasons for her dropout behavior that were external to the school, including heavy drug use, her age, depression, and her desire to be with her boyfriend. Katie's boyfriend was a heavy drinker with a crack cocaine addiction. Katie's mother would not let her continue to date him while she was living with her. Katie felt that she had no other way to be with her boyfriend than to leave her mother's house and drop out of school.

Erika

Erika was a pregnant 18-year-old black female who had been living with her maternal grandmother since she was three months old. Erika's maternal grandfather was in jail. She referred to her grandmother and the man with whom she lived as "Mom" and "Dad." Erika had never known what it was like to have the love of her parents, something for which she longed desperately. Her mother was a drug addict who had been in and out of jail for various offenses. The man she believed was her father refused to acknowledge his paternity. Erika said that one of the reasons she decided to drop out of school was that she was "trying to find out who [she was]." She did a lot of introspection after she found out she was pregnant and dropped out of

school. Erika stated that if she had a better understanding of her needs and desires while she was still attending, she would not have left school.

During the 2005-2006 school year, Erika decided to move into her aunt's house. Transportation difficulties were an issue when Erika was living with her aunt. She could have attended the other high school in the city and transportation would have been provided, but Erika chose to continue attending the school in the zone in which her grandparents lived. As a result, Erika had to walk about fifteen minutes to get to the bus. She often missed the school bus and had to take city transportation. Erika asked for money to ride the city bus to school, but her grandmother would not give it to her. Her grandmother kept telling her to move back home. Erika did not want to ask her friends for a ride and she did not want to move back to her grandmother's house. Ultimately, she did not go to school due to a lack of transportation. Another reason Erika gave for dropping out of school was that she was "trying to live the fast life" of a drug dealer. She was able to make a lot of money quickly and easily while dealing drugs for her boyfriend. In addition, Erika did not cultivate strong relationships with the adults at her school. She had conversations with the intervention specialist about staying in school. Erika had also talked to another teacher when she learned she was pregnant. However, she did not talk to her school counselor for any reason other than scheduling classes.

Erika had a litany of responses when asked if she wanted to go back to school. She claimed that she did not actually drop out of school. She merely let time go by and felt as if she could not get back into school. She fell behind, did not have transportation to and from her aunt's house, felt like she was unable to stay after school for help, and lost hope of completing school. She said that with the baby on the way, she believed that she would be unable to go back.

Greg

Greg was an 18-year-old white male who was living with his alcoholic mother, two younger brothers, and infant sister. Greg was a high achiever in school until he entered the eighth grade. After that, he moved multiple times. His grades dropped as a result. Eventually, the disappointment of poor achievement and the lure of money led Greg to drop out of school.

While the movement of his family may have been a major contributing factor to Greg's decision to drop out of school, he identified other factors as well. He believed that he had lost focus and would sleep through class. He said sleeping in class was due to the stress of being up late, not getting enough sleep, and trying to do everything. He failed the first nine weeks of tenth grade due to attendance problems, but passed his classes the remainder of the year. He brought up his grades, but continued to have attendance problems. He finally dropped out of school in the middle of his eleventh grade year. He said it was as if he dropped out on a "whim." For Greg, the lure of money was too strong to resist. Greg attributed the desire for money to feeling like he was an adult. He worked long hours and many days without a break to make as much money as he was able. When he turned 18, Greg decided to drop out of school to make more money. Greg had no contact with any school personnel to discuss his choice to drop out of school. He made the decision on his own.

Once Greg dropped out of school, he believed he had no other options and lost hope. He thought that if he returned to school, he would have to repeat the entire eleventh grade, which seemed like a daunting task. Greg felt secluded, but he felt that school personnel did everything possible to encourage him to stay in school. Greg admitted that his main problem was that he just did not listen to those who tried to encourage him to stay in school. Greg said that his decision to drop out of school was not a good one. He lamented that he should have contacted the school, but he did not seem to have the motivation to do so. He seemed to believe that once he dropped

out, he would not be able to go back, even after receiving letters encouraging him to finish.

Deshawn

Deshawn was an 18-year-old black male who was living with his mother. He had seven siblings, two sisters on his mother's side and five brothers on his father's side. They ranged in age from 17 to 31. Most of his siblings, except for the oldest and the youngest, graduated from high school. Deshawn had to ride the city bus to school his last year he was enrolled because he was living with his father in a neighboring city. Deshawn could have gone to school in the city, where transportation would have been provided for him, but chose to stay at his high school because all of his friends went there. It took Deshawn an hour on the city bus in the morning to get to school. He would come to school around 10:00 a.m. every morning. Deshawn said that he truly wanted to be in school, but staying up late made him very tired and he was always late to school, missing his first block classes.

Deshawn dropped out of school when he was in the tenth grade because he felt he had to support his family when his father was incarcerated. After his father was sentenced to jail for a driving infraction, Deshawn took care of his siblings and stepmother and felt strongly that he had to work because he had dropped out of school. Deshawn worked evenings, usually until at least 11:00 p.m. He would then walk home to his father's house. He would get home between midnight and 12:30 a.m. and wind down for the evening. When he tried to wake up the next morning, he said he was unable to wake up on time for school. Deshawn did not share his problems or concerns with members of the school community. However, he had strong ties with his employer, which may have influenced his decision to drop out of school to some extent.

Deshawn believed that he did not drop out of school by choice, but rather out of necessity. Deshawn felt more of a compulsion to help other people than to help himself. He saw

how much good his mother did for others and wanted to emulate her. Deshawn's mother was the sole income for the family after Deshawn's father went to jail, so she agreed that he could remain out of school to help her support the family. Deshawn thought that it was his duty to make money for the family. Deshawn did not think that dropping out of school was a good idea, but to him it was unavoidable. He said that he would have stayed in school if he had transportation, a stable residence, knowledge of where the next meal was coming from, and no bills to pay. His fear of not being able to sustain his lifestyle was overwhelming. He said that the only way that he could have stayed in school was if he did not have to work to support his family.

THEMES ACROSS CASES

School Social Capital

Croninger and Lee (2001) measured school social capital in two ways: student opinions and beliefs about the efforts of high school personnel to help them in school and self-reported incidences of school personnel guiding students about school or personal matters. The five students in this study spoke of many members of the school community with whom they established relationships, including teachers, the intervention specialist, counselors, and other interested individuals. School social capital resulting from relationships with teachers was alluded to in many forms – teachers who made an effort to create personal bonds with students, teachers who contacted parents, and teachers who worked with other faculty members to develop information channels. The high school the students attended had a full-time intervention specialist who was responsible for tracking students who had continuing attendance problems and trying to get them back into school on a regular basis. The intervention specialist worked to develop plans for academic and social supports to assist students in their endeavors to stay in school, thereby increasing the level of school social capital of the students with whom she came

into contact. The school social capital established as a result of the relationship between student and counselor was also crucial to the success of the student. In addition, other individuals, such as school resource officers and administrators, also played a key role in shaping the nature of the social capital that existed within the school.

The students in this study seemed to appreciate good teachers and described some of their best teachers. Students talked about some of their favorite teachers, saying that while they may have been gifted in the art of teaching, these teachers often went beyond the typical expectations to develop relationships with the students. Greg stated, “Every single one of them cared about what I was doing and was worried about it.” One of Greg’s teachers offered to let him stay in her house when she realized he was having problems at home. Joshua’s favorite teacher spent time with him. He remembered, “You know, he would sit down with me for 20 minutes at a time, for one problem, until I completely understood it.” Katie appreciated the personal attention she received from one teacher who “was there for me when if something was like bothering me in class. She would like come up to me before anybody gets in and just talk to me and ask me what’s wrong and I’d tell her and she would make me feel better.”

Not all descriptors of teachers were positive and some could be described as negative school-related social capital. When students believed their teachers were ineffective, they tended to develop negative relationships with those teachers. Several of the students commented that teachers called home when they were having discipline problems, but did not call their parents when they were struggling academically in school. There was some indication that the students wanted their teachers to talk to their parents about their academic struggles. In addition, students complained that some teachers did not follow up on commitments made to contact parents. Joshua stated, “They gave me a homework contract deal, which was bogus ... Never happened

... I mean, they're supposed to keep my parents informed of my progress and they never got a phone call out of them." One student complained that his teachers never called his parents to tell them when he was doing something well.

School counselors make personal connections with students and are trained to listen to them. They have access to information about support that may be needed by students to enable them to be better prepared to become productive citizens. Unfortunately, as Greg stated, "The only time that I talked to him was doing schedules." Deshawn, Joshua, and Erika made similar statements. In addition, most of the students had multiple counselors while they were in high school. Joshua, Greg, and Deshawn had different counselors each year they were in high school. A lack of consistency in school counselors may have made establishing relationships difficult for the students. Only one of the students believed that she had a close relationship with her counselor. Katie stated, "We was real close. He talked to me about everything. I could go to him and he'd make me feel better." Katie talked to her counselor about dropping out of school. He told her that he could not make her stay in school, but Katie said that he said, "I would rather you not to make the wrong choice." Katie truly understood that she needed the presence of her school counselor in her life. He was a source of much social capital for her.

It was often difficult to categorize examples of social capital as solely school-related or family-related, for they often overlapped in the students' stories. For example, when the students were younger, their parents took the opportunity to help increase the school social capital of their children by being active in the school. Several of the students said that their parents may have volunteered their time once or twice in elementary school. Deshawn's mother had been to see him play football when he played in the sandlot league, but had not seen him play since that time. Joshua's mother went to his band concerts in middle school. Unfortunately, as they entered

high school, the students perceived that their parents did not have the time available to participate in their lives. Many opportunities to increase school social capital may have been lost as a result. For example, none of the students' parents volunteered at the high school or were members of the Parent-Teacher-Student Association. The only mention of interaction with the student at the high school level was that Erika stated that her grandparents would occasionally accompany her to a sporting event.

Each of the students or the parents of the students involved in this study were contacted several times by the school's intervention specialist according to her records, except for Greg. Deshawn recalled that he talked to the intervention specialist a few times at school and that she contacted his mother many times. Each time the intervention specialist called, his mother would tell him about the conversation. Deshawn appreciated her efforts and stated, "She's trying to stay on me. She's not giving up on me. That's for real. She's not giving up." Unfortunately, Deshawn never shared his family's problems with the intervention specialist, so she was unable to talk to him about available support in the community that would help him in his efforts to stay in school and provide for his family. Erika talked to the intervention specialist many times at school about returning to school or earning a GED. According to Erika, "She kept pushing me and pushing me to come back to school. She would call ... and ask me how I was doing, when I was going to come, and if I wanted to come back." The intervention specialist also connected her with her school counselor and made an appointment for her at the school clinic for a pregnancy test. Like Deshawn, Erika appreciated the efforts of the intervention specialist and believed that she had tried to help her in her endeavors to return to school.

Some of the students took advantage of other means of support available at the school that had the potential to increase school social capital. Erika utilized the services of the school

clinic to learn about her pregnancy. Deshawn was a member of a support group that focused on increasing the social intelligence of certain young men in the school community. Joshua noted that he often talked to the security guards and the custodial workers at the school. Katie was able to attend a local charter school for a while. She enjoyed going to the school, “Cause they had the higher learning and it was for people that always got in trouble at their home school and they gave people the chance to see that they are smart.”

Each of the students stated that there was nothing any member of the school faculty could have done to keep them in school. Greg stated, “Everyone was always there to talk to. It was just a matter of doing it. Putting aside my pride and just talking to someone. Saying hey, I am having problems. I just basically didn’t.” Erika blamed herself. When asked if there was anything that prohibited her from utilizing the support that existed at the high school, she said, “Me, just me, and me following behind the other people.” The students stated they felt support from the faculty of the school, but they did not make use of the support that was available.

Family Social Capital

Hofferth, Boisjoly, and Duncan (1998) developed a measure of extrafamilial resources to address a gap in understanding the process of school completion known as family social capital. They determined that parents’ education, family structure, family income, and geographic mobility are linked to the amount of schooling children complete in early adulthood (Hofferth et al. 1998). Each of the students in this study had a definite lack of family social capital.

None of the students in this study lived with two birth parents. Three of the students lived with their single mothers. One of the students lived with her grandparents. One lived with his mother and stepfather. Greg’s parents divorced about ten years ago. He recently contacted his father and was very excited about renewing his relationship with him. Joshua never knew his

birth father because he left his mother when he found out she was pregnant. During her interview, Erika lamented frequently that she longed for the love of her mother and her father, but she knew that she would never have it. Her mother was a drug addict and the man she thought was her father would not admit that he was.

The level of education attained by parents of the students in this study varied. Joshua's mother graduated from college and his stepfather dropped out of school when he was in the eleventh grade. Deshawn's mother went to a community college to become a certified nursing assistant. His father graduated from high school. Greg's mother dropped out of school in her senior year. His father completed college. Katie's mother dropped out of school in the ninth grade. Erika's mother also dropped out of school in the ninth grade. Her grandmother went to a community college to become a certified nursing assistant. Students with a parent who graduated may have had a higher level of social capital than the others. However, the increase in social capital due to parental education did not appear to be significant as described by those students.

None of the students remembered having meaningful conversations with their parents when they were younger. Greg remembered "basic chatter," but no "deep thought conversations." Deshawn had conversations with his mother "only like what I felt was necessary to talk about." Since his mother and father worked long hours, Deshawn rarely talked with them. Joshua's response to a question asking about conversations with his parents was, "Does, 'You either make better than a C or I whip your butt' sound ... Well, I guess it would be positive. I mean if I didn't get C's. Well, I guess it would be positive. Well, naaa, well, it wasn't all bad. Just stuff like that."

In each case, the students were expected to graduate from high school. Most of the parents expected their children to go to college. This should have increased the level of family

social capital possessed by the students. Greg's mother expected him to graduate, go to college, and be successful with his life. Greg said, "She didn't want me to end up like everybody else in our family." He believed that his mother's expectations of him were reasonable. Deshawn's parents expected their children to do their best. In Deshawn's words, "Just do our best. If we was doing our best and getting C's or B's, we just do our best and make sure we pass." Deshawn was also expected to graduate and go to college. Deshawn believed that the expectations were reasonable. He said, "Of course it was reasonable to finish school. Everybody should finish school." Joshua's parents expected him to always try to pass his classes and to graduate.

The expectation of graduation from high school may not have had an impact on the desire of each student to complete school. When asked how he felt about his parents' expectations of him, Joshua stated, "At first, it was like, I should at least try to make them care. Maybe try and do good. Then it just went to whatever, basically. I stopped caring and that's what got me." Katie's parents had high expectations, including graduating, attending college, obtaining gainful employment, and owning a nice house and car. Katie was satisfied with the expectations, but "I just couldn't find a way to do it after I got into middle school and high school." Erika's grandparents expected her to graduate and go to college. In fact, Erika complained that her grandparents had mapped out her life completely. She resented any expectations. When asked about her grandparents' expectations, Erika stated, "I never wanted to go to college when she said I had to go to college." She believed that any actions must be done because she wanted to do them, not because of the desires of her grandparents.

Dropping out of school was a pattern among the family members of many of the students. Greg's younger brother dropped out of school shortly after Greg. Deshawn's oldest brother and his younger brother dropped out of school. Joshua's brother dropped out of school when he was

a junior. He said that he doubted that his sister would graduate. Katie and Erika had no siblings in their immediate families. However, neither of their mothers graduated from high school.

Mobility was a definite theme with all of the students, including moving from house to house and changing schools. This mobility may have resulted in a loss of social capital established in previous living situations or school situations. Two of the students, Joshua and Erika, had lived in four different places. Katie had moved four times with her mother, but also moved several times while she was living with her boyfriend. When she was living with her boyfriend, Katie said, “Basically I was worried about where I was going to lay my head, or when was the next time I was going to eat.” Deshawn moved seven times while he was in school, including a period during which he was living in a shelter. In many of these cases, movement of living situations included a change of school. Sometimes, the students did not want to change schools, so transportation to school became a hindrance to obtaining their educations.

Greg’s situation most clearly indicated how student mobility can decrease the level of social capital available to the students. Greg remembered moving at least nine times, from Ohio to South Carolina to Colorado to Virginia and several points in between. During that time, he attended nine different schools. Greg recalled, “I went out to live with my uncle in Colorado, cause me and my mom were having differences. So, I moved out right before I started ninth grade ... moved back to SC same year, and then we moved up here same year. So, I was at three different schools in ninth grade. I failed ninth grade, because I was just all over the country. That’s probably where all of the trouble began.” Greg had difficulty creating close relationships with peers and adults after he left South Carolina. This difficulty resulted in a decrease in access to available social capital that is established for students within networks of friends, teachers, and other concerned adults. In addition, his mother probably had difficulty establishing social

networks.

Rules and norms established in the household helped develop social capital for adolescents. Rules set expectations for the children as they mature. The rules set in the homes of each of the students interviewed varied and many had difficulty answering when they were questioned about household rules. Greg's household rules included, "Just normal rules growing up, don't hurt nobody, treat women with respect ... take out the trash, clean your room." Deshawn had to "keep everything clean." He summarized all of the rules in his home as the "respect factor." The rules in Joshua's home were "basically, no going out on school nights, and making sure the house was clean. Oh, and well about homework. But, that was about it." Katie only remembered that she had a curfew and was not allowed to date. Erika was more explicit than the other students in enumerating the rules in her grandparent's home. She stated that the rules were, "No cussing, no drinking or smoking ... I got to clean. I can't be disrespectful. Be respectful, presentable, decent. Basic family household rules." Interestingly, none of the subjects in this study mentioned a rule stating that they must attend school. The only mention of school-related rules was that Joshua said that he had to do his homework. Each of the students was allowed to continue to live with their parents after he or she dropped out of school. There were no consequences to dropping out of school other than a requirement by some of the parents for the child to pay a nominal rent.

Community Social Capital

Crowder and South (2003) examined how the influence of neighborhood distress on the tendency to drop out of school varied by race, sex, and socioeconomic level. They defined community social capital as a commodity attained through relationships with other members of the community, such as friends and neighbors (Crowder and South 2003). Membership in

community organizations and churches affected the level of community social capital of a student (Smith et al. 1992). In addition, having a mentor strongly affected students by reducing dropout rates, decreasing teenage pregnancy rates, and increasing employment rates after graduation, thereby increasing community social capital (White and Wehlage 1995).

Each student in this study exhibited negative behaviors which may have contributed to a lack of ability to utilize available social capital in their lives. The behaviors they exhibited ranged in severity from not attending school to participating in illegal activities. All students admitted that they did not attend school, however, Deshawn stated that he actually wanted to go to school, but was unable to attend due to transportation issues. Three of the students, Erika, Katie, and Joshua, admitted to drinking alcohol and using drugs. Erika made money selling drugs for her boyfriend. Greg exhibited the smallest level of participation in deviant activities, but his participation may have contributed to his failure to access available social capital nonetheless. He denied participation in any type of illegal activity during high school, but said, "I was always around it, I just never did it, you know, like all of my friends. I was just the one that sat around, you know, and watched them waste their lives away." Greg did not have a network of friends who were committed to doing the right things, which led to a low level of community social capital. He admitted to skipping a few classes in middle school. He was caught and punished in such a manner that he was reluctant to skip classes again. Greg missed a lot of school before he dropped out of school. He reasoned that he was not skipping school; he always stayed at home when he was not in school. Because he missed so much school, Greg was unable to develop any degree of school social capital. Deshawn's deviant activities occurred when he was in middle school. He did not establish a high level of school social capital early in his school career. Deshawn seemed to have matured by the time he entered high school. He said that, "I could have

like went to the streets and done some crazy stuff, but I wanted to do it the right way.” He only attended school about half of the time, which contributed to a lower capacity to access school social capital.

The students interviewed for this study may have benefited from having an older experienced individual who would be willing to help ease the transition to adulthood by providing support and challenging them to make good decisions. In addition, a mentor who could suggest alternatives to dropping out of school, provide guidance in obtaining available community or school supports, and impart information about future careers may have given the students hope and direction. None of the students in this study had experience with a true mentor. All of the students in this study, except Greg, said that no one in the community outside of the school or their family tried to encourage them to stay in school. Greg was the only student who knew the definition of the word “mentor.” At first, he said that he did not have a mentor. Then, Greg mentioned that he had two mentors, his youth pastor and his uncle. Both tried to convince Greg not to drop out of school. Deshawn mentioned his mother and his brother who graduated from high school and is going to college as his mentors. Both set an example for Deshawn to follow and tried to convince him to stay in school. Joshua said that he did not have any mentors, but that his parents set an example of a good work ethic for him. He seemed to want to have someone in his life with whom he could talk on a regular basis and who would provide guidance in his life. Katie selected her “sister,” her mother, and her best friend as her mentors. Her best friend was an odd selection, for she was an 18-year-old high school dropout. However, her “sister” and her mother tried to encourage her to stay in school. Erika said that she did not have any mentors, “Cause the only people I looked up to was my mom and my dad and they was never there.”

The parental knowledge of friends and friends' parents should result in an overall increase of community social capital. Deshawn's parents knew the friends that came to his house. They did not know many of his friends at school. They also knew his friends' parents and kept in touch with them when they were together. Many of them had known each other since they were in high school because they lived in the same neighborhood. Deshawn's level of family social capital within his mother's household seemed much higher than that of the other students in the study. The connection his mother had with his friends and their parents may have contributed to the level of family social capital. In the cases of each of the other students, their parents knew at least one of their close friends and that friend's parents. Joshua's parents knew one of his close friends and his mother. His parents did not approve of the people with whom he associated. Katie's mother knew most of her friends and her closest friends' parents. Katie's friends were influential in helping her develop negative social capital by providing her with drugs and alcohol and helping her skip school. Erika's grandparents knew her closest friends and their parents. They generally knew where she was and who she was with, until she moved out of their house. Unfortunately, for Joshua, Katie, and Erika, the relationships the students established with their friends resulted in encouragement to participate in many deviant activities. The negative social networks in which they were involved contributed to an increase in negative community social capital in their lives.

Coleman (1988) first established the connection between social capital and dropouts by analyzing attendance in Catholic schools. Coleman found a direct correlation between church attendance and level of social capital contributing to positive school attendance. Results from this study were mixed. Joshua never attended church. The other four students attended church when they were younger. Greg attended church at the time of his interview, but his family did

not attend with him. Erika stated that she attended church occasionally. The other students had not attended church for some time. Church leaders encouraged Greg to stay in school. He also named his youth pastor as a mentor. Greg's youth pastor encouraged him by saying, "If I didn't stay in and I didn't go to college that I was going to have a hard time dealing with life and the future." The two black students, Erika and Deshawn, specifically mentioned relationships connected to church attendance. Deshawn mentioned that he was very comfortable with a teacher who led a support group because, "I was like I already know you from somewhere I just can't remember. Probably from church." When talking about why a teacher was her favorite, Erika stated, "She tried to keep me coming to school and encouraged me. She was trying to make me go to church with her, but I wouldn't."

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to record and analyze students' experiences with dropping out of high school within a social capital framework. Multiple studies have shown a correlation between the level of social capital students have and the tendency for students to exhibit dropout behaviors (Coleman 1988; Israel and Beaulieu 2004; Teachman et al. 1996). These studies consistently show that students who are unable to develop social capital in the forms of school social capital, family social capital, or community social capital or a combination of these three forms may have a more difficult time completing school. However, these researchers have utilized databases that were not designed to specifically measure social capital levels. Through utilizing qualitative methods, the stories of students who have dropped out of school were analyzed to illustrate how students did not access social capital, which may have contributed to their dropout behaviors. The overarching theme found throughout each of the stories was that none of the students in this study had relationships with members of their families or

communities who had the capacity to assist them in their endeavors to complete school. In many cases, the students had the desire to complete school or obtain a GED, but did not have a relationship with any person outside of the school setting who was persistent with encouragement and knowledge. Finally, the students often had access to social capital within their reach, but did not understand how to exploit it effectively.

While each of the students in this study had access to a high level of school social capital in the form of student-teacher or student-adult interactions at the high school, most did not establish relationships with adult members of the school community. Croninger and Lee (2001) found that social capital benefits gained from trusting teachers and receiving guidance from teachers tend to be greater for students who are at risk of dropping out of school than for average students. In fact, students who had good relationships with their teachers were more likely to graduate from high school than at-risk students who had no social ties to their teachers (Croninger and Lee 2001). The findings from this study confirm those of Croninger and Lee. Furthermore, students in this study rarely had contact with their school counselors or other people in the school who would be able to guide them toward graduation and provide them with increased levels of school social capital. In addition, the students did not have school social capital available to them that could potentially arise from interactions between their parents and adult members of the school community. Further qualitative research can assist researchers in analyzing relationships established between the parent and school personnel to understand how students benefit from school social capital they have gained from the development of those interactions.

The development of positive family social capital was difficult for the students in this study. Although the students believed that they had good relationships with their parents or

guardians, many of the relationships they described were dysfunctional, such as Greg's relationship with his alcoholic mother and Deshawn's relationship with his incarcerated father. None of the students lived with both birth parents and they did not have memorable meaningful conversations with their parents, which supports the findings of Smith et al. (1992). They had few clearly established rules and little structure in their households. Smith et al. (1992) found that children of mothers who expect them to go to college are less likely to drop out of high school. The students in this study were expected to complete high school, but they did not have positive role models or family members who could help them find the support they needed in order to be successful or to provide motivation and encouragement for the students. In addition, many had siblings and parents who had dropped out of school. While the level of education of the students' parents varied, any increase in social capital levels that may have resulted from parental education appeared to be negligible. The students moved frequently, changing residences and schools many times, which may have led to a decrease, not only in family social capital, but also in school and community social capital, confirming the findings of Hofferth et al. (1998).

Carbonaro (1998) found that parental knowledge of their children's friends and their friends' parents adds to the level of social capital possessed by a student. However, most of the participating students' closest friends reportedly engaged in deviant activities with them or encouraged deviant behaviors. The social capital gained from friendships established by the students in this study seemed to be negative. Friends encouraged the students to participate in illegal drug activities and skip school.

White and Wehlage (1995) advocate that collaboration in neighborhood groups and the provision of mentors can increase community social capital. None of the students in this study

had mentors in their communities who had the capacity to help them be more successful. The students who were employed felt the immediate pleasure of being able to purchase items they desired and succumbed to this power, which may have added to negative community social capital. Some of the students had the support of members of their churches when they were younger, but lack of participation in church activities as they matured did not add to the levels of social capital they possessed. The students did not take advantage of opportunities to develop community social capital.

Further research into the development of successful intervention programs to provide support for social capital attainment throughout a child's school career may be a proactive way to work with students who exhibit tendencies to drop out of school. Leaders of such programs could work with students to develop communication and questioning skills in all areas of their lives. Teaching children how to seek out positive relationships and sustain them, and possibly providing mentors for the children could increase social capital in all areas of their lives. In addition, programs could be designed to help children learn to identify dysfunctional relationships and develop strategies to modify those relationships or seek help to end them. Another important component of these programs could include working with parents to help them establish better relationships with their children. Providing clear suggestions for parents to use to create better networks within the schools their children attend could increase school social capital. It could also provide opportunities for parents to participate in the development of stronger ties to their communities. The establishment of such programs in both schools and communities would increase the potential for social capital development for all students.

Social networks among parents, educators, and community members are crucial to the success of each child. School social capital, family social capital, and community social capital

develop as a result of participation in social networks. As demonstrated by the participants in this study, social capital may be a readily available resource for students, but they may be unable to attain it. The inability to draw upon an available reservoir of social capital may result in an exhibition of behaviors associated with dropping out of school.

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CHAPTER 5

ARTICLE 2

High School Dropout Voices Enhancing School Counseling:
Increasing Utilization of Social Capital

Note: This document has been written for publication in *Professional School Counseling*.

Abstract

The purpose of the phenomenological study from which this article was drawn was to document and analyze students' experiences with dropping out of high school using a social capital framework. This article focuses on the role the school counselor may play in increasing access to, acquisition of, and utilization of social capital. School counselors have a unique role in the lives of students and have the potential to advocate higher levels of social capital within the school setting more than any other individuals in the school. Social capital is positively associated with academic achievement. As a result of their ability to increase access to and use of available social capital, counselors may play a greater role in enhancing student achievement. Interviews of students were analyzed to determine how their decision to drop out of school may have been influenced by their inability to acquire available social capital. Conclusions from this study include suggestions for the development of school counseling programs to increase availability and usage of social capital in the family, school, and community.

Katie believed that she had a solid relationship with her school counselor. Unfortunately, he was unable to help her develop higher levels of social capital, which may have increased her desire to stay in school. When asked about her relationship with her counselor, Katie replied, “We was real close. He talked to me about everything. I could go to him and he’d make me feel better about it. If I have a situation that’s really bad with students or teachers, he’ll make me like feel better, toughen up, and just think about school.” I (please note, I as the researcher here indicates the first author) continued our conversation by asking Katie to provide examples of situations about which she would go to her counselor. Her response was that she would talk to him about, “How I was tired of coming to school and I want to drop out or maybe take my GED, or like confrontation about like if teachers get smart or have an attitude, or whatever, and me and teachers get into it. I told him whenever I wanted to quit and everything. And how I was fed up with going to school every day because of how old I was and he told me that it don’t matter how old you are as long as you get your education. He said, ‘I can’t make you do nothing cause you’re a grown adult now, but I would rather,’ he said, ‘I would rather you not to make the wrong choice.’”

Katie did not remember whether her counselor discussed how she could develop relationships with others who could assist her in her endeavors to stay in school. She did not understand that she could make positive choices in her life, until she had dropped out of school. Katie wanted to go back “to the point that I wasn’t doing nothing, not even smoking cigarettes, or dating the wrong people.” She said that, “I would choose my friends better, who I hang out with, and actually listen to people who care about me.” Unfortunately, Katie did not have those people in her life who could influence her to make positive choices. She has yet to complete high school or earn a general education development (GED) certificate.

Katie was one of five students interviewed for a phenomenological study completed during the summer of 2006 in which I documented and analyzed students' experiences with dropping out of high school using a social capital theoretical framework. The primary focus was examining lived experiences of dropouts and providing them with a voice in a dialog to determine the underlying motivation for students who left school before graduation. The dropout problem is pervasive in America's schools and must be addressed proactively. This article focuses on students' access to available school social capital and how they were unable to use it, which may have led to dropout behaviors, and the role the school counselor may play in increasing students' access to and acquisition of social capital.

The Dropout Problem

As public school personnel are becoming more accountable for student achievement, dialog on the dropout problem facing many school districts is becoming more frequent. Local, state, and federal mandates are addressing the problem. For example, the Dropout Prevention Act, part H of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), provides federal grants for funding programs designed to encourage students to stay in school and to provide support for students to reenter school (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). School districts are encouraged to implement research-based activities that will promote higher graduation rates. Providing school counselors with an understanding of how components of social capital may be associated with the reduction of dropout behavior can provide strategies for developing programs to be included in a comprehensive school counseling program designed to lower dropout rates in order to meet the requirements of NCLB.

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, school counselors must not only include students in their program design, but also other school

professionals, parents, and community members to enhance the experiences of the students in their caseload (ASCA, 2003). Under NCLB, Title I schools are required to develop policies to involve school personnel, families, and communities in collaborative partnerships to work for the good of the students in the schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). As described by Green and Keys (2001), the comprehensive developmental model for school counseling includes a “fully developed collaborative role” for counselors in which “institutional mechanisms that support collaboration” are developed proactively (p. 91). Amatea et al. (2004) described a model in which counselors, teachers, and students and their families work together to establish relationships that will promote academic success for the students. This collaborative model contrasts with the traditional model of the teacher as the education expert who is responsible for providing the academic environment believed to be in the best interest of the student. With a collaborative model, counselors, teachers, and families are able to establish a common purpose and commitment to attend to the needs of the whole student. Bryan (2005) and Giles (2005) acknowledged that, while school counselors cannot do everything in the school, they are ideally suited to serve as team facilitators who engage members of the team in a dialog of problem-solving and decision-making, as advocates who work with the team to remove barriers to student academic success, and as collaborators to work with students to accomplish goals. Howard and Solberg (2006) evaluated a curriculum known as Achieving Success Identity Pathways, which was developed within the Ecological Developmental Framework, in which school counselors teach students to become aware of their identities in the larger social context and to become advocates for them. They found that social justice efforts on the part of the school counselor may encourage students to “become engaged in their own academic success, to improve teacher-student relationships, and to manage oppressive messages and influences in youth’s lives”

(Howard & Solberg, p. 286). In addition to establishing programs that establish relationships, Bradley et al. (2005) underscore the importance of being “multiculturally competent to work with parents for the benefit of students’ academic and developmental success” (p. 424). Such programs are developed with the knowledge that different ethnic groups may have unique expectations of school outcomes.

A 2002 document from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that the national status dropout rate, the percent of individuals who were not enrolled in school and did not have a high school diploma or its equivalent, was 10.7% in 2001 (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004). In that same year, 5% of all U.S. students dropped out of school (Kaufman et al.). Data from the NCES also showed that the number of 16 to 24 year olds who have a high school degree or its equivalent has increased little in the past three decades, but has decreased from 14.6% since 1972 (Kaufman et al.). Other trends in dropout rates are also bleak. For example, as age increases, the tendency to drop out of school increases (Allensworth, 2005; Gottfredson, Fink, & Graham, 1994; Roderick, 1994; Rumberger, 1995). In addition, students from low income families and lower socioeconomic status families are more likely to drop out of school than their higher income and higher socioeconomic status peers (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Rumberger, 1983; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984).

Due to the federal requirement for state and local education agencies to decrease dropout rates, research to define reasons students drop out of school is timely. Since 1988, researchers have provided support for a relationship between social capital and dropout rates. Prior to 1988, several social factors that contributed to a student’s tendency to drop out of school were identified. Rumberger (1983) pointed to parents’ educational attainment, family structure and size, and family socioeconomic status as strong influences on the probability of dropping out of

school. Pittman and Haughwout (1987) found a positive correlation between school size and dropout rate, but the authors attributed their findings to the social effects of a larger school having a negative influence on the tendency for a student to drop out of school. Steinberg, Blinde, and Chan (1984) concluded that a higher dropout rate for language minority students was associated with low socioeconomic status and poor academic achievement.

Social Capital and Dropouts

In 1988, James Coleman brought many social factors together to define social capital and how it is related to dropout rates. Coleman (1988) found that as the level of social capital increased, a student's tendency to drop out of school decreased. According to Coleman (1988), social capital is an aggregate of trust and obligations developed within networks of various people. It is a resource available to individuals, much like monetary capital. The obligations form a type of social credit. A variety of social circumstances that influence a student's tendency to drop out of high school may be related to the level of social capital found in a student's family, school, or community.

Coleman's (1988) findings in his landmark study showed that attendance at Catholic schools increased social capital and thereby decreased the tendency to drop out of school. Further research has added to Coleman's findings. Researchers studying student mobility and social capital concluded that for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, changing residences and schools several times during the course of a student's high school years decreased social capital and may have increased the tendency to drop out of school (Coleman, 1988; Hofferth, Boisjoly, & Duncan, 1998; Swanson & Schneider, 1999). Strengthening social capital within communities with programs designed to perform such services as educating young women about teenage pregnancy, reducing disruptions due to mobility, promoting the social

integration of youth into neighborhood leadership, providing a nurturing environment with guidance in acceptable behaviors, and increasing communication between parents and students, has been shown to have an association with a decrease in dropout tendency within the community (Crowder & South, 2003; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Smith, Beaulieu, & Israel, 1992). Furthermore, high parental expectations have been associated with a decrease in the tendency to drop out of school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Nejinez, 2002; Qian & Blair, 1999). Finally, attendance was found to improve when levels of social capital grew because of increased networking among school personnel, parents, students, and community members (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hofferth et al., 1998; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; McNeal, 1999; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997; Yan, 1999).

Croninger and Lee (2001) defined school social capital as the efforts of school personnel to help students in school and guide students about school or personal matters. They found that the tendency for at-risk students to drop out of school decreases as the level of social capital between students and teachers increases. School social capital has been associated with an increase in student achievement and a decrease in dropout rates (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004). Brewster and Bowen (2004) found that as perceptions of teacher support increased, the levels of problem behavior decreased and that as teacher support increased, so did student perceptions of school meaningfulness. This student support leads to increased levels of school social capital. However, due to inequities in financial capital, school social capital has only a minor impact on reducing the propensity to drop out in communities in which a majority of the residents have low socioeconomic status (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

In other studies related to school social capital and dropout tendencies, relationships between parents and students and parents and school personnel were found to have an effect on

the level of school social capital of the student. Crosnoe (2004) confirmed Croninger and Lee's (2001) conclusion that students perform better academically when they attend schools with strong student-teacher bonds, but they also determined that students who were not close to their parents received less academic benefit from schools with strong student-teacher bonds (2% increase) than students who were very close to their parents (21% increase) (Crosnoe). Woolley and Grogan-Kaylor (2006) found that family integration and family satisfaction were important in avoiding problem behavior at school. In addition, they found that family integration, family support, and home academic culture were significantly related to school coherence, which they believed to be vital to academic achievement. In a 2004 study by Anguiano, the relationship between traditional parent involvement and high school completion was found to be significant for all ethnicities in the study. In the same study, the relationship between parent advocacy and high school completion was significant for all ethnicities, except Native Americans.

Research Methods

In the original study, a phenomenological research approach was used to understand the perceptions of five students who dropped out of a comprehensive public high school in an urban inner city area of Southwest Virginia. During the 2005-2006 school year, the student body of approximately 1850 students was extremely diverse, racially, socioeconomically, and academically. Two hundred of the students were considered dropouts at some point during the school year; many returned to complete the year. Of these 200 students, 39 satisfied the selection criteria for the purposeful sample used to select the study participants. The students who were chosen for the study were at least 18 years old and had not completed any type of high school equivalency degree. They spoke English as their primary language, were a part of the general education population of a local high school, and were willing to be interviewed for this study.

The shared experiences of the high school dropouts interviewed provided insight into the aspects of social capital that contributed to the decision for the student to leave school. Many of the students who exhibit dropout behaviors with whom I have worked are very transient. As a result, I chose to utilize a method of interviewing which centered on a single lengthy interview known as the depth interview (Miller & Crabtree, 2004). Depth interviews provided a venue for gaining thick, rich descriptions of the lives of dropouts, for the primary focus is on the researcher and the subject gaining a mutual understanding of a topic (Miller & Crabtree). For the purposes of this study, the interview guide was organized around four grand tour prompts:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your high school experience.
3. Please share some stories about how you used the support systems that existed at your high school.
4. Describe the ways you were encouraged to stay in high school.

The first prompt was designed to develop a rapport with the interview subject. The other three prompts were intended to elicit stories that would provide information to answer the research questions. They were written to extract responses based on the main components of social capital found in the literature.

Interviews were not the only means of data collection for the study. Detailed field notes were taken during the interviews. Observations were made about each participant's demeanor and comfort level, physical movements and perceived stress levels, and any other nuances or stumbling blocks presented by the participant. Specific words used in the stories told by the participants about their experiences were highlighted in the field notes. Documentation of the activities taking place to maintain the integrity of the research process was also kept in the field

notes. Interviews and field notes were the primary means of data collection for this study. In addition, archival documents obtained from the school's intervention specialist and school records were collected as data. Data collected included attendance records, grade reports, notes from student support meetings, records of home visits, telephone contacts, discussions with other support agencies, and other information relevant to the students' cases.

An examination of the stories gave the students a voice. As a result of the purpose of this study and the research questions guiding the inquiry, an analytic framework centered on social capital theory provided the backdrop for the interpretation of data. At the completion of each interview, transcripts were typed and labeled with line numbers, page numbers, subject, and date. Field notes were also typed and labeled according to date and subject. Information from archival documents was copied and labeled according to date and subject. In addition, explanations of the archival documents were kept in the field notes.

The primary codes and themes developed during the analysis of the data were based on the literature on social capital and dropouts. Other codes and themes that were found in the data were scrutinized to ascertain how they fit or did not fit into the framework of social capital theory. The three-iteration strategy of code mapping as described by Anfara et al. (2002) was used for the ongoing process of data analysis. I used the experiences described by the participants to relate the essence of the students' experiences with dropping out of high school within the framework of social capital. Each of the themes developed was explained from a social capital perspective. The process of code mapping provided an audit trail of the data analysis process which enhanced the dependability of the study.

It was assumed that students have strong perceptions about the social components that are lacking from their educational progression and that students who have dropped out of school

may have unique insight into this aspect of their scholastic career. Furthermore, it was believed that the discourse on social capital might be enriched by the views of these students. In addition, this study led to the development of an opportunity to analyze opportunities for school counselors to have an impact on the reduction of the dropout problem by utilizing social capital theory. One of the limitations of this study may have been that the population selection may have inadvertently identified a group of students that helped to explain the findings. Because of the method used to obtain participants for the study, it is possible that the students who agreed to be interviewed are different from those who did not agree to be interviewed in terms of their level of social capital. Those students who did not agree to be interviewed may have experienced less social capital and therefore did not have the same sense of obligation to participate.

Dropout Stories

This section provides the context and framework for the study in the form of background information on the students. The interviews and the study from which this article is drawn include more information about each of the participants and the stories they told about their dropout experiences.

Joshua

Joshua was a 19-year-old white male who left school when he was in the eleventh grade. He enjoyed drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. He skipped school often and was troublesome to teachers and administrators because of the general mischief in which he participated regularly. He resented authority figures and did not like to comply with directions. Joshua reported that he dropped out of school for three main reasons: students and teachers annoyed him, waking up in the morning was difficult after staying online late, and two jobs left him little time for homework and adequate sleep. He also acknowledged that it was frustrating

knowing that he would not be able to graduate from high school until he was 20 years old. While he did state that he should have completed school, he seemed to believe that making money while working as a telemarketer and having the ability to purchase things, like a car, were more important to him at that time.

Katie

Katie was a 20-year-old white female suffering from depression who dropped out during her senior year of high school. She was the only child of a single mother who struggled to pay the bills each month. Katie moved four times when she was younger and changed schools many times. When she was in high school, she changed schools three times. Katie often skipped classes and was a heavy drug user. She would go to bed late and did not wake up for school in the morning. Katie stated that a lack of transportation to school other than the bus made it difficult for her to make up the time that she missed due to skipping classes. She did not have access to teachers after school for additional assistance, had difficulty making passing grades, and grew frustrated trying to understand the content she had missed. However, the ultimate reason Katie gave for dropping out of school was her desire to be with her boyfriend. Her mother would not allow her to continue dating an older man who was a heavy drinker with a crack cocaine addiction, so Katie moved out of her mother's house and dropped out of school.

Erika

Erika was an 18-year-old pregnant black female who dropped out of school while she was in the tenth grade. Erika had been living with her grandmother since she was three months old. Her mother was a drug addict who had been in and out of jail throughout her life. The man she believed was her father refused to acknowledge her paternity. Erika stated that the main reason she chose to drop out of school was her longing to understand her needs and desires.

During the school year, she moved to her aunt's house, which was out of the district of the school she attended, so transportation was also an issue for Erika. In addition, Erika was a drug dealer and enjoyed making money quickly. Her lifestyle contributed to her desire to drop out of school. With the complexity of issues surrounding Erika's life, she lost hope of completing school and believed that she would be unable to go back after the birth of her child.

Greg

Greg was an 18-year-old white male who dropped out of school when he was in the eleventh grade. He lived with his alcoholic mother and three siblings. Greg's family had a history of moving from place to place. He recalled moving nine times and changing schools even more. Greg was a high academic achiever until the eighth grade. He moved three times during his ninth grade year and changed schools each time. As a result, he failed the ninth grade. The next year, he stayed up late while working long hours and trying to keep up with his homework. He slept through many classes and started to have an attendance problem. Eventually, his despondence from poor achievement and the lure of money led Greg to drop out of school when he turned 18. He believed he had no other options and lost hope of completing school.

Deshawn

Deshawn was an 18-year-old black male who dropped out of school when he was in the tenth grade. He lived with his mother. Deshawn had seven siblings; most had graduated from high school, except the oldest and the youngest. When his father was incarcerated during the school year, Deshawn felt compelled to drop out of school to help support his family. He tried to continue going to school and working in the evening, but found it difficult because he worked late hours and had to ride the city bus to school. Deshawn would often miss his first classes in the morning because he would arrive late to school or he would sleep through his classes because

he was exhausted from working late hours. Deshawn believed that dropping out of school was his only option, for he did not have the security of a stable residence, money for food and bills, and reliable transportation.

Analysis

The five students in this study described several people at the school who took an interest in their lives, including counselors, teachers, the intervention specialist, administrators, custodians, school resource officers, and security guards. This article focuses on analyzing dropouts' perception of the role the school counselor may play in increasing access to, acquisition of, and utilization of social capital. Israel and Beaulieu (2004) provided a discussion defining school social capital. They stated that a number of factors, including student body composition, school size and available financial resources, and school climate, interact to facilitate the development of interest in the welfare of the students by the members of the faculty and staff. Negative interactions among the factors identified by Israel and Beaulieu may result in a lack of social capital, which can contribute to students exhibiting dropout behaviors.

The ASCA National Model (2003) defines each of the components of a successful school counseling program. The goal of the model is for every student to receive the maximum benefit from the school counseling program. In order to attain this goal, the school counselor must make a personal connection with each student. School counselors are trained to listen to students' voices and assess the information they receive. They also have access to information about support networks that may be needed by students to enable them to be better prepared to become productive citizens. The school social capital established as a result of the relationship between student and counselor can be crucial to the success of the student. For many of the students in this study, the only contact they had with their counselor was to discuss scheduling issues. Greg

stated, “The only time that I talked to him was doing schedules.” Deshawn, Joshua, and Erika made similar statements. In addition, most of the students had multiple counselors while they were in high school. Joshua, Greg, and Deshawn had different counselors each year they were in high school. A lack of consistency in school counselors may have made establishing relationships difficult for the students. Only one of the students believed that she had a close relationship with her counselor. Katie stated, “We was real close. He talked to me about everything. I could go to him and he’d make me feel better.” Katie talked to her counselor about dropping out of school. He told her that he could not make her stay in school, but he said, “I would rather you not to make the wrong choice.” Katie understood that she needed the presence of her school counselor in her life.

Many children need the assistance of an advocate to promote academic success. One of the roles of the school counselor is to “work proactively with students to remove barriers to learning” (ASCA, 2003. p. 24). Poor relationships with teachers can result in a student erecting mental barriers to knowledge acquisition. When students believe their teachers are ineffective, they may develop negative relationships with those teachers. Greg stated, “When you are struggling and you are in a math class where everyone else is struggling and they’re not learning either, it’s a big problem.” When talking about the distractions in a class, Deshawn said, “It’s hard for other people to learn that way, cause they focus on what the other people talking to them about instead of focusing on the teacher.” One of Joshua’s teachers espoused a feminist viewpoint and brought it into the classroom. He felt that it was inappropriate for her to promote her own social agenda in the classroom. Had these students used their voices to communicate these concerns with their counselors, more effective working relationships between the students and the teachers may have been established.

Some students developed positive relationships with teachers who made an effort to create a personal bond with the student. While they may have been gifted in the art of teaching, these teachers often went beyond the normal expectations of a teacher to develop relationships with the students. The teachers had discussions with other members of the school community who had a vested interest in the students, including their counselors. These factors combined to yield a high level of social capital availability for the students. Greg stated, “Every single one of them cared about what I was doing and was worried about it.” One of Greg’s teachers knew about his home situation and offered to let him stay in her home. Deshawn commented that a teacher “actually listened to what we was going through. I told her some things.” Joshua remembered one teacher who cared about him and said, “You know, he would sit down with me for 20 minutes at a time, for one problem, until I completely understood it.” Katie appreciated the personal attention she received from a teacher who “was there for me when if something was like bothering me in class, she would like come up to me before anybody gets in and just talk to me and ask me what’s wrong and I’d tell her and she would make me feel better.” By building upon these established relationships, the counselor could foster a mentoring aspect of the relationship which could increase social capital (White & Wehlage, 1995).

One of the simplest ways for teachers to exhibit interest in students is by contacting parents and establishing relationships. Katie stated that she thought a teacher had called about academic difficulties, but no one else at the school called. Greg thought that his journalism teacher called once, but he was not told about the topic of the conversation. Several of the students commented that teachers called home when they were having discipline problems, but did not call their parents when they were struggling academically in school. Erika said that some of her teachers called her grandmother after she stopped going to school. In addition, students

protested that some teachers did not follow up on commitments made to contact parents. Joshua stated, “They gave me a homework contract deal, which was bogus ... Never happened ... I mean, they’re supposed to keep my parents informed of my progress and they never got a phone call out of them.” One student complained that his teachers never called his parents to tell them when he was doing something well. Since counselors have access to data regarding students’ academic progress and course interest, they are able to collaborate with parents to act as an intermediary when communication between the teachers and parents seems to be inadequate. This bridge would help increase social capital for the students and provide a model for utilizing potential or existing social capital.

Parent participation in school activities can enhance a child’s likelihood of completing school (Anguiano, 2004). Unfortunately, none of the students’ parents volunteered their time at the high school or were members of the Parent-Teacher-Student Association. Several of the students said that their parents might have volunteered their time once or twice in elementary school. Deshawn’s mother had been to see him play football when he played in the sandlot league, but had not seen him play since that time. Joshua’s mother went to his band concerts in middle school. Sometimes Erika’s grandparents would accompany her to a sports event at the high school. According to the students, their parents did not seem to have time to take the opportunity to participate in the lives of their children at the high school. They did not attend back-to-school nights or parent-teacher conferences. Dialog between the school counselor and the parents may have provided ideas for ways in which the parents could have taken advantage of available time to participate in the school community that may not be readily advertised. Counselors can contact parents to provide them with knowledge of their students’ progress and ways to enhance their school experience.

Another school-based individual mentioned by many of the students was the intervention specialist who was responsible for tracking students who have attendance problems and trying to get them back into school on a regular basis. In order to facilitate a student's return to school, the intervention specialist works with the students and their school counselors to develop plans for academic and social support needed to assist the students in an effort to stay in school. Each of the students or the parents of the students involved in this study were contacted several times by the school's intervention specialist according to her records, except for Greg. However, Greg's mother had been contacted about his brother's attendance. Two students in the study had many contacts with the intervention specialist. Deshawn recalled talking to the intervention specialist a few times at school. In addition, she contacted his mother many times. Deshawn's mother told him about each conversation she had with the intervention specialist. Deshawn appreciated the efforts of the intervention specialist and stated, "I mean, she's trying to stay on me. She's not giving up on me. That's for real. She's not giving up." Deshawn did not share his family problems with the intervention specialist. As a result, the intervention specialist was unable to talk to him about community support available to assist him in his efforts to stay in school and provide for his family. The intervention specialist took on a counseling role with Erika. Erika and the intervention specialist talked many times about returning to school or earning a GED. According to Erika, "She kept pushing me and pushing me to come back to school. She would call ... and ask me how I was doing, when I was going to come, and if I wanted to come back." The intervention specialist also connected her with her school counselor and made an appointment for her at the school clinic for a pregnancy test. Like Deshawn, Erika appreciated the efforts of the intervention specialist and believed that she had tried to assist her in returning to school.

Participation in extracurricular activities enhances ties to the school, thereby increasing school social capital. The ASCA National Standards indicate that development of the ability to balance extracurricular and academic activities is important to the growth of the child, as is acquiring a broad range of interests and abilities (ASCA, 2003). Each of the students in this study had multiple opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, but chose to limit themselves. Greg was the editor of the school newspaper at the time he dropped out of school. He enjoyed using his writing skills in a positive way. Deshawn played football in middle school and basketball for one year in high school, but did not continue to participate in subsequent years. He also played in the band in middle school. Joshua was in the band and the chess club in middle school. He wanted to be on the Youth Court in high school, but transportation issues hindered his participation. Katie and Erika did not participate in extracurricular activities. Counselors can use their knowledge of students to encourage them to take part in activities that will suit their personalities and skill sets and to advocate for continuation of involvement in a variety of activities.

Some of the students took advantage of other support networks available at the school. Erika utilized the services of the nurse in the school clinic to learn about her pregnancy. Deshawn was a member of a support group led by a school counselor and a teacher that focused on increasing the social intelligence of certain young men in the school community. Joshua noted that he often talked to the security guards and the custodial workers at the school. Katie was able to attend a local charter school for a while. She enjoyed going to the school, “Cause they had the higher learning and it was for people that always got in trouble at their home school and they gave people the chance to see that they are smart.”

All of the students stated that there was nothing any member of the school faculty could

have done to keep them in school. Greg stated, “Everyone was always there to talk to. It was just a matter of doing it. Putting aside my pride and just talking to someone. Saying hey, I am having problems. I just basically didn’t.” Erika blamed herself. When asked if there was anything that prohibited her from utilizing the supports that existed at the high school, she said, “Me, just me, and me following behind the other people.” The students felt support from the faculty of the school. There just did not actualize the support from the relationships that were available.

Conclusions

The students interviewed for this study had access to social capital in many areas of their lives. Nevertheless, it seems that in the cases of these students, school social capital was readily available, but they did not utilize it. To maximize the benefits received, students must understand how to use social capital available to them. School personnel have limited control over the amount of school social capital students may utilize. By increasing available school social capital, students should exhibit decreased dropout tendencies (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004). Increasing community and family social capital has also been shown to increase student achievement (Israel & Beaulieu). Students who have access to social capital but do not use it as a means to stay in school are an important part of the overall population that must be studied further. Determining how to improve student utilization of social capital may contribute to increased graduation rates in the future.

School counselors are in a unique position in that they may help promote the development of social capital for students, for they are, “specially trained educators in a position to call attention to situations within the schools that defeat, frustrate and hinder students’ academic success” (ASCA, 2003, p. 15). A firm belief of all high school counseling programs should be that all students have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma. This belief should

be incorporated into the mission statement of the counseling program. In order to fulfill the mission, it should be helpful for school counselors to understand how they can contribute to the development of social capital for their students. Furthermore, school counselors who deal with students who are at risk of dropping out of school should work with students to teach them to advocate for themselves and work with students and their parents to help develop skills needed to locate and develop relationships within the community that will promote positive behaviors and encourage the students to stay in school (Green & McCollum, 2004).

To deliver an effective program, school counselors must develop relationships with their students so that they can gain awareness of the issues students are facing, knowledge about those issues, and a means to advocate for the students to deal with the issues in a proactive manner. Students who may be at risk of dropping out of school have unique needs that go beyond the development of surface relationships. The students in this study needed to have discussions with their counselors to develop relationships with adults who could guide them to graduation, but they remembered few occasions for counseling opportunities other than to schedule classes. Information from the interviews indicated that the students did not understand how to establish relationships that were not dysfunctional and to identify those that were. A relationship development component of the K-12 counseling curriculum may assist students in gaining the social capital necessary to help them in their endeavors to earn high school diplomas. Within such a curriculum, students would learn to seek out persons with whom they could establish positive relationships and how to dissolve relationships with individuals who would not help them lead productive lives. They would also learn how to establish goals for the future, including time management skills and skills for self-advocacy, and how to use the supports, relationships, and resources available to them.

Green and McCollum (2004) promote the use of advocacy counseling to empower students to increase their sense of belongingness. This concept is directly aligned with increasing students' ability to use available social capital. The traditional role of the *guidance counselor* is outdated and too narrow in today's world. While Katie's counselor's response, "I would rather you not to make the wrong choice," is respectful in a politically correct world, it may not be a response that would empower students to work within the system to make positive changes in their lives. As stated by Howard and Solberg (2006), "School counselors must find ways to understand failure through accurate assessment and diagnosis of challenges facing these youths" (p. 280). Effective school counselors must advocate for the success of all students and be aware of the needs of students who exhibit dropout tendencies.

In order to help students increase the level of community social capital in their lives, school counselors can become active participants in community organizations. Participation in such organizations can increase interaction with students on their caseload who are from a variety of different backgrounds, thus increasing cultural awareness and developing a sense of trust within the community. In addition, counselors should make an effort to develop relationships with key community leaders, such as members of the clergy, business leaders, and neighborhood group leaders. By establishing relationships with community leaders, counselors are able to more effectively utilize available resources in their school programs.

Relationships with mentors in their communities enable students to increase social capital (White & Wehlage, 1995). None of the students in this study had true mentors who were able to guide them and provide insight into possibilities for the future. One setback encountered by some students is that they have not established long-range goals or have goals that are unrealistic. In this study, students had difficulty answering questions about their goals. Many of the

competencies in the *ASCA National Model* are specifically designed to help students develop goals and strategies to meet those goals. For example, most high school counselors provide career-counseling opportunities for the students. The students in this study did not take advantage of those opportunities. Some were obsessed with unrealistic ideas of future careers, such as modeling and singing. By receiving the services of a mentor as a component of the counseling program, students would likely develop more realistic goals and be able to explore career possibilities in a setting outside of school. In addition, the school counselor may help students by providing information about successful people who advocate for the value of a high school diploma and are idolized by young people, such as Dead Prez and the Outlawz, who recently released an album entitled *Can't Sell Dope Forever*; James Brown, who sang *Don't Be a Dropout*; Lance Armstrong, and Michael Jordan.

The Family-School Collaborative Consultation Project, as described by Amatea et al. (2004) focuses on promoting close working relationships between families of students and school personnel. Those close working relationships should increase the level of social capital for students. Counselors can be proactive in creating relationships with families by contacting parents or guardians of students who may be identified as being at risk of dropping out prior to the beginning of the school year. In addition to developing the relationships, the students in this study seemed to desire systematic contact with their parents or guardians at strategic points throughout the year to work together to enhance their child's school experience and increase school social capital. Designating certain days throughout the month when the counselor would be available during the evening to accommodate schedules of parents who are unable to take time off from work during normal school hours would show a desire for the counselor to develop relationships with parents who would otherwise be unable to meet with them.

Another way to establish social capital for students may be to hold group meetings for parents of at-risk students and inviting parenting experts to the meetings to talk with the parents. These meetings may give parents a sense of community and provoke continuing dialog that will increase community and family social capital. Some parents may be reluctant to come to the school for such meetings because of the negative experiences they or their children may have perceived to be a direct result of attending the school. None of the parents of students in this study came to the school to talk to teachers, counselors, or other members of the school community who had the ability to assist the family in enabling the student. In order to provide a safe and welcoming environment for those parents, it may be prudent to hold meetings in local community centers, libraries, or churches.

In an age of accountability, school counselors are going to be called upon increasingly to provide more services that will enable the schools to meet state and federal guidelines for accreditation. Increasing school social capital is a way to advocate for students and increase student achievement. By developing aspects of the school counseling program that will assist relationship development with community members, families, and students, counselors have the opportunity to meet a need for increased access to and acquisition of social capital within the school community, thereby increasing student achievement. School counselors are charged with the duty to remove barriers to learning (ASCA, 2003). Developing social capital is a way to remove barriers for students and to build bridges that bring school personnel, community members, and families together to keep youths in school.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to record and analyze students' experiences with dropping out of high school within a social capital framework. Utilizing qualitative methods, the stories of students who dropped out of school were analyzed. This chapter will discuss overall conclusions of the study. In addition, implications for future studies will be provided. Finally, thoughts on writing articles for journal publication will be presented.

Conclusions from Data Analysis

The overarching theme found throughout each of the stories was that a lack of family and community social capital in the form of a deficiency in relationships with members of families or communities with the capacity to assist students in their endeavors to complete school may have contributed to dropout behaviors exhibited by students in this study. In addition, access to school social capital did not necessarily enhance the students' potential to complete school. Developing social capital is a way to remove barriers for students and to build bridges that bring school personnel, community members, and families together to keep youth in school. Social capital levels that would enhance potential to complete school were not developed by the students who participated in this study.

Social networks among parents, educators, and community members are crucial to the success of each child. School social capital, family social capital, and community social capital develop as a result of participation in social networks. As demonstrated by the participants in this study, social capital may be a readily available resource, but they may be unable to attain it. The students in this study acknowledged that a relatively large pool of school social capital was available to them. At one time in their lives, they seemed to have a supply of community social

capital, but due to circumstances in their lives, it eventually dwindled. Levels of family social capital seemed to be smaller than other types of social capital available to the students. When one aspect of social capital is lacking in the life of a student, school completion may be difficult.

Conclusion 1

Each of the students in this study had access to a high level of school social capital in the form of student-adult interactions at the high school. However, most did not establish relationships with any adults in the school community, including their school counselors or other people in the school who would be able to guide them toward graduation and provide them with increased levels of school social capital. The students in this study seemed to desire systematic contact by school personnel with their parents or guardians at strategic points throughout the year to work together to enhance school experiences and increase school social capital. The students remembered few occasions for counseling opportunities for reasons other than to schedule classes. In addition, school social capital was not established through interactions between the participants' parents and adult members of the school community.

Conclusion 2

The development of positive family social capital was difficult for the students in this study. These students had very little family social capital available to them, but most stated that they thought they had good relationships with their families. Factors which have been related to an increase in family social capital, such as clearly defined rules and structure in the household, living with both birth parents, and meaningful conversations with parents, were not included in the stories related by the participants in this study. Parents expected the students to complete high school, but many had siblings and parents who had dropped out of school and did not demonstrate the values they expected the students to uphold. The level of education of the

students' parents varied, but any increase in social capital levels that may have resulted from parental education appeared to be negligible. The students moved frequently, changing residences and schools many times, which may have led to a decrease, not only in family social capital, but also in school and community social capital. While some of the students stated that their parents knew their friends, which would increase social capital, most of the participants' closest friends reportedly engaged in deviant activities with them or encouraged deviant behaviors, such as drug use and skipping school.

Conclusion 3

None of the students in this study had mentors in their communities who had the capacity to help them be more successful. The students who were employed felt the immediate pleasure of being able to purchase items they desired and succumbed to the power of money. As a result of working long hours, sleeping late, and not attending school or being able to be attentive in school, they saw their jobs as an alternative to school. In addition, the lure of quick money, from drug dealing or other means, led the students to associate with people who did not readily encourage the students to stay in school. Some of the students had the support of members of their churches when they were younger, but lack of participation in church activities as they matured did not add to the levels of social capital they possessed. The students did not appear to take advantage of opportunities to develop community social capital.

Conclusion 4

Students in this study clearly indicated a desire for nurturing relationships with school personnel, family members, and community mentors. They longed to be in caring relationships with others and to be encouraged by others to complete school. They also seemed to have an innate understanding that those relationships would augment the skills they needed to become

productive members of society. Development of positive relationships was not a skill that came naturally for all students. Unfortunately, the students in this study who dropped out of school exhibited an inability to draw upon an available reservoir of school social capital which may have helped overcome inadequate levels of family and community social capital. While there is no proof that increased levels of family or community social capital would have assisted these students in completing school, perhaps increased awareness of how to draw upon the levels of social capital that do exist would provide students with a greater likelihood of graduation.

Implications for Future Study

School personnel are being held accountable for increasing graduation rates. While they are unable to control access to family and community social capital available to students, they can assist students by teaching them how to identify dysfunctional relationships and how to utilize social capital that is available to them through building positive relationships and seeking mentors. Further research into the development of successful intervention programs to provide support for social capital attainment throughout a child's school career may be a proactive way to work with students who exhibit tendencies to drop out of school.

One setback encountered by the students was that they had not established long-range goals or had goals that were unrealistic. In this study, the students had difficulty answering questions about their goals and seemed to be unable to imagine prospects beyond the immediate future. A longitudinal study to establish a relationship between goal establishment and school completion would provide some support to the assertion that students need to establish goals for the future, including time management skills and skills for self-advocacy.

There was an apparent lack of family social capital available to the students in this study. Quantitative studies have clearly identified components of social capital related to the family that

are indicators of future dropout behavior. No studies were found that analyzed the parental viewpoint on the development of family social capital. A qualitative study of the parents of dropouts and the stories they tell about their children may add to the literature. Understanding how aspects of social capital appear in the stories that parents tell could provide information about how family social capital development breaks down in the lives of dropouts.

Thoughts about Article Publication

As I started writing the results of this study in the form of journal articles, it quickly became clear that it would not be a simple undertaking. After several iterations of analyzing data, I was able to write narratives of the students' stories. From the themes established in each of the stories, I developed themes across the cases. Once my analysis was complete, I did another literature search to determine the availability of recent articles on dropouts and social capital to add to the literature reviews for each manuscript.

I obtained several issues of each journal, *Sociology of Education* and *Professional School Counseling*, so that I could understand the voice required for publication. I also found and read multiple articles written about qualitative studies to see how they were presented in each journal. After reading several issues of each journal, I obtained copies of the guidelines for authors. Writing an article for publication in *Sociology of Education* required me to adhere to guidelines that were established by the American Sociological Association. I had to read the publication guidelines multiple times prior to writing the manuscript to ensure that I did not commit style errors which may have resulted in rejection. *Professional School Counseling* required authors to follow APA publication guidelines.

Multiple revisions of each article were necessary to develop sound manuscripts that would add to the body of literature currently available on dropouts and social capital. It would

have been easy to get discouraged by the number of comments provided by those who read the articles, but I found that each person bestowed a new level of insight. Each reader offered suggestions for improvement that enhanced the articles and presented conclusions for consideration that supplied further depth to the articles.

Finally, I had to read and reread each article multiple times to evaluate it as a whole. Each time I read an article, I found words that needed to be changed and phrases that seemed misplaced. I eventually reached a point that I was satisfied and ready to send the articles to the editors for consideration for publication. I am hopeful that they will be published, but I feel the knowledge gained about the process of writing a manuscript for publication was the most valuable part of this undertaking.

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Appendix A

Telephone Script to Request Study Participation

Hello (Student's name). My name is Julie Drewry. I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech and the Assistant to the Principal at Patrick Henry High School. I need your help. I am currently working on a study in which I am telling the stories of students who have dropped out of high school. I am hoping that you will allow me to include your story.

I am trying to learn why so many students leave school before they graduate. Your story may help others who are in a similar situation. It may also help school personnel design programs to meet the needs of students who are in a similar situation. Your story is very important to me and it could be to a lot of other people.

Before I continue, do you think you might be willing to participate? (If the student says no, I will thank him or her for her time. I will also ask if he or she knows anyone who might be willing to participate. If the student says yes, I will continue with the remainder of the script.)

Thank you for being willing to participate. But before you agree completely, would you like to know a little more about the study?

I will set up a time with you when you are available to be interviewed for about 90 minutes. We will agree on a time and place for the interview. I would suggest the guidance conference room in the new school building. If you are not comfortable meeting there, then we can find some other place. If you need transportation, I would be glad to pick you up and take you to the interview site. Once we get to the site, I will ask you to sign an informed consent form which explains the study. Then, I will ask you to tell me your story. I will ask you to tell me about yourself and your high school experience. Then, I will ask you to share some stories about how you used the support systems that existed at your high school. Finally, I will ask you to

describe the ways you were encouraged to stay in high school.

Everything you say will be completely confidential. You will not be identified in the study in any way. If at any time you are uncomfortable with the questions or the situation, you may stop the interview. After I have completed typing up the interview, I will allow you to read it so that I do not make any mistakes with your words.

Do you have any questions?

Would you be willing to participate?

Is there any particular day or time that would be best for you for the interview?

Are you comfortable with coming to the school for the interview or is there some other place you would prefer?

Do you need transportation?

Thank you so much! I truly appreciate your participation!

Appendix B

*Informed Consent Form***VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY****Informed Consent for Participants
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

Title of Project: High School Dropout Experiences: A Social Capital Perspective

Investigator(s): Julie A. Drewry and Penny L. Burge

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this research is to write down and examine students' experiences with dropping out of high school. The type and amount of social capital a student had in school will be gauged. *Social capital* is like a bank account of money, but the money in this case is the feeling that you owe someone because they have done something for you and the trust that builds up between you. This research will be used to complete my dissertation.

Five students who have dropped out of school will be interviewed. These students will be at least 18 years old, speak English as a first language, and not have been involved in a special education program.

II. Procedures

You will be interviewed for about 90 minutes about your experiences in school. The interview will be recorded and notes will be made about the interview. You will only be asked to sit for one interview. The interview will take place at the high school or at another site of your choice. Transportation will be provided to and from the interview site, if necessary.

You are asked to be open and honest about your experiences in school. The following guiding questions will be asked of you:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your high school experience.
3. Please share some stories about how you used the support systems that existed at your high school.
4. Describe the ways you were encouraged to stay in high school.

After the interview, the researcher will type a transcript of the interview. At least three attempts will be made to contact you. You will be invited to read the transcript and make comments. A time and place to read the transcript will be selected. You may read the transcript in the presence of the researcher. If necessary, the researcher will read the transcript to you.

III. Risks

There are minimal risks associated with this study. You may suffer some emotional distress by having to remember an unpleasant circumstance. You are allowed to state that you do not wish to answer a question that is asked of you at any time.

III. Benefits

At the end of the interview, you will be told about local GED programs available to you so that you may pursue alternatives to dropping out of school.

Society will benefit from hearing your story for it may lead to the development of programs designed to better meet the needs of students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

No promises or guarantees of benefits have been made to encourage you to participate.

You may contact the researcher at a later time for a summary of the research results.

IV. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to hide your identity in any written work resulting from this study. False names will be used to identify you in any written materials. The researcher will try to minimize the possibility of identifying other people you may mention. Fake names will be used in any printed materials. Furthermore, no mention of the actual name of the school will be made.

Within the transcripts, you will be identified by a number.

Any mention you may make of previous use of illegal substances, such as illegal drugs or alcohol, will not be reported to the authorities. This information may be used as data for this study.

CDs made from the digital recordings of the interview will be stored in a locked file box at the researcher's home. The researcher is the only individual who will have access to the recordings. Copies of the transcripts may be viewed by the researcher or other members of her dissertation committee.

It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

All data will be destroyed after the dissertation defense, publication of any articles resulting from the study, or presentations made related to the study.

If child abuse is known or strongly suspected, I am required to notify the appropriate authorities and must then break my promise of confidentiality..

If you are believed to be a threat to yourself or others, I am required to notify the appropriate authorities and must then break my promise of confidentiality.

VI. Compensation

There will be no money given to you for participating in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free stop participating in this study at any time. You may feel free to not answer any questions. If there are circumstances which arise and it is determined that you should not continue as a subject, the interview will end.

VIII. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- I agree to answer questions honestly. Initial _____
- I agree to allow the researcher to record the interview on tape. Initial _____
- I agree to allow the researcher to see my school records. Initial _____
- I agree to allow the researcher to use a non-identifying direct quote. Initial _____

X. Subject's Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Subject signature _____ Date _____

Julie A. Drewry
Investigator

540-776-3478/jdrewry@vt.edu
Telephone/e-mail

Penny L. Burge
Faculty Advisor

540-231-9730/burge@vt.edu
Telephone/e-mail

M. David Alexander
Department Head

540-231-9723/mdavid@vt.edu
Telephone/e-mail

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

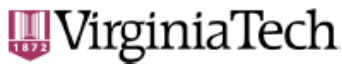
David M. Moore
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review
Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research Compliance
1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006 (0497)

540-231-4991/moored@vt.edu
Telephone/e-mail

[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]

Appendix C

IRB Approval Form



Office of Research Compliance
 Institutional Review Board
 1880 Pratt Drive (0497)
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
 540/231-4991 Fax: 540/231-0959
 E-mail: moored@vt.edu
 www.irb.vt.edu

FWA00000572(expires 7/20/07)
 IRB # 16 IRB00000667.

DATE: May 15, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Penny L. Burge
 Julie Drewry

FROM: David M. Moore 

Approval date: 5/15/2006
 Continuing Review Due Date: 4/30/2007
 Expiration Date: 5/14/2007

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "High School Dropout Experiences: A Social Capital Perspective", IRB # 06-298

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective May 15, 2006.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Important:

If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, this approval letter must state that the IRB has compared the OSP grant application and IRB application and found the documents to be consistent. Otherwise, this approval letter is invalid for OSP to release funds. Visit our website at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/newstudy.htm#OSP> for further information.

cc: File

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Appendix D

Vita

Julie Anne Drewry was born in Roanoke, Virginia. She graduated from The College of William and Mary in 1992 with a bachelor of science degree with a major in Mathematics and a minor in Religion. She completed 24 hours toward a Master of Science in Mathematics in 1993 at North Carolina State University. In 2001, she received a Master of Education in Education Administration and Supervision. She was awarded the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 2007.

Ms. Drewry taught mathematics for eleven years at the Roanoke Valley Governor's School for Science and Technology in Roanoke, Virginia. While there, she earned National Board Certification in Adolescent and Young Adult Mathematics. During the last three years, Ms. Drewry has been the Assistant to the Principal at a high school in Southwest Virginia.

Ms. Drewry resides with her husband and dog in Roanoke, Virginia. She serves her community as a board member of Youth Support Services. She also serves on the board of the Presbyterian Community Center. In addition, she volunteers her time as a Field Supervisor for the Society of St. Andrew.