Sustaining Trajectories: Black Males Persisting in Undergraduate Social Work Education

Lamont D. Simmons

Abstract: *While the literature is replete with studies on persistence among students across academic majors, few studies examine the nature of persistence among Black males enrolled in baccalaureate social work programs. This qualitative study offers some insight into how a sample of four Black male graduates from an accredited baccalaureate social work program persisted toward degree attainment. Three themes emerged from this study: (a) family encouragement and support, (b) sense of belonging, and (c) presence of Black male professors. Findings suggest the need for social work educators to consider programmatic initiatives acknowledging the role of families in persistence efforts, facilitating connectedness, and recruiting Black male professors or other Black male mentors.*

Keywords: Black males; persistence; qualitative research; social work education; undergraduate

The academic literature loosely defines persistence as a student's motivation to earn a degree at any institution and the considerable efforts they expend to do so (Tinto, 2017). In recent years, much has been written about Black male persistence in higher education (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2012; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Wood, 2014). The concern with high dropout and underachievement has given rise to studies examining the challenges that Black males face in higher education, together with differential factors that enable these students to persist and achieve academic success (Brooms, 2019). Even with studies centering on Black male persistence across a range of academic contexts, little attention has been given to persistence among Black males specifically enrolled in baccalaureate social work programs (Beadlescomb, 2019; Bowie, Cherry, & Wooding, 2005; Giesler, 2013). A few studies have focused on recruiting students of color in social work programs (Bowie, Nashwan, Thomas, Davis-Buckley, & Johnson, 2018; Raber, Tebb, & Berg-Weger, 1998; Rogers, 2013; Wilson, 1999), career choices of Black MSW students (Bowie et al., 2005), and student success in doctoral social work education (Johnson-Motoyama, Petr, & Mitchell, 2014). Though these studies enrich understanding of student experiences in social work education, they largely ignore a population of students whose experiences are unfamiliar to social work researchers and educators. For this reason, studies are needed to document the experiences of Black males in social work education.

Holsey-Hyman's (2015) dissertation study focused on understanding persistence among Black students in a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program at a historically Black college. The study assessed students' perceptions of background and environmental factors that influenced their persistence. The findings showed that non-academic factors (e.g., age, gender, race, family support, financial factors, etc.), a positive learning environment, and supportive social work faculty were central to their wherewithal to persist in completing

_____

Lamont D. Simmons, EdD, MSW, Assistant Professor, Salem State University School of Social Work, Salem, MA 01970, lsimmons@salemstate.edu

the degree. Though the study produced thematic findings relevant to Black BSW students altogether, the findings were not disaggregated by gender as only two Black males were interviewed for Holsey-Hyman's (2015) study.

The current state of Black male persistence in baccalaureate social work programs is largely unknown (Bowie et al., 2018). However, we know from recent data that 64% of Black males fail to persist across academic programs over 6 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Given this percentage, it is possible that Black males enrolled in baccalaureate social work programs fail to persist at high rates and also experience high levels of underachievement. Studies are needed to help social work educators better facilitate Black male persistence by equipping them with resources and strategies to bridge the persistence and achievement gaps. Social work educators who invest in practices that improve Black male persistence are helping to ensure the availability of skilled Black male professionals. This is important given the growing number of clients of color requiring social services (Bowie et al., 2005), along with the capacity of Black male professionals to understand and be sensitive to the unique experiences of these clients (Beadlescomb, 2019). More so, their presence in the field supports the profession's adherence to promoting equity and diversity.

The purpose of the present study was to explore persistence through the lens of Black male graduates from an accredited baccalaureate social work program. For this study, persistence was defined operationally as a student's wherewithal to remain in their BSW program until degree attainment (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, 2012; Hagedorn, 2012). The primary research question addressed was: "How were Black males influenced to persist in a Bachelor of Social Work program?" The study aimed to expand the visibility of Black males in the social work literature and encourage future scholarship aimed at understanding their lived experiences in social work education and practice.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Model of Black Student Attrition

Bennett and Bean's (1984) conceptual model of black student attrition forms the basis of the literature review and explains persistence as it relates to Black students enrolled at historically White institutions (HWIs). The model includes hypothesized relationships between several predictor variables (e.g., test scores, parental education, pre-college performance, and preparedness) in relation to the variable "intent to persist." Also included are predictor variables the researchers deemed as appropriate to Black undergraduate students, including developmental stages of ethnic identity (extent of openness to human diversity and ethnic difference), interracial contact, satisfaction and transitional trauma experiences (alienation students experience when confronted with unfamiliar norms in college). Applying regression analysis to explain Black male persistence, Bennett and Bean (1984) found that satisfaction, less trauma, and preparedness were positive influences on their persistence. While these findings advanced understanding of Black male persistence, the variable "positive interracial contact" mediates "satisfaction:" which is significant in "intent to persist." Of itself, this supports the need for HWIs to develop campus-based programs that encourage interracial peer contacts.

Background Factors

Scholars have linked student persistence to background factors such as race, gender, parental education, family income, and age (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Choy, 2002; Tinto, 1993). Achievement disparities across race and gender indicate that Black males are least likely to persist in college (Harper, 2012). Continuing-generation students, usually defined as students having at least one parent with a four-year degree (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, & Covarrubias, 2012), are more likely to persist than first-generation students. The notion here is that parents with an earned bachelor's degree possess academic capital that can be socially reproduced (Brown & Davis, 2001). Hence, knowledge from higher education experiences means that parents can impart to their offspring what it takes to persist and succeed in college (Allen, 2010; Strand, 2013; Strayhorn, 2006). A few studies confirm the relationship between economic capital and persistence. Low-income students who are disproportionately older and categorized as racial minorities are less likely to persist compared to their higher-income peers (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Reason, 2003). Often, work and family commitments preclude these students from engaging fully in their studies, thus decreasing the likelihood of persisting (Kezar, Walpole, & Perna, 2015).

College Readiness and Persistence

Cognitive measures like high school grade point average, standardized test scores (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Choy, 2002; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004), and advanced placement courses (Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009) have been linked to college readiness and persistence. Strong performance on standardized tests (e.g., ACT, SAT) has been associated with cognitive development and academic gains for Black males (Strayhorn, 2010). Advanced placement courses have been linked to readiness, and in shaping student efficacies to persist in college (Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009; Schwartz & Washington, 2002; Strayhorn, 2008b). Menson, Patelis, and Doyle (2009) noted that Black males who participate in advanced placement courses build positive study habits, research skills, and higher-level thinking. Notwithstanding existing research showing the predictive power of cognitive measures on college readiness and persistence, mounting research suggests that for Black males, the integration of cognitive, psychosocial (e.g., motivation, social interaction, self-efficacy, and esteem), and institutional factors (e.g., racial climate, peer and faculty support) contributes to their persistence (Bush & Bush, 2010).

Academic and Social Integration

Persistence has been linked to the extent to which students integrate with the academic and social structures of their higher education learning environments (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Seidman, 2005). Rooted in sociological models of student departure, academic and social integration are the means by which students "interact with a range of people and situations on campus … [and how] they derive meaning from those interactions" (Tinto, 2005, p. 319). Academic integration is manifested when students feel connected to their academic learning environment (Xu & Webber, 2018). Students can integrate themselves into their learning environment in many ways, such as attending classes, forming healthy

relationships with faculty, and accessing departmental resources (e.g., academic advising, tutors, writing support, scholarships) that facilitate academic persistence and achievement (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). Social integration considers how students engage in meaningful interactions with a range of people (e.g., professional staff and peers) on campus and the extent of involvement in campus-based activities (Xu & Webber, 2018). For Black males, early and continued engagement in the fabric of campus life is seen as significant to persistence and degree attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Sense of Belonging

The notion of sense of belonging is well-documented in the higher education literature and is directly associated with persistence and educational outcomes (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rhee, 2008). According to Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods (2009), sense of belonging is the "psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community" (p. 650). For Black males, high levels of engagement with students across campus contribute to their sense of belonging. In studying the relationship between peer interactions and a sense of belonging at HWIs, Strayhorn (2008a) found that Black males who "interacted with diverse peers reported higher levels of sense of belonging than those who did not interact with diverse others" (p. 513). This finding reified the power of cross-cultural interactions on satisfaction, self-concept, and belonging and their impact on Black male persistence. Somewhat different, Brooms (2019) found that peer interactions between Black males in male-centered campus-based programs were central to Black males cultivating a sense of belonging. These cultural communities serve as safe venues for Black males to bond, build cultural connections, experience empowerment, and develop a sense of self and identity. The findings from both studies confirm that when Black males interact with different and same-race peers, they experience greater satisfaction and less alienation (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Bennett & Bean, 1984; Leppel, 2002), and acquire the social and cultural capital needed to persist and succeed in college (Strayhorn, 2008a).

Meaningful Relationships with Black Faculty

Little research examines Black male student-faculty relationships in social work education, especially with regards to how these relationships influence persistence. Existing research underscores the importance of these relationships on Black male persistence (Umbach, 2006). Brooms and Davis (2017) noted that "strong bonds developed in student-faculty relationships can be significant in students' satisfaction, retention, and persistence" (p. 321). Similarly, Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2011) suggest that student-faculty relationships are linked to "increases in motivation, career aspirations, and persistence" (p. 339). While Black male social work students can benefit from meaningful relationships with Black social work professors, these relationships are less probable, given that only 16% of full and part-time faculty in U.S. accredited social work programs are Black (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2016). For accredited programs lacking ample representation of full-time Black faculty, a purposeful (re)assessment of their implicit curriculum could warrant practices that aggressively recruit and retain these faculty (Peterson, Farmer, & Zippay, 2014).

Persistence in the Current Study

While the extant literature is replete with information on persistence, there are noticeable gaps in the literature as it relates to persistence among Black males enrolled in baccalaureate social work programs. The lack of research inhibits social work administrators and educators from gleaning information and converting findings into practices that positively promote student persistence (Giesler, 2013). Further complicating the study of persistence is the scarcity of Black male social work majors, which translates into fewer opportunities for researchers to collect data on a range of issues impacting their persistence. The present study adds to the literature about how Black males persist in social work education and offers suggestions on how administrators and educators can strengthen their trajectories toward degree attainment.

Methods

This qualitative research study employed in-depth interviews and a strategy of prolonged engagement (Padgett, 2008) to understand how Black males were influenced to persist in an accredited undergraduate social work program. The study's constructivist epistemology facilitated the researcher's understanding of how Black male participants made sense of their persistence in social work education (Crotty, 1998).

Sampling

The study involved participants from a large, public research university in the Southern part of the United States. Institutional data show that the university enrolled 21,301 students, including 17,176 undergraduate students in fall 2016. Black males comprised 36.6% of undergraduate students.

Purposive sampling was used to select the study participants. This technique involves purposefully selecting willing individuals with knowledge of some experience or phenomenon (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Patton, 2015). Participants were selected from a sampling frame, which consisted of nine alumni who earned a bachelor's degree in social work between 2009 and 2016. The time frame helped to increase the number of Black males who could be asked to participate in the study. This was an important consideration given significant gender, racial, and ethnic imbalances across social work programs where Black males are proportionally underrepresented (Warde, 2009). Initial emails were sent to recruit potential study participants, and four confirmed their interest in participating in the study. Another email providing a full explanation of the study's purpose and procedures was sent to those who agreed to participate in the study. Participants signed consent forms confirming their participation in the study. Pseudonyms of Aaron, Barry, Carl, and Damien were used to protect the participants' personal identities.

The age range of the participants was 22 to 45. One participant identified as a veteran. Two participants identified as first-generation college students, indicating that neither of their parents earned a four-year degree. All participants were professionals in the field of social work after earning their bachelor's degree, and one participant was working toward a master's degree. The university's institutional review board (IRB) reviewed and approved the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each participant was involved in one semi-structured, face-to-face interview. Interviews occurred in September and October of 2016 and lasted between 60-90 minutes. An interview guide (see Appendix A) consisting of nine open-ended questions aided in eliciting factors that contributed to their persistence. The guide included questions about participants' preparation for college, involvement in campus-based activities, relationships with faculty and peers, and other factors that enabled their persistence. Interviews were digitally recorded with participant permission and transcribed verbatim shortly afterward for analysis.

A general inductive approach was used to analyze the interview data and identify themes relevant to this study. More efficient than structured design methodologies (e.g., case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative inquiry, etc.), this approach enables "research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). Apart from limitations, this approach can produce rich insights and lead to additional research that could generate more conclusive findings especially in situations where low population prevalence is a challenge (Singh, 2007). In this study, data analysis began with open coding, which allows researchers to examine distinct concepts from the data and break them into manageable categories (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). Open coding involved carefully reading the interview transcripts and examining the hand-written comments recorded in the margins of each transcript. Comments from transcripts appearing to reflect some recurring patterns were grouped and used to construct themes, which were then presented as the study's findings.

Credibility and Optimization of Rigor

Padgett (2008) discusses various techniques designed to optimize rigor in qualitative social work research, including the use of member checks. Member checks aided in establishing the present study's credibility. Qualitative researchers use this technique to validate their interpretations of the data to avoid misconstruing the way participants make meaning of their experiences (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, the participants had a chance to correct errors or address what they perceived as erroneous interpretations of their narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They were emailed a scanned, marked-up copy of their printed interview transcript and asked to provide preliminary feedback on comments and interpretations of the data. Maxwell (2013) said that such feedback is the "single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (pp. 126-127). Participants had an opportunity to review the comments on their transcripts and each felt that the notes and identified themes adequately captured their experiences, supporting the rigor of the data collection and data analysis process.

Thematic Findings

Thematic findings were produced in relation to the participants' responses to the interview questions (see Appendix A). Three major themes emerged from the interview data: (a) Family Encouragement and Support, (b) Sense of Belonging, and (c) Presence of

Black Male Professors. The first theme reflects how family members and significant others were essential to their wherewithal to persist. The second theme focuses on a sense of belonging, which suggests that Black males are more likely to persist when they feel connected, supported, and satisfied with their academic experiences (Brooms, 2019; Strayhorn, 2017; Wood & Ireland, 2014). The third theme describes how the presence of Black male social work professors influenced their persistence. In different ways, each theme speaks to the need and benefit of establishing or maintaining existing relationships with others (e.g., family, peers, professors) who can encourage or inspire persistence.

Family Encouragement and Support

The participants acknowledged parents, extended relatives, and significant others for helping them stay focused while pursuing their social work degree. Carl, who early in his trajectory considered departing college altogether, credited his mother for encouraging him to remain in his program. He spoke of how his mother deterred him from leaving college:

> *My mom especially* [supported me] [be]*cause she's the one who encouraged me to keep going when I thought about dropping out. She would always talk to me if I was having problems with different classes and things. She always encouraged me to keep going.*

Carl's mother supported him in other ways. When Carl experienced transportation hardships after matriculating in his social work program, his mother made sure he got to campus to attend class. He said, "she did whatever she could to get me here [to campus]. She would pick me up from the bus station. She wanted to make sure I went to school and finished." With his mother's support, Carl was able to attend class and persist in his social work program.

Growing up in a single-parent household, Barry's mother had always supported his endeavors. She made no exception to this when he enrolled in the Navy immediately after high school and later, as an undergraduate social work student. Barry offered a brief reflection on how his mother encouraged him to be a successful social work student:

> *My mom kind of prepared me* [for the real world]. [She said] *I love you but the world doesn't. You are a Black male, you gotta work twice as hard to get half of what you need. No one was going to get you anything. So as I got older, she was like… "you have the mentality. You have the smarts to do this, to do that. You have to work." She said, "twice as hard."*

Barry recalled his mother saying that he needed to work "twice as hard." According to White (2015), this catchphrase is often echoed by Black parents explaining to their children the impact of racial discrimination against marginalized individuals amid various educational and occupational spaces. Heeding his mother's empowering words, Barry grew confident and managed to persist in the face of being Black and male in his social work learning space.

Aaron's experience as a social work student was replete with periods of academic frustration and subpar course grades. His fiancée, who Aaron identified as a major source of support, was central in encouraging his persistence. He said:

One of the major persons that really pushed me was my fiancée. And the reason why I say this is because umm…she was there when I was crying. She was there when I was frustrated with school. When I was frustrated with going to class. She was like, "You gotta do this. You are needed to do this. I know you could do this." And she really pushed me to do the work and to put my all into the work.

The encouragement and support from Aaron's fiancée enabled him to persist and realize his goals of earning a social work degree and subsequently, securing professional employment in public child welfare. Through introspection, Aaron acknowledged the reality of many Black males who matriculate in academic programs but fail to persist. Reflecting on this reality had solidified his commitment to sustain his trajectory as a social work student. "Finishing my degree as a Black young male was important because a lot of Black men start but they don't finish. And she [fiancée] always talked to me about continuing my path and that's what I was doing."

Damien's relationship with a "distant" cousin was important to his path of earning a social work degree. His cousin, then a social work major at a different college, provided Damien with the emotional support that helped sustain his academic trajectory. The excerpt describes how they supported each other in their pursuits to earn a social work degree:

I have a cousin who went to [college name]. She began the social work program the same time I did and we used to try to keep up with one another as far as staying on track. We would always tell each other and text each other, "we're gonna get through it. It's getting hard but we're gonna get through it." We always encouraged one another and we both finished in fall of '14 from social work.

Damien's godmother, sister-in-law, and first cousin are social workers. They also encouraged his persistence by showing genuine interest in his academic pursuit and well-being. He said:

They were really ecstatic about me studying social work and encouraged me along the way. Every time they saw me they would ask, "how you doing," you know. "You haven't called me in a while. I'm here if you need me." Stuff like that.

These "check-ins" reinforce the importance of family capital in fostering persistence. In higher education, family capital represents how family members invest their time, effort, and resources to ensure the persistence and academic success of children or relatives (Gofen, 2009). Through family membership, Damien had access to a supportive family network of social workers who were critical facilitators of his persistence and success.

Sense of Belonging

As mentioned, "sense of belonging" concerns the extent to which students feel connected to their campus community. Some participants experienced difficulties establishing a sense of belonging as social work students. Damien did not feel strongly connected to his female-dominated social work program, but easily "fit in" in an ethnic-based student organization designed to provide activities and resources to meet the needs of Black males, as well as enhance their persistence. The organization seemed vital to providing a nurturing space that cultivated Damien's belonging and persistence. He said:

And with my activities in Organization X [pseudonym]*, you have really good people…the same people who are the same color as you. And all trying to achieve a well above [grade point] average. And you want to be in that setting, too. To be inspired to be successful. But as far as Organization X, we played together. Did homework…studied together. Went out together. You know, socialized. So I think Organization X was very helpful…uh, very supportive.*

Though the organization was peripheral to the academic and social components of his social work program, being involved extended Damien's networks to the broader campus community (e.g., friendships with other Black students, professional student support staff). These networks enabled access to campus resources (e.g., needs-based book vouchers, Spanish tutor) that aided his persistence as a social work student.

Aaron was disheartened by limited opportunities to interact with other Black males in his social work courses. This impacted the extent of his connectedness and engagement in course dialogue aimed at facilitating his academic growth and professional character as a social worker. One can sense his frustration from this comment:

There was some topics in social work [courses] *you wanted to talk about as a male but you didn't make a statement because you were the only one* [only male]*. And especially the only Black male in class. I was in a room full of women and couldn't really connect to them.*

There was an instance when Aaron found solace seeing another Black male in one of his social work courses. In his interview, he stated "Yes we got some brothas' up in here. But then when I didn't see him a few weeks in the semester, I was like 'oh crap, I'm back to myself again." Understandably, Aaron would be disappointed with the other student's departure, given the existing narratives of achievement disparities between Black male college students and their race and gender counterparts. In response to the student's departure, Aaron said that he was "back to being a square peg trying to get into a round hole." The statement reveals him questioning his belonging as a social work student, particularly with feeling alienated as a Black male and his wherewithal to persist in a female-dominated social work program.

Carl, too, was frustrated "seeing a lot of women and not seeing other Black men in social work." Compared to Aaron, he was more self-conscious about engaging in course dialogue--so much so that he sometimes would wait "until class [was] over to talk to professors." While he did not expand on the meaning behind this remark (despite several probes), it appears his choice to "wait" speaks to apprehension about being negatively evaluated by peers for offering opinions through his gendered and racialized lens. Strayhorn and Saddler (2009) noted that for Black males, feeling constrained in the classroom can adversely affect their sense of belonging, engagement with peers, and achieving an end-goal to earn a degree.

Unlike other participants, Barry bonded with a White social work student who identified as lesbian and was also a student veteran. His interactions with her helped solidify his sense of belonging and in due course, positively influenced his persistence. He said:

The one young lady that identified as lesbian…we pushed each other a lot. I think her and I talked, texted and emailed probably more during this program. So most times, it was that push…that drive. Having somebody else that when you don't feel like finishing to say, "hey we got this" or "hey we can get this research paper done." With her being older [non-traditional student], we were able to connect on some things a little better which made me understand the urgency of getting through school.

Barry's relationship with another social work student compelled him to consider the importance of "knowing different kinds of people outside of who I already know." Seemingly from this comment, Barry realized the value of engaging in interactions with diverse peers who were and can be critical to stimulating his persistence.

Initial findings from this theme show the importance of ethnic-based student organizations in helping Black male social work students establish a sense of belonging and subsequently, find worth in persisting. According to the literature, these organizations provide welcoming spaces, academic support, and engagement opportunities with campus stakeholders (e.g., student support staff, advisors) who may function as gatekeepers to persistence (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kuk & Manning, 2010; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997). Partaking in diverse peer interactions was also fundamental to a sense of belonging. For example, Barry's "friending" with a White lesbian veteran social work student resulted in a supportive relationship that seemed to engender his belonging and persistence. Strayhorn (2008a) acknowledged the power of diverse interactions in assisting Black males to establish a sense of belonging. These interactions promote high levels of satisfaction with academic programs and help Black males "feel at home or feel they are a member of a place or community" (Tinto, 2005, p. 319). It was the social work community in which Barry established a meaningful peer relationship that became integral to his persistence.

The findings also showed how the shortage of Black males in baccalaureate social work programs could inhibit belonging among Black males already matriculated in these programs. This causes some concern given existing research suggesting that Black males establish a sense of belonging when they feel connected to other Black males (Strayhorn, 2008b). Some participants reported isolation and discomfort being the only Black male in their White, female-dominated social work courses. Aaron, in particular, feared engaging in course dialogue, believing his perspectives would be considered invalid or not resonate with his female peers. He said:

I felt isolated because there was some topics…or some things you wanted to talk about as a male, but you didn't raise your hand or make a statement because you're the only male, and especially the only Black male in class. You try to fend [defend] certain things and then you get beat down. It's like pitchforks and torches and you find yourself sitting in the corner and nodding your head. I felt like a nobody cause you know, I was in a room full of women.

Feeling isolated or not welcomed can force Black males to question their belonging, especially in social work programs where they often are the only "one."

Presence of Black Male Professors

The participants discussed how the sole Black male social work professor influenced their persistence, and how he pushed them to achieve academically. Aaron mentioned how this professor helped to build his efficacy to persist. He recalled during informal conversations how this professor was "always pushing me to do what I had to do to graduate." Aaron also remembered internalizing encouraging phrases from this professor affirming his need to persist such as "you can make it" and "you can easily get the degree." These affirmations were indicative of this professor's concern for Aaron's academic well-being and trajectory in social work education. More so, these encouraging messages helped Aaron believe that he could achieve academic success and graduate with a social work degree.

This professor impacted other participants in different ways. After several social work courses with female professors and experiencing racism from a White male professor in a general education course, Barry felt relieved "seeing a male, Black professor" in his social work program. He noted, "as a Black man…to see another Black man in social work with the title 'Doctor' made me proud." Setting aside pride, he remarked how this professor pushed him in class and instilled him with confidence to succeed:

> *Before I took Dr.* [name withheld] *for research, I knew it was gonna be hard because we* [students] *was talkin.' Then when I took him, he just kept on pushing us and pushing us. When we'd get frustrated with something from not knowing the material or getting bad quiz grades, he kept on saying to the class "you got to embrace challenges." So by the end of the semester, I realized that he wanted us to be successful as social work students. This had instilled a lot of confidence in me mainly because it was an African American man who was saying this to us.*

For Damien, connecting with this professor helped sustain his motivation to persist as a social work student. He said:

> *Access to Dr.* [name withheld] *was wonderful. Like, I could email him anytime. Meet him in his office during office hours. He even gave me his cell number. We had a great rapport and it was a great networking* [opportunity]. *He even wrote me a reference for graduate school. He kept me motivated and made me want to do better in all my courses so that I can be a great social worker.*

Discussion

The thematic findings led to several general conclusions about how the participants in this study persisted in their baccalaureate social work program. The first theme emphasized the relationship between family encouragement and persistence. In examining external factors of persistence among students of color, Maramba and Palmer (2011) found that family members were essential to their persistence and degree attainment. The finding in this particular study shows how core and extended family members aided in the participants' wherewithal to persist and sustain their trajectories. Though familial support is not guaranteed, this study reinforces the critical role that families can play in the academic success of Black males enrolled in baccalaureate social work programs. It also

speaks to the importance of families to provide emotional support to Black males struggling to negotiate their persistence in learning environments where they often are marginalized and rendered invisible (Giesler, 2013; Hyde & Deal, 2003; Teasley, Schiele, Adams, & Okilwa, 2018).

The second theme revealed that Black male student representation in social work programs can help instill a sense of belonging. The presence of other Black males can reduce isolation, marginalization, and increase connectedness (Strayhorn, 2008a). The findings from this theme also give attention to how ethnic-based student organizations enhance belonging and persistence for Black males. These spaces can be sanctuaries for Black male social work students to build community with other Black males, feel valued and supported, and receive the social capital necessary to strengthen their persistence and academic success (Brooms, 2019).

The last theme showed how participants attributed their persistence to the presence of, and relationship with a Black male social work professor. Their collective remarks centered on how this professor was encouraging, always available, and invested in their academic growth. The mere presence of this professor was elemental to strengthening the participants' capacities to cope with the stress and burden of being male and Black in their social work program. Indeed, this finding substantiated how Black male professors are important to the academic well-being of Black male social work students.

Limitations

This study was not without limitations. The study was restricted to a single social work program at a large public research university. Conducting this research across programs at multiple institutions could undoubtedly increase the pool of Black males and in turn, extend the breadth and depth of thematic findings. Transferability of findings to Black males in undergraduate social work programs is cautioned, as qualitative research studies aim to achieve a deep understanding of phenomena through small sample sizes (Gheondea-Eliad, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Notwithstanding the sample size (n=4), the narratives were essential to developing findings that characterize participant persistence. The last finding reflects the importance of Black male professors in facilitating persistence but disregards contributions to persistence by other social work faculty. As this study was conducted at a specific institution, Black male social work students attending other institutions (e.g., private, Historically Black colleges, small liberal arts colleges) might differ in their perspective of how diverse social work faculty influence their persistence. The study also relied on individual interviews to provide substantive participant data. Future studies should incorporate multiple data sources (e.g., focus groups, artifacts, critical incidents, journaling) and structured design methodologies that would deepen understanding (Patton, 2015; Radford, 2006) of factors that lead to persistence or early departure among Black males in baccalaureate social work programs.

Implications

Overall findings provide insight for social work education administrators and advisors responsible for facilitating persistence among Black male BSW students. We know from

the study participants that family and significant others are essential to persistence. Therefore, administrators should consider programmatic initiatives that acknowledge the importance of families in the success of Black male students. As they exist, social work orientations can be conduits to these initiatives. In addition to presentations that introduce students to social work, orientations can include family panels that integrate thorough discussions on how families can facilitate persistence and success. For families of Black males, these thoughtful discussions can address pressing questions or concerns, and convey messages that family support is a critical component for Black males to sustain their trajectories as social work students. Having Black male alumni and Black professors can be meaningful and reinforce to families that persistence and success are possible despite real or pending obstacles. Faculty and advisors should be cognizant of the role student affairs offices play in involving families in persistence and success. These offices can implement campus-based programming that includes students and families, or even evidenced-based initiatives that engage families in supportive processes that cultivate positive educational outcomes (Maramba & Palmer, 2011).

The study showed that belonging and persistence are attained when Black males bond with other Black males. Faculty and professional advisors can facilitate connectedness by encouraging involvement in campus-based organizations offering networking opportunities with Black males in different academic programs. Indeed, ethnic-based organizations offer Black males a communal space that can be responsive to their ethnic and gender needs. They can also provide students with cultural activities and resources not available in their social work program.

Learning environments should be structured so Black males feel supported and encouraged to share viewpoints (Saunders & Kardia, 1997). This could support their capacities to develop a sense of belonging and "fit in" as social work students. Thus, pedagogical efforts should focus on legitimizing Black male perspectives and concerns in a manner that precludes them from feeling constrained and marginalized. Teaching methods that inspire students to engage in diverse interactions can significantly impact the extent to which these students feel they belong. Heterogeneous learning experiences (e.g., small groups, debates, service-learning projects) expose Black males to students from different backgrounds (Strayhorn, 2008a). These collaborative experiences leave them feeling satisfied and connected, as well as more willing to engage in intense classroom dialogue (Fischer, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008a; Tinto, 2005).

Black male social work professors matter. Their presence can have a significant impact on the persistence of Black male students. They can serve as mentors, role models, and gatekeepers for helping Black males negotiate their social work educational experience. Notwithstanding standard policies on recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified faculty (CSWE, 2015), it is incumbent upon baccalaureate social work programs to continually find ways to enrich the diversity of program faculty. These programs must be aggressive in recruiting and hiring ethnic and culturally diverse social work faculty (Quaye, Tambascia, & Talesh, 2009). An aggressive approach can provide a diverse cross-representation of faculty available to strengthen the persistence and academic experiences of Black males who still experience dismal graduation rates compared to their gender and racial counterparts (Harper, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, when

Black male social work professors are not present, BSW programs can provide mentoring support by pairing students with Black male MSW students, Black male professors from other departments, or Black male professional staff.

Conclusion

This study examined persistence through the lens of Black male graduates from an accredited baccalaureate social work program. Findings affirmed that family support, peer relationships, sense of belonging, and Black male student-faculty relationships influenced Black males' persistence in a baccalaureate social work program. The findings substantiate the relationship between non-academic factors and persistence and uniquely emphasized that Black male social work professors are key to Black male student persistence. This specific finding is indicative of the need for social work programs to prioritize and incorporate in their strategic plans the hiring of Black male professors. While social work programs are accountable for ensuring academic success for all students, they have a special responsibility to students from underrepresented groups and those at-risk for early program departure. Concerning Black males, program administrators and educators must be intentional in enhancing their educational outcomes (CSWE, 2015). They must be proactive in addressing problems related to retaining Black males and be responsive in developing program initiatives that influence their persistence. Therefore, they should be prepared to (re)examine and modify their program's implicit curriculum for ensuring their academic success and degree attainment (Bogo & Wayne, 2013). This might mean having a supportive faculty and staff structure, practices that promote meaningful interactions and belonging, and a commitment from the social work program and institution in strengthening Black male persistence.

References

Allen, Q. (2010). Racial microaggressions: The schooling experiences of Black middle-class males in Arizona's secondary schools. *Journal of African American Males in Education, 1*(2), 125-143.

Astin, A. W., & Oseguera, L. (2005). Pre-college and institutional influences on degree attainment. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 245-276). Westport, CT: Prager Publishers.

Beadlescomb, T. L. (2019). BSW students of color: Principle factors influencing intent to persist through completion of degree. *Journal of Social Work Education,* doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2018.1544522

Bennett, C., & Bean, J. (1984). A conceptual model of Black student attrition at a predominantly White institution. *Journal of Educational Equity and Leadership, 4*(3), 173-188.

Berger, J. B., Ramirez, G. B., & Lyons, S. (2012). Past to present: A historical look at retention. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (2nd ed., pp. 7-34). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bogo, M., & Wayne, J. (2013). The implicit curriculum in social work education: The culture of human interchange. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 33*, 2-14. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2012.746951

Bowen, W. G., Chingos, M. M., & McPherson, M. S. (2009). *Crossing the finish line: Completing college at America's public universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400831463

Bowie, S. L., Cherry, D. J., & Wooding, L. H. (2005). African American students: Personal influences on social work careers and factors in graduate school selection. *Social Work Education, 24,* 169-184. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/0261547052000333117

Bowie, S. L., Nashwan, A. J. J., Thomas, V., Davis-Buckley, R. J., & Johnson, R. L. (2018). An assessment of social work education efforts to recruit and retain MSW students of color. *Journal of Social Work Education, 54*(2), 270-286. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797/2017.1404531

Braxton, J. M., & Hirschy, A. S. (2005). Theoretical developments in the study of college student departure. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 61-87). Westport, CT: Prager Publishers. doi: https://doi.org/10.2190/m127-v05b-5e5j-f9lq

Brooms, D. R. (2019). Not in this alone: Black men's bonding, learning, and sense of belonging in Black male initiative programs. *The Urban Review.* March 19, 2019. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-019-00506-5

Brooms, D. R., & Davis, A. R. (2017). Staying focused on the goal: Peer bonding and faculty mentors supporting Black males' persistence in college. *Journal of Black Studies, 48*(3), 305-327. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934717692520

Brown, C. M., II, & Davis, E. J. (2001). The historically Black college as social contract, social capital, and social equalizer. *Peabody Journal of Education, 76*(1), 31-49. doi: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327930pje7601_03

Bush, E. C., & Bush, L. V. (2010). Calling out the elephant: An examination of African American male achievement in community colleges. *Journal of African American Males in Education, 1*(1), 40-62.

Choy, S. P. (2002). *Access & persistence: Findings from 10 years of longitudinal research on students.* Washington DC: American Council on Education. Retrieved from http://www.ccsse.org/center/resources/docs/research/access_persistence.pdf

Council on Social Work Education [CSWE]. (2015). *2015 educational policy and accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's social work programs.* Retrieved from https://www.cswe.org/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2015-EPAS

CSWE. (2016). *2015 annual statistics on social work education in the United States.* Retrieved from https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/992f629c-57cf-4a74-8201-1db7a6fa4667/2015-Statistics-on-Social-Work-Education.aspx

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fischer, M. J. (2007). Settling into campus life: Differences by race/ethnicity in college involvement and outcomes. *Journal of Higher Education, 78*(2), 125-161. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2007.11780871

Gheondea-Eliad, A. (2014). Is qualitative research generalizable? *Journal of Community Positive Practices, XIV* (3), 114-124.

Giesler, M. A. (2013). The problem of privilege: Male social work students' preservice experiences. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research, 7*, 204-214.

Gläser, J., & Laudel, G. (2013). Life with and without coding: Two methods for early-stage data analysis in qualitative research aiming at causal explanations. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 14*(2), Art. 5.

Gofen, A. (2009). Family capital: How first-generation higher education students break the intergenerational cycle. *Family Relations, 58*(1), 104-120. doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2008.00538.x

Hagedorn, L. S. (2012). How to define retention: A new look at an old problem. In A. Seidman (Ed.)., *College student retention: Formula for student success* (2nd ed., pp. 81-99). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Harper, S. R. (2012). *Black male student success in higher education: A report from the National Black Male College Achievement Study.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.

Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2009). Beyond sameness, with engagement and outcomes for all: An introduction. In S. Harper & J. Quaye (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations* (pp. 1-15). NY: Routledge. doi: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203894125

Hausmann, L. R. M., Ye, F., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2009). Sense of belonging and persistence in White and African American first-year students. *Research in Higher Education, 50,* 649-669. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-009-9137-8

Holsey-Hyman, M. (2015). Perceptions of retention among bachelor of social work graduates at a historically black college and university. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest dissertations and theses global. (3705074)

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education, 70*, 324-325. doi: https://doi.org/10.2307/2673270

Hyde, C. A., & Deal, K. H. (2003). Does gender matter? Male and female participation in social work classrooms. *Affilia, 18*(2), 192-209. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109903018002008

Johnson-Motoyama, M., Petr, C. G., & Mitchell, F. M. (2014). Factors associated with success in doctoral social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 50,* 548-558. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2014.916955

Kezar, A. J., Walpole, M., & Perna, L. W. (2015). Engaging low-income students. In J. Quaye & S. R. Harper (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practice approaches for diverse populations* (2nd ed., pp. 55-74). NY: Routledge. doi: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203894125

Klopfenstein, K., & Thomas, M. K. (2009). The link between advanced placement experience and early college success. *Southern Economic Journal, 75*(3), 873-891.

Komarraju, M., Musulkin, S., & Bhattacharya, G. (2011). Role of student-faculty interactions in developing college students' academic self-concept, motivation, and achievement. *Journal of College Student Development, 51,* 332-342. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0137

Kuk, L., & Manning, J. (2010). Student organizations and institutional diversity efforts: A typology. *College Student Journal, 44*(2), 354-361.

Leppel, K. (2002). Similarities and differences in the college persistence of men and women. *Review of Higher Education, 24*(4), 433-450. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2002.0021

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lotkowski, V. A., Robbins, S. B., & Noeth, R. J. (2004). *The role of academic and non-academic factors in improving college retention.* Iowa City, IA: ACT.

Maramba, D. C., & Palmer, R. T. (2011). Perceptions of family support among students of color at a predominantly White university. *Enrollment Management, 3*, 112-135.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Menson, R. P., Patelis, T., & Doyle, A. (2009). New England's state of college readiness. *New England Journal of Higher Education, 23*(5), 22-23.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis. A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2015.975966

National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *The condition of education 2016* (NCES 2011-144). Washington, DC: US Department of Education. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016144.pdf

Padgett, D. K. (2008). *Qualitative methods in social work research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Padilla, R. V., Trevino, J., Gonzalez, K., & Trevino, J. (1997). Developing local models of minority student success in college. *Journal of College Student Development, 38*(2), 125-135.

Palmer, R. T., Davis, R. J., & Hilton, A. A. (2009). Exploring challenges that threatened to impede the academic success of academically underprepared African American male collegians at an HBCU. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(4), 429-445. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0078

Palmer, R. T., Wood, J. L., Dancy, T. E., & Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). *Black male collegians: Increasing access, retention, and persistence in higher education* (ASHE Higher Education Report). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/aehe.20015

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students (Vol. 2): A third decade of research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. doi: https://doi.org/10.14426/jsaa.v2i2.70

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peterson, N. A., Farmer, A. Y., & Zippay, A. (2014). The implicit curriculum in an urban university setting: Pathways to students' empowerment. *Journal of Social Work Education, 50*(4), 630-647. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2014.947163

Quaye, S. J., Tambascia, T. P., & Talesh, R. A. (2009). Engaging racial/ethnic minority students in predominantly white classroom environments. In S. Harper & J. Quaye (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations* (pp. 157-178). NY: Routledge. doi: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203810163

Raber, M., Tebb, S., & Berg-Weger, M. (1998). Recruitment and retention of minority students in bachelor of social work programs. *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work, 3*(2), 31-49. doi: https://doi.org/10.18084/1084-7219.3.2.31

Radford, M. L. (2006). The critical incident technique and the qualitative evaluation of the connecting libraries and school project. *Library Trends, 55*(1), 44-64. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2006.0051

Reason, R. D. (2003). Student variables that predict retention: Recent research and new developments. *NASPA Journal, 40*(4), 172-191. doi: https://doi.org/10.2202/0027-6014.1286

Rhee, B. (2008). Institutional climate and student departure: A multinomial multilevel modeling approach. *Review of Higher Education, 31*(2), 161-183. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2007.0076

Rogers, L. (2013). Should there be mentoring efforts to help retain and recruit more Black males into baccalaureate and master's social work programs? *Journal of Human Behavior and the Social Environment, 23*, 908-917. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2013.788463

Saunders, S., & Kardia, D. (1997). *Creating inclusive college classrooms.* Retrieved from http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1

Schwartz, R. A., & Washington, C. M. (2002). Predicting academic performance and retention among African American freshmen men. *NASPA Journal, 39*(4), 354-370. doi: https://doi.org/10.2202/0027-6014.1178

Seidman, A. (2005). Where we go from here. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 295-316). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Singh, K. (2007). *Quantitative social research methods.* New Delhi: Sage.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: How American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102*(6), 1178-1197. doi: https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027143

Strand, K. J. (2013). *Best practices for ensuring the academic success of first-generation college students.* Washington DC: Council of Independent Colleges.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2006). Factors influencing the academic achievement of first-generation college students. *NASPA Journal, 43*(4), 82-111. doi: https://doi.org/10.2202/0027-6014.1724

Strayhorn, T. L. (2008a). Fittin' in. Do diverse interactions with peers affect sense of belonging for Black men at predominantly white institutions? *NASPA Journal, 45*(4), 501-527. doi: https://doi.org/10.2202/0027-6014.2009

Strayhorn, T. L. (2008b). The invisible man: Factors affecting the retention of low-income African American males. *NASAP Journal, 11*(1), 66-82.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2010). When race and gender collide: Social and cultural capital's influence on the academic achievement of African American male and Latino males. *Review of Higher Education, 33*(3), 307-332. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.0.0147

Strayhorn, T. L. (2017). Factors that influence the persistence and success of Black men in urban public universities. *Urban Education, 52*(9), 1106-1128. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915623347

Strayhorn, T. L., & Saddler, T. N. (2009). Gender differences in the influence of faculty-student mentoring relationships on satisfaction with college among African Americans. *Journal of African American Studies, 13*, 476-493. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-008-9082-1

Teasley, M. L., Schiele, J. H., Adams, C., & Okilwa, N. S. (2018). Trayvon Martin: Racial profiling, Black male stigma, and social work practice. *Social Work, 63*(1), 37-45. doi: https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swx049

Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation, 27*(2), 237-246. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. doi: https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226922461.001.0001

Tinto, V. (2005). Moving from theory to action. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 317-333). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Tinto, V. (2017). Reflections on student persistence. *Student Success, 8*(2), 1-8. doi: https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.v8i2.376

Umbach, P. D. (2006). The contribution of faculty of color to undergraduate education. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(3), 317-345. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-005-9391-3

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). The condition of education 2015 (NCES 2015–144). Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40

Warde, B. (2009). Why social work, and what does the future hold? The narratives of recently graduated Hispanic and African-American male BSW and MSW students. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 18*, 129-145. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/15313200802595369

White, G. B. (2015). Black workers really do need to be twice as good. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/10/why-black-workers-really-do-need-to-be-twice-as-good/409276/

Wilson, P. P. (1999). A social work imperative: Recruiting African American males into the profession. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 6*(3), 77-84.

Wood, J. L. (2014). Examining academic variables affecting the persistence and attainment of Black male collegians: A focus on academic performance and integration in the two-year college. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 17*(5), 601-622. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.733687

Wood, J. L., & Ireland, S. M. (2014). Supporting Black male community college success: Determinants of faculty-student engagement. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 38*(2-3), 154-165, doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2014.851957

Xu, Y. J., & Webber, K. L. (2018). College student retention on a racially diverse campus: A theoretically guided reality check. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 20*(1), 2-28. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025116643325

Author note: Address correspondence to Dr. Lamont D. Simmons, School of Social Work, Salem State University, 352 Lafayette Street, Salem, MA- 01970. E-mail: lsimmons@salemstate.edu

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Research Question:

How were Black males influenced to persist in a Bachelor of Social Work program?

1. What led you to pursue a bachelor's degree in social work?

2. In what ways did your high school prepare you for the academic demands of a social work education?

3. Tell me about those people, if any, who encouraged your success as a social work student?

4. What motivated you to earn your social work degree?

5. What social work programs or other campus activities were you involved in?

6. How often do you interact with minority or non-minority faculty in your social work program?

   Probe: How have these interactions influenced you to do well as a social work student?

7. What obstacles did you experience as a social work student? How did you overcome those obstacles?

8. What has been your greatest challenge as a Black male in pursuing your social work degree?

9. Tell me about the satisfaction of your experience as a college student in your social work program.