Using an Exploratory Approach to Describe Issues that Affect African American males in the Field of Social Work

Quincy Dinnerson
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

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Using an Exploratory Approach to Describe Issues that Affect African American males in the Field of Social Work

by

Quincy Dinnerson

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Social Work

St. Catherine University – University of St. Thomas

School of Social Work

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Abstract

This banded dissertation examined some of the issues of black men in the field of social work. Some of the issues to explored included social acceptance, oppression, and emotional and moral support, to name a few. The researcher goal was to gain more insight into the African American male social work experiences. The researcher used Afrocentric theory in this banded dissertation. Afrocentric theory considers the worldviews of African Americans with the understanding that historically African Americans are an oppressed population.

The first product of this banded dissertation is a conceptual paper that focuses on whether social work implicit curricular support African American men in addressing diversity. The researcher reviewed the current body of knowledge on social work implicit curriculum and how they fit with Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) educational policy and accreditation standards (EPAS) 2015. The researcher used Afrocentric theory as the conceptual framework.

The second product for this banded dissertation is a qualitative study. The study examined the factors that may hinder African American males in the field of graduate social work. Using a snowball sampling method, the researcher identified the study participants, hoping to capture the experiences as African American male social workers. The participants were interviewed by the researcher. The researcher interviewed 15 African American professional social workers in the state of North Carolina. The researcher collected the data, transcribed the notes, coded the text, determined categories, developed themes, and then wrote the findings. The method of analysis was framed by grounded theory.

The third product provides an overview of the presentations entitled “Use of the Afrocentric Theory in Exploring Social Work Curriculum, Racism, and Sense of Isolation from

*Key words: African-American, Isolation, Racism, & social work curriculum*
Dedication and Acknowledgements

I would like to profoundly thank my late grandmother Cholia Ratley for her vision and prayers. Without her never-ending belief in me and non-stop prayers, I would not have made it this far. I would like to thank my family for their love and support through these years and understanding for the missed birthdays, sporting events and family gatherings. I would like to specifically extend a thank you to my parents Earline and Martin Dinnerson for their encouragement, and their support emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

I would like to express my appreciation to my dear friends and fraternity brothers Robert, Tim, and L. Jay who pushed me beyond measure. Special thanks go to my mentor and friend Dr. Lavi Wilson who has been there for me in the darkest hour. I truly value and care for our bond that we have Dr. Wilson and I appreciate everything that you have done for me along the way.

As this journey ends, I will forever be grateful to Dr. Kingsly Chigbu chair and Dr. Maria Ann Graham advisor for believing in me and advocating on my behalf. I will cherish the wisdom and knowledge that Dr. Chigbu and Dr. Graham shared with me through this process. I will forever be grateful for the friendships that I have made as part of my cohort. From the first summer at orientation to sharing meals like family, the memories we have all made together will forever hold a place in my heart. I especially would like to recognize Minday and Laura a true friendship that developed through this cohort, we held each other accountable and texted and talked through the early mornings and late nights for that I thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas school of social work for the opportunity to be a part of this program. To Dr. Niah White for her inspiration through conversations and fellowship we were able to support each other and graduate in the same year! Thank you, God, for your grace and mercy that kept me through this
journey. I would like to dedicate this banded dissertation to my nieces and nephews I wish to
inspire, empower and encourage your dreams to become realities.
# The Afrocentric Theory

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Introduction

Embracing the role as a social work educator means that teaching is about the transformation of learners through empowerment to become practitioners, advocates, and scholars. The intent of this banded dissertation is to examine the issues that hinder African American males from being successful in the field of social work. Some of the issues to explore include the social work curriculum and a sense of isolation among African American men in the field of social work. The researcher hopes to share some insight into African American male social work experiences with regards to the social work curriculum, racism, and a sense of isolation.

There are limited studies on African-American males in the field of social work. Morris-Compton (2007) wrote about the limited number of African American men in the field of social work and the importance of African American men in the field. According to Morris-Compton, African-American men comprised 7% of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) list of registered licensed social workers in 2004. Two primary issues impacting African-American males include racism and oppression (Elligan & Utsey, 1999) and may be connected with African-American males experiencing educational barriers manifesting in the forms of low grade point averages (GPAs), low Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, and inability to take pre-college classes while in high school (Farmer & Hope, 2015). By understanding the educational preparedness may explain the engagement and performance African American males have with the social work curriculum. The Farmer and Hope article points out that some African American males enter college with a poor foundation therefore, creating a huge barrier for them. It is important to understand the educational history of African-American men in order to understand some of the issues they may be facing while engaging the social work
curriculum, a history that shows that African American males are educated at some of the poorest and low-performing primary and secondary schools.

For this reason, Elligan and Utsey (1999) called for an African-American-centered approach to help African-American men develop coping skills to deal with racism. However, to date, there is paucity of research on factors affecting African-American men social work. However, there are only a few studies that discuss the issues affecting African-American males in higher education overall (Elligan & Utsey, 1999; Farmer & Hope, 2015). The goal of this Banded Dissertation was to gain more insight into the experience of African-American male social workers regarding the social work curriculum, racism, and a sense of isolation. The meaning of the three concepts for this banded dissertation are as follows: social work curriculum the structure and material that is taught to social work students, racism is wrongful treatment because the color of one’s skin and sense of isolation the emotion of feeling alone or not connected. This research will generate three products: a conceptual paper, a research paper, and a poster/oral presentation. The first product will be a conceptual paper. The conceptual paper is a review of literature on the issues affecting African-American males in social work more specifically looking at how social work implicit and explicit curriculum support African-American men by addressing diversity. The second product is an exploratory study of the issues that affect African-American men in social work. The researcher used a qualitative approach in conducting the study. Grinnell, Williams, and Unrau (2016) “define exploratory approach as descriptive research that provides an accurate profile of a group, describes a process, and confirms or contradicts prior beliefs” (pp. 55–56). Product three will be an oral presentation combining the first product (the conceptual paper) and second product (the explorative study).
Conceptual Framework

Afrocentricity Theory

The chosen theoretical framework chosen to analyze the subject of this dissertation is Afrocentricity theory. Through the readings and understanding the differences between theories, perspectives, and paradigms, one may learn that Afrocentricity is a theory. The researcher intended to use this theory as it adds great perspective to the banded dissertation (BD) research topic, “What factors might be hindering African-American male’s success in graduate social education?” Afrocentricity theory, coined by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante, is based on the idea that African people should reassert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity. Afrocentricity theory stretches long and wide with roots grounded in African tradition. The Afrocentricity theory is a shift in thinking proposed as a constructural adjustment to black disorientation. The theory gives authority to black ideals and values and expresses the highest forms of African culture. One of the key assumptions of the Afrocentric paradigm theory is that all relationships are based on centers and margins and the distances from either the center or the margin (Asante, 2009a). For the majority of the research, the words Afrocentric and Afrocentricity are used interchangeably as both a theory for describing human phenomena, as well as a movement to strengthen and liberate African Americans from cultural oppression, spiritual alienation, and social injustice (Sherr, 2006). Afrocentricity is a paradigmatic intellectual perspective that privileges African agency within the context of African history and culture trans-continentally and trans-generationally (Asante, 2007). Afrocentricity traces its theoretical heritage to African ideas and African authors (Asante, 2007).
**Relationship between Concepts**

In some cases, the study of Afrocentricity, and the new approach researchers use to seek information and data, is called looking at information from “a Black perspective” as opposed to what had been considered the “White perspective” of most information in the traditional American culture research.

Therefore, it becomes legitimate to ask, “Where is the sistah coming from?” or “Where is the brotha at?” “Are you down with overcoming oppression?” These are assessment and evaluative questions that allow the interrogator to accurately pinpoint the responder’s location, whether it is a cultural or psychological view. There were five factors that impacted the historical development of the Afrocentricity theory (Asante, 2009a).

A key assumption of the Afrocentrist is that all relationships are based on centers and margins and the distances from either the center or the margin. The philosophy that when Black people view themselves as centered and central in their own history then they see themselves as agents, actors, and participants rather than as marginal on the periphery of political or economic experience. One way to express Afrocentricity is called marking; whenever a person delineates a cultural boundary around a particular cultural space in human time, this is called marking. Afrocentricity is the substance of our regeneration because it is in line with what contemporary philosophers Haki Madhubuti and Maulana Karenga, among others, have articulated as the best image and interest of African people. What is any better than operating and acting out of our own (Afro) collective interest and what is any greater than seeing the world through our (Afro) eyes?

A few factors from the exemplar theorist Dr. Asante have impacted the development of the Afrocentricity theory. The philosophy of Afrocentricity as expounded by Molefi Kete
Asante is a way of answering all cultural, economic, political, and social questions related to African people from a centered position. Asante believes that Afrocentricity cannot be reconciled to any hegemonic or idealistic philosophy. It is opposed to radical individualism as expressed in the postmodern school and also opposed to spookism, confusion, and superstition. The postmodernist would go on to say that if there were Africans and if the conditions were as described by the querist (questioner), then the answer would be that Africans had not fully developed their own capacities in relationship to the global economy; therefore, they are outside of the normal development patterns of the world economy. However, Asante (2009a) notes that the Afrocentrist does not question the fact that there is a collective sense of Africanism revealed in the common experiences of the African world. The Afrocentrist would look to the questions of location, control of the hegemonic global economy, marginalization, and power positions as keys to understand the underdevelopment of African people (Asante, 2009a).

Afrocentricity theory has a unity relationship with the environment, which is referred to in the theory as community. Afrocentricity refers to Umoja (Unity), another important value held within Afrocentric approaches, which encourages the maintenance of individual, family, and community relationships and underscores that these relationships, when healthy, can provide a firm foundation for developing success in groups at risk for negative outcomes (Stepteau-Watson, Watson, & Lawrence, 2014).

**Critical Analysis of Afrocentric Theory**

The purpose of this section is to critically analyze Afrocentricity theory through three lenses identified in James Forte’s (2014) text, *Skills for Using Theory in Social Work*. The selected lenses are standards of strengths, standard of justice, and standard of sensitivity to diversity. The analysis will consist of identifying two strengths and limitations for each critical
lens. After the analysis, a declarative statement is provided on whether Afrocentricity is the appropriate theory for this banded dissertation. The strengths perspective “asserts that social workers can make significant difference in the lives of clients by helping them search for and identify strengths, capacities, and resiliencies” (Forte, 2014, p. 286). Two of the strengths of the perspective are the positive, empowering approach to working with individuals and the ease of applying concepts in a practice setting (Rogers, 2013). Limitations in the strengths perspective is that it is too focused on individual responsibility and autonomy and it is difficult to test constructs empirically and predict behavior (Rogers, 2013). The strengths perspective calls for a theory to have one key assumption, and Afrocentricity meets that requirement. Afrocentricity allows each person to possess a degree of agency and allows individuals to choose and achieve a better future. Afrocentricity theory begin with aspirations and urges practitioners to invite clients to engage in a new way of thinking. The theoretical language of Afrocentricity theory stands more so on a post-modernist view. Afrocentricity theory most definitely emphasizes vocabulary from Pan Africanism, which is a strength of the theory that sheds light on African history accomplishments. Afrocentricity highlights the importance of culture and history to the African American culture so it will not be lost or forgotten. For example, “Without such a universal African sense of our exceptionalism within the context of our own land and activities it will be nearly impossible for us to overcome the numerous obstacles that stand in the way of a continental state” (Asante, 2009c, p. 8). Afrocentricity incorporates the importance of relationships and communication: “every communication engagement with another human brings an infinite array of possibilities” (Asante, 2011, p. 1). Afrocentricity would rank highly among other theories on the realm of possibilities of individuals becoming successful or feeling empowered.
The justice standard for theorizing focuses on advocates rebelling against oppressors and promoting human emancipation from circumstances of arbitrary control and domination (Forte, 2014). The strengths of a social change lens like justice are powerful tools for social change, which is a central charge of the social work profession and concepts fit well with other theories used in social work (Rogers, 2013). The limitations of the justice standards are the fact that there are no clear organizations of concepts, which makes articulating common definitions among practitioners difficult and cannot predict behavior (Rogers, 2013). Afrocentricity appeals to the vulnerable populations of African Americans based on the clause of culture inclusiveness. Afrocentricity theory affirms populations by encouraging the practice of being centered. Afrocentricity theory contributes to the fair allocation of societal resources and to the extension of opportunities to more social groups. For example, the Afrocentric idea must be the steppingstone from which the multicultural idea is launched (Asante, 1991). Afrocentricity theory takes the initiative to reach out in a multicultural approach. Afrocentricity theory contributes to the expression of marginalized voices and exposes unquestioned assertions that obscure the structures and processes causing inequality. For instance, Afrocentricity addresses the white supremacist educational system with the concept of centricity, which is a method of teaching any student by placing his or her group within the center of the context of knowledge (Asante, 1991). Afrocentricity provides an opportunity for each culture to be included, which is to become centered in one’s own culture of empowerment.

Forte (2014) explains the diversity lens as human differences that are key to understanding variations in life chances and life constraints for a person’s social groups and communities. A strength of using the diversity lens is an understanding of differences in a variety of ways. Another strength of the lens is the influence of the differences in human
behavior, human development, and life chances (Forte, 2014). The limitations are the difficulties to define and measure the results (Rogers, 2013). Yet another limitation of the diversity lens is determining whether interventions are effective (Rogers, 2013). Afrocentricity theory respects the client, family, and other social systems accurately. Afrocentricity theory may be viewed as a theory that limits a cultural view and is built on a narrow set of cultural principles assuming that a particular cultural tradition is superior. Dr. Asante addresses those very critiques in his book *An Afrocentric Manifesto*: “Afrocentricity is not the reverse of Eurocentrism; neither is it a counter to Eurocentrism” (Asante, 2007, p. 5). Afrocentricity does not label deviant or cast other individuals from valued communities. However, Afrocentricity does empower other cultures:

“Afrocentricity take a strong view that racial, sexual, gender, and class discrimination and exploitation must be condemned outright and forthrightly. All Afrocentric analysis is a critique on domination . . . and on hierarchy and patriarchy” (Asante, 2009b, para. 51). Afrocentricity affirms human diversity and suggests cultural sensitivity through celebration and acknowledgement. “There must be a celebration of ‘centeredness’ and agency and an uncompromising commitment to lexical refinement that eliminates pejoratives about Africans” (Asante, 2009d, “Bases for the Civic Commitment,” para. 10). Afrocentricity theory undoubtedly aligns with the diversity lens.

It is without reservation that I stand firm on using Afrocentricity theory for this banded dissertation. Dr. Asante (2009c) states that “the problem of Africans being moved off of terms is a worldwide issue” (p. 1). I believe this to be true for the profession of social work; the lack of inclusiveness of African Americans, and more specifically African American males’ presence in the history and research of the field, is a concern. Dr. Asante (2009d) adds that the “Afrocentrist is committed to the idea that Africans are agents in the world and therefore should not be viewed
as spectators” (p. 1). Afrocentricity theory is important in guiding the framework of the questions and interviewing of a select few African American males in the field to highlight their voices. Afrocentricity theory “seek[s] neither hegemony nor domination of others, but abhor[s] the idea that one group should impose its will on others against their wills” (Asante, 2009b, para. 47). This is why it is important to use the Afrocentricity theory as a guide in capturing the voices of African American males in the field of social work to add a different perspective to the field.
Summary of Scholarship Products

The focus of this banded dissertation was to gain a better understanding of the few number of African-American males with a master’s degree in social work. This is broken down into three sections. In the first section is a conceptual article on the use of the Afrocentric theory in exploring social work curriculum, racism, and sense of isolation from an African-American perspective. The second section is a qualitative research paper that looks into factors that hinder African-American male success in graduate social work education. The third section presents an overview of both the conceptual paper and research paper at the North Carolina School Social Worker Association (NCSSWA), a presentation highlighting the current findings from the research and the discussion of the social work curriculum in the conceptual article.
Discussion

The literature on African-American males in social work education is very limited and the information reviewed support the argument that the social work curriculum has an effect on African-American males. Reports in an article states that African-American men are amongst the lowest numbers of licensed social workers in comparing to other races (Morris-Compton, 2007). Social work education has no specific way measure the implicit curriculum that could be replicated by social work programs. Reasons for African-Americans to select social work as a major were gender differences, minority faculty present, academic reputation and school climate toward minorities. The attrition of African-American males in higher education is attributed to their secondary education preparation. Oppression was noted as a contributing factor for some African-American males who were the only males in their program with no support. Although, some graduate programs address CSWE requirements on topics of race, power, privilege and cultural competence, more content on diversity specifically addressing African-American men is needed. That is why there are few African-American men in social work. It was discovered social workers are not prepared to work with African-American males due to the lack of diversity courses offered in some social work programs. A contributing factor to African-American male’s success was attributed to support of peers, friendships and organizational memberships. In higher education in general a lot of research reports that the lack of African-American males in higher education is due to challenges with low GPA’s and SAT scores as well as, poor reading and writing skills. Findings from studies indicate the need to conduct future research on African-American males in social work (Farmer & Hope, 2015). It is significant to recognize the lack of African-American males in social work and possibilities of barriers that contribute to this dilemma.
Implications for Social Work Education

This banded dissertation asserts that social work programs need to be intentional in integrating concepts of cultural competence throughout the curriculum making sure all cultures are represented especially an African-American male figure. The banded dissertation adds to the current literature on diversity and social work education and provides a new perspective around the African-American male population specific to social work. It poses the challenge to CSWE and social work programs to be more explicit in its language to connect cultural competence within the social work curriculum to better guide social work programs and courses. The knowledge on African-American males from this research will bring awareness to the profession. Maybe generate ideas for social work programs to address implicitly or explicitly through their curriculum in supporting the success of African-American males in graduate social work programs. Additionally, as social work education continues to expand, schools will need to be especially cognizant on how to support African-American males students in graduate social work programs to help the profession obtain more men of color within the profession.

Implications for Future Research

More research is needed based solely on African-American men in social work to assist in promoting social work for men of color. Also look for more strategies, techniques, or interventions to support the success of African-American men in social work. Continuing Education for faculty on cultural sensitivity training for classroom management in how to build rapport, teach, and communicate with African-American males. Additionally, expanding the sample of this research would generate more scholarship to inform social work educator’s practice.
Comprehensive Reference List


Banded Dissertation Product 1:

Use of the Afrocentric Theory in Exploring Social Work Curriculum, Racism, and Sense of Isolation from an African-American Perspective

Quincy Dinnerson

St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas

Author Note

The author would like to acknowledge reviewers for beneficial comments on previous versions of the manuscript. Communication should be addressed to the author at St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas, 2004 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul, MN, 55105. E-mail: dinn4978@stthomas.edu
Abstract

African-American men comprised 7% of the National Association of Social Workers list of registered social workers in the year of 2004. The growing concern for the limited number of African-American males in work are underrepresented in social work programs and as social worker practitioners. This conceptual paper focuses on how social work implicit and explicit curriculums support African-American men by addressing diversity. It is important to investigate how the social work curriculum supports the education of African-American males. The author uses the Council on Social Work in Education’s educational policy and accreditation standards to see how diversity is assimilated through the social work curriculum. In this manuscript, the author argues that social work programs lack educational support systems for African-American males, and more effective supports are needed.

Keywords: African-American, Afrocentric, social work curriculum
The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) released the 2015 educational policy and accreditation standards (EPAS) as a first attempt of addressing one aspect of the implicit curriculum. Although the attempt to incorporate diversity was implied by CSWE, social work programs still have the choice of addressing either diversity, student development, faculty, administrative and governance structure resources to implement and evaluate. Therefore, not holding social work programs accountable to address the diversity concern of the lack of African-American males in social work. Nevertheless, the social work 2015 EPAS afford African-American males a one in five chances of supporting their learning (CSWE, 2015). However, it would be beneficial for social work programs to include diversity to see if this would address the lack of African-American males within the field of social work. An argument to CSWE would be to require social work programs to incorporate evaluating two aspects of the implicit curriculum, with one of the aspects being diversity. Afrocentric theory speaks to the importance of making every culture important; more specifically, African-American culture. One of the key assumptions of the Afrocentric paradigm theory is that all relationships are based on centers and margins and the distances from either the center or the margin (Asante, 2009a). For the majority of the research, the words Afrocentric and Afrocentricity are used interchangeably as both a theory for describing human phenomena, as well as a movement to strengthen and liberate African-Americans from cultural oppression, spiritual alienation, and social injustice (Sherr, 2006). Afrocentricity is a paradigmatic intellectual perspective that privileges African agency within the context of African history and culture trans-continentally and trans-generationally, crossing ideas from continent to continent (Asante, 2007).
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this paper is to explore the possibility that the social work curriculum has an effect on the lack of African-American men in social work. This paper examines the barriers to success among African-American men in social work, focusing on racism and a discussion of whether the social work curriculum lacks diversity that would allow African-American males to feel connected to the social work curriculum.

Theoretical Framework: Afrocentricity

Since the inception of accreditation standards for curriculum development, social work programs have experienced significant changes. The latest curriculum in 2015 seems to instruct social work programs to evaluate the implicit curriculum. In 2007, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) published an article asking, “Where are the African-American men in social work?” In 2015, the CSWE released the latest EPAS that added an emphasis on the implicit curriculum specifically aimed at diversity. Have the social work curricula blocked or supported African-American men from completing a degree in social work? I would agree that social work education has made an effort to address diversity, but not African-American males specifically. There are limited articles that specifically discuss if the social work curriculum isolates or is unfair/racist towards African-American men. The most recent articles that address the social work curriculum were published in 2008. However, there are some articles that address the barriers African-American men face in higher education. Afrocentric theory helps in finding the African-American voice in the social work curriculum because the theory gives authority to black ideals and values and expresses the highest forms of African culture. Afrocentricity theory was coined by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante and is based on the idea that African people should reassert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity in their way of thinking.
Afrocentricity theory stretches with its roots grounded in African tradition. Afrocentricity theory is a shift in thinking proposed as a constructural adjustment to black disorientation. The theory gives authority to black ideals and values and expresses the highest forms of African culture.

The social work curriculum is divided into two parts—the explicit curriculum, which mainly focuses on the structure and course material, and the implicit curriculum, which deals with the educational environment within which the explicit curriculum is delivered. The Afrocentric theory can apply to both the implicit and explicit curricula, as outlined in the following sections.

**Implicit and Explicit**

The Afrocentric paradigm is a revolutionary shift in thinking proposed as a constructural adjustment to black disorientation, de-centeredness, and lack of agency. Furthermore, it is based on the idea that African people should re-assert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity in their thinking (Asante, 2009a). Afrocentricity enthrones the centrality of the African; that is, black ideals and values, as expressed in the highest forms of African culture, and activates consciousness as a functional aspect of any revolutionary approach to phenomena (Asante, 2009a). The Afrocentrist asks the question, “What would African people do if there were no white people?” In other words, what natural responses would occur in the relationships, attitudes toward the environment, kinship patterns, preferences for colors, type of religion, and historical reference points for African people if there had been no intervention of colonialism or enslavement? Afrocentricity answers this question by asserting the central role of the African subject within the context of African history, thereby removing Europe from the center of the African reality. In this way, Afrocentricity becomes a revolutionary idea because it presents
ideas, concepts, events, personalities, and political and economic processes from a standpoint of black people as subjects and not as objects, basing all knowledge on the authentic interrogation of location (Asante, 2009a).

There are three factors to consider when viewing the social work curriculum through the Afrocentricity lens:

- The philosophy of Afrocentricity as expounded by Molefi Kete Asante is a way of answering all cultural, economic, political, and social questions related to African people from a centered position.
- Asante believes that Afrocentricity cannot be reconciled to any hegemonic or idealistic philosophy. Afrocentricity is opposed to radical individualism as expressed in the postmodern school and also opposes spookism, confusion, and superstition.
- The postmodernist would go on to say that if there were Africans and if the conditions were as described by the querist (questioner), then the answer would be that Africans had not fully developed their own capacities in relationship to the global economy; therefore, they are outside of the normal development patterns of the world economy. However, Asante notes that the Afrocentrist does not question the fact that there is a collective sense of Africanism revealed in the common experiences of the African world. The Afrocentrist would look to the questions of location, control of the hegemonic global economy, marginalization, and power positions as keys to understanding the underdevelopment of African people (Asante, 2009a).

Using the Afrocentric theory keeps social work grounded in viewing all persons equally and ensures inclusiveness. The Afrocentricity theory contributes to the fair allocation of societal resources and to the extension of opportunities to more social groups. For example, the
Afrocentric idea must be the stepping-stone from which the multicultural idea is launched (Asante, 1998). The Afrocentricity theory takes the initiative to reach out in a multicultural approach. The Afrocentricity theory contributes to the expression of marginalized voices and exposes unquestioned assertions that obscure the structures and processes causing inequality. For instance, Afrocentricity addresses the white supremacist educational system with the concept of centricity, which is a method of teaching any student to place his or her group within the center of the context of knowledge (Asante, 1991). Afrocentricity provides an opportunity for each culture to be included, which is to become centered in one’s own culture empowerment.

After establishing the theoretical framework of Afrocentric theory, let us examine the social work curriculum.

**Social Work Curriculum**

Faculty at California State University, East Bay examined the intersection between the teaching of racism and their role as educators. The faculty created a teaching note that displayed a case study of a newly-established MSW program committed to infusing content on racism into its curriculum (Phan et al., 2009). This article reports on the experiences of a new MSW program in designing a gateway race, gender, and inequality course (Phan et al., 2009). Faculty decided to anchor the material in a gateway oppression-focused course and to build upon it in every subsequent class (Phan et al., 2009). The attempt to address diversity within the curriculum at California State University was embraced by the students and community, claiming it to be a strength of the program. The faculty implies that one course is not enough to prepare effective multicultural social workers to be ready for practice. This one teaching note describes how faculty are experiencing difficulties applying diversity to the curriculum. However, once some form of diversity is applied the results are encouraging.
Nicotera and Kang (2009) address diversity in curriculum development by employing a critical consciousness route. The premise of such strategies arises from examination of the social work educational policies and standards that require attention to the experiences and conditions of marginalized populations (Nicotera & Kang, 2009). The purpose of Nicotera and Kang’s article was to encourage social work educators to extend the learning that begins in the required multicultural course by explicitly attending to social justice concerns in the content of other courses. Nicotera and Kang concluded by offering a conceptual position that suggested three teaching strategies to further investigate the role of unearned privilege and oppression in social work practice and research. With such a great effort to address diversity in the social work curriculum only a piece was attempted with implications for additional research (Nicotera & Kang, 2009). Holosko, Skinner, MacCaughelty, and Stahl (2010) described a 2-year, 5-step process that was adopted to build and evaluate the implicit curriculum of a BSW program at a large southern university. This framework was characterized as flexible and distinctive of the nature of the program. However, a limitation of this study was that it was developed for a BSW program and not an MSW program. M. D. Grady, Powers, Despard, and Naylor (2011) were the first to publish a standardized instrument for evaluating the implicit curriculum. The instrument was developed based on the 2008 EPAS for an MSW program. The study included 110 participants; however, the reliability and validity of the measures were not tested. It would benefit the social work curriculum if more studies were completed to be tested as models for social work programs to follow. M. D. Grady and colleagues made an attempt to evaluate their works in addressing diversity; social work education could benefit from their efforts in creating a uniform tool to evaluate the implicit curriculum.
Osteen, Vanidestine, and Sharpe (2013) take a different route by seeking the opinion of MSW students. This was accomplished by a convenience sample of 528 participants in a mixed methods study. Multivariate analysis of variance revealed significant differences between students in programs with required multicultural coursework and those utilizing an infusion model with respect to attitudes toward African-Americans but not on measures of diversity or social equality and justice (Osteen et al., 2013). Osteen et al. (2013) disagree that conflating all of the pertinent issues of human oppression may lead to a watered-down curriculum that fails adequately to address issues of power, prejudice, and privilege. This study may extend the literature on the impact of multicultural curricula on MSW students’ attitudes about race and diversity. Elsewhere, Miller (2013) presented and tested a framework for the professional socialization of social workers. This paradigm identified and integrated features of the explicit and implicit curricula that may be essential in promoting a strong commitment to social work values, positive attitudes toward the profession’s history and mission, and a variety of forms of social work identity.

Limited research is available on the correlation between student experiences and the implicit curriculum. Peterson, Farmer, Donnelly, and Forenza (2014) make the effort through the use of a latent profile analysis to identify groups of students based on their experiences with the implicit curriculum in school and field contexts. The study examined differences between profile groups on measures of professional empowerment. Profile groups consisted of the students’ educational level (BSW or MSW), gender, age, and race. The purpose of the study was to extend their previous pilot work by testing a greater range of potentially empowering characteristics of the implicit curriculum in both classroom and field placement contexts (Peterson, Farmer, Donnelly, et al., 2014). The findings indicate that an empowerment-based
approach may be useful to institutions as they develop tools to measure their implicit curricula (Peterson, Farmer, Donnelly, et al., 2014). The authors’ research suggest further research is needed to develop assessment tools used to evaluate the implicit curriculum. This article points out that social work faculty do not have a clear direction in assessing their efforts to address diversity within the social work curriculum.

In another article, Peterson, Farmer, and Zippay (2014) examine how the implicit curriculum empowers students in an urban setting. This study evaluated measures and tested a path model that included perceptions of characteristics of implicit curricula, which are faculty and staff diversity, supportive faculty, opportunity role structure, and access to information (Peterson, Farmer, & Zippay, 2014). The mediating variables were participation, sense of community, and feeling valued by the school as predictors of professional empowerment (Peterson, Farmer, & Zippay, 2014). Findings from Peterson, Farmer, and Zippay’s (2014) study indicated that opportunity role structure and access to information had the strongest total effects, including both direct and indirect effects on students’ professional empowerment. The authors recommend that the implicit and explicit curricula should be applied equally. The authors also referenced the 2008 EPAS, which are a little different than the 2015 EPAS, which further supports the request for more research in this area.

All things considered, the social work curriculum is still evolving. There is no clear example that models diversity in the social work curriculum that could be replicated by other programs. Many tools have been created to evaluate the implicit curriculum; however, the tools created have not been successfully replicated.
Barriers African-American Males Face in Higher Education

A limited number of articles have been written about African-American males in the field of social work, which prompted a broader search on African-American males in education. Following is what the literature states about African-American males in higher education, as well as the graduate realm of social work. An article published in the professional newsletter of *Social Work Today* titled, “Wanted: African American Men in Social Work” by Morris-Compton (2007) speaks to the need for African-American men in the field of social work. Morris-Compton also brings the numbers to life, drawing statistics from the NASW list of registered licensed social workers, which showed that in 2004, 7% of licensed social workers were African-American males. The statistics only provide readers with a glimpse into the world of African-American men in the field of social work. Morris-Compton (2007) states, “more insight could be gained from the minds of African American men who are in the profession” (p. 24), providing an in-depth look into the profession. Therefore, this manuscript on the use of the Afrocentric theory to explore variables of social work curriculum, racism, and sense of isolation from an African-American perspective is very important. Morris-Compton had limited statistics on African-American males in the field of social work because only licensed social workers are counted. However, the 7% listed by NASW is still a small margin in comparison to the majority. It is very important that Morris-Compton lists the percentage of African-American males posted by NASW; however, the author could have made a stronger argument by inquiring the membership list from the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) and the CSWE, or the author could have been more specific in identifying African-American males in undergraduate or graduate who are licensed. This article asks the question, “Where are the black men?” which complements my research question, “What are the issues that affect African-
American males in the field of social work while working toward completing a graduate degree in social work?” This research will add a deeper meaning to Morris-Compton’s (2007) question of “Where are the black men?” by identifying factors that prohibit African-American men from graduating. Identifying these factors will help increase the statistic listed by NASW that 7% of social workers were African-American males. McGowan, Palmer, Wood, and Hibbler (2016) discuss how African-American males have always displayed a predilection for education since the time of slavery. This book perspective is relevant because it discusses African-American men’s current position in higher education. The book’s goal is to provide a deficit perspective surrounding African-American men and education. Discussing issues affecting the success of African-American men is a critical point; however, the authors believe it is equally important to focus on the achievements of black men in education. The overarching purpose is to reframe African-American males academy from a deficit perspective to an anti-deficit approach, exploring narratives of resiliency, success, and achievement of African-American men in the academy.

**African-American Male’s Foundation**

When one thinks about African-American males’ success in graduate social work programs, one has to consider the foundation of their education. Do black males have a skill deficit in reading and writing that influence their success as graduate students? Farmer and Hope’s (2015) article discuss the retention of African-American men in higher education and some of the changes African-American men face. The results of the research indicated that African-American males who had low grade point averages (GPAs), low Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, and who did not take precollege classes had a harder time getting into college and continuing through to graduation. It is important to understand the educational history of
African-American men in order to identify some of the issues they face in college and the professional world. Farmer and Hope (2015) provide great implications on factors that influence African-American male retention, but they did not expand on environmental factors such as whether the males attended low-performing schools with few resources. The common theme throughout the article was that precollege courses and students’ GPAs better prepared them for college. These factors are important to this current manuscript in determining the issues within social work education. Through this manuscript, the author hopes to add that a strong foundation in secondary education will yield strong possibilities for an African-American male to complete a graduate degree in social work. The additions may help to advocate for more interventions for African-American males in secondary education.

African-American Male Educational History

Another aspect to consider in an African-American male’s educational history before graduate school would be to review the success of African-Americans at the undergraduate level. Matthews-Whetstone and Scott (2015) discuss factors affecting bachelor degree completion among black males with prior attrition. In their study, the authors address three questions: “What causes black males to discontinue their postsecondary degrees and leave college?”; “What factors influence their decisions to return to postsecondary education?”; and “What factors help or hinder them in completing their degrees?” (Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015). Matthews-Whetstone and Scott discovered that the lowest average number of years it took to complete a degree was 5 years and the maximum was 27 years. Matthews-Whetstone and Scott also noticed that males who attended a 4-year institution versus a 2-year institution completed their degrees in a shorter period of time. This study relates to the future research of the issues that affect African-American males in the field of social work while working toward completing a graduate
degree. Although the key concept in the Matthews-Whetstone and Scott (2015) article is the attrition rate for black males, the article still provides readers with a snapshot into some of the challenges African-American males face. The authors’ limitations include the participants primarily lived in the state of Texas and that they did not explore social and emotional learning supports. Common themes in the article were retention, dropouts, and degree completion. Future research with the issues that affect African-American males in the field of social work while working toward completing a graduate degree in social work could only add to what is already established because Matthews-Whetstone and Scott primary focused on undergraduates, and this manuscript will focus on African-American males’ success with the social work curriculum.

Now that some background literature has been established regarding the challenges African-American males face prior to higher education, let us view some of the factors African-American males face when selecting social work as a profession. Warde’s (2009) study focused on African-American and Hispanic males’ experiences in selecting Social Work as a profession. Warde (2009) interviewed seven minority males in a focus group and identified three factors that influence their social work care choice, which are “personal experience with a social worker, . . . wanting to give something back to the community, and . . . preexisting internalized altruism” (Warde, 2009, p. 129). This article provides an idea of why African-American males select social work as a major. This article also brings attention to the gender differences in the profession of social work. The common themes in the article were “personal experience with a social worker, wanting to give something back to the community, preexisting altruistic values, bringing a needed perspective to the field and progress academically and professionally” (Warde, 2009, p. 136). A limitation of Warde’s (2009) study is a small sample size of seven males.
Warde’s (2009) main focus on males of color in social work reinforces the need to examine African-American males’ experiences within the profession. Another factor to explore in the African-American males’ selection of social work as a major would be to consider personal influences.

**Undergraduate experience.** Bowie, Cherry, and Wooding (2005) examine undergraduate experience in an empirical research study that focused on MSW students. Bowie and colleagues surveyed 207 African-American alumni from three predominantly white universities—two universities in the state of Florida and one in the state of Tennessee. The authors’ findings revealed enrollment factors included social work as an undergraduate degree, influence by a social worker, family, and social work undergraduate faculty (Bowie et al., 2005). Stronger enrollment factors included geographical location, type of social work program, class scheduling, and cost of tuition. “The number of minority students and number of minority faculty, academic reputation and type of social work program . . . and the number of minority faculty and school climate toward minorities were the strongest enrollment decision factors for students” (Bowie et al., 2005, p. 169). This article relates specifically to this current manuscript on the issues African-American males experience with the social work curriculum. The limitations of this study are that the authors did not explore students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and more females were interviewed than males. However, the factors explored in this article support what I would like further research as contributing factors that influence African-American males who complete their social work degrees.

Matthews-Whetstone and Scott (2015) researched three questions around why African-American males drop out of higher education and take an extended period of time to enroll back into higher education, as well as the contributing factors causing African-American males to
drop out of higher education. In their article, Matthews-Whetstone and Scott discover that African-American males who attend 4-year institutions have a higher chance of graduating than African-American males attending 2-year colleges. Another aspect that arose in the research was how prepared the men were in their primary and secondary schools. There are no specific articles found that relate to variables affecting African-American men’s success in social work education. However, there are a few articles that discuss the issues that affect African-American males face in higher education overall. Further examination of African-American males in social work will likely explore in more detail the issues affecting African-American males in the field of social work.

**African-American Males and Oppression**

It could be an emotional undertaking for black males to cope with being the only black male in class and facing oppression, with limited or no support from social work faculty. African-American males may experience a disconnect with the social work curriculum by the lack of incorporation of diverse lessons. Two primary issues impacting African-American males in a pluralistic society include societal racism and oppression (Elligan & Utsey, 1999). In their study, Elligan and Utsey (1999) make use of a case study design to outline the use of an African-centered group approach as a way to help African-American men develop coping skills in dealing with societal racism. The results of the study indicated that the men reported a decrease in conflicts and anger, gained an appreciation of each other, and learned to accept constructive criticism. Also, looking into contributing factors of retaining African-American males in college, as well as their acceptance into college/degree programs, was another connection. Elligan and Utsey make great points in how to deal with oppression; however, their stance is limited because the participants were in support groups which is another supporting layer to
Elligan and Utsey’s structure of the article creates and allusion that African-Americans are angry and confrontational, which is not the case for all African-American men. This article is important to the manuscript; for one, it demonstrates how African-American males are viewed in initial reactions. It also identifies a contributing factor that affects African-American males who are pursuing a social work degree.

**Oppression.** Otuyelu, Graham, and Kennedy (2016) discuss unmasking of cultural competence and oppressive practice in their article a recent publication under the graduate school of social work at Touro College in New York, New York. The authors examined the relationships between cultural competence, oppressive practices, and micro-aggression within the field of social and the larger community (Otuyelu et al., 2016). The article addresses how the Council on Social Work Education requires that topics of race, power, privilege, and cultural competence be included in the graduate schools of social work (Otuyelu et al., 2016). The authors state the impact of race, culture, class, and privilege in society and the work environment in the form of micro-aggression remains ignored within the human service field (Otuyelu et al., 2016). Recommendations were rendered to help improve the issues of micro-aggression which involved creating specific diversity courses, consortiums, and trainings within schools of social work. This research is important concerning the issues that affect African-American males in social work education because it highlights a diversity of issues that are not being addressed by the social work curriculum. This research was very specific that some social work programs are not preparing culturally aware social workers. The current manuscript of the issues that African-American males face with the social work curriculum will add a fresh perspective to this research article.
Fletcher, Bernard, Fairtlough, and Ahmet (2015) describe educational experiences among African-American men. Findings from a qualitative study indicated that social work educators tended to place more emphasis on equality of access than equality of outcomes, resulting in a lack of focus on other aspects of the student’s life cycle such as inter-group dynamics and rates of progression through the social work program (Fletcher et al., 2015). Fletcher et al. (2015) have provided research around equal access to equal outcomes. In this qualitative study the authors examine diversity and progression within social work programs in England that focused on the experiences of disabled; black and ethnic minorities; and lesbian, gay, and bisexual students (Fletcher et al., 2015). The authors interviewed 95 students from eight different institutions. However, the article provides factors to consider such as inter-group dynamics. By examining this phenomenon, social work educators will likely enhance their understanding of diversity within social work education.

Diversity

Another call to diversity training was conducted by Goggins and Dowcett (2011). In Goggins and Dowcett’s presentation they discuss the development and impact of effective interactions with African-American males in a course designed to engage social work and education students in a critical examination of the social and emotional effects of racism on the academic, occupational, cultural, and relational well-being of African-American males. This presentation brings significance to the research of the issues that affect African-American males in social work education. The presentation’s focus is on diversity due to the fact that social workers and educators in Durham Public Schools who work with African-American males are not really prepared due to the lack of diversity courses in their social work and educational programs. The limitations of this article are that it is written as a presentation and it is not
specific to African-American male social workers. The researchers could add to this publication a focus to identify specific factors within social work programs.

The focus of the issues that affect African-American males in social work education is related to men’s experiences. Masocha (2015) states that race and racism are salient determining factors in the negative experiences of black students within social work education. Masocha (2015) reframes understandings of the perceived failures of black males to relate to the world of higher education. Masocha’s implications for the field of social work are important to consider, as they bring to the foreground the salient role of race and racism in shaping differential outcomes. Social work pedagogy should also actively seek to address the racial disparities in the ways in which the curriculum is accessed and experienced (Masocha, 2015). The limitations of this research are the United Kingdom’s perspective on African-American males. The issues that affect African-American males in social work education could add a positive perspective to this research by strengthening a view that does not limit African-American males’ success to just support groups and having to adapt to the privileged society.

It is important to view other research with similar topics that provided implications to some of the factors that affected African-American males. Research of this nature may offer a plan of action that could be extended for the benefit of social work education. Gilkey (2012), in her dissertation, states that support of peers through friendships and organizational memberships as predominant factors for persistence and success for African-American males. Brown (2013), in her dissertation titled “A Phenomenological Study of African American Men Who Were Mentored while Pursuing Their Bachelor’s Degree at Historically White Colleges and Universities,” had a similar interest of viewing contributing factors that affect the success of black men. Brown’s (2013) findings revealed that African-American men’s self-confidence and
the ability to feel comfortable on campus were impacted. Also, the presence of a mentor was instrumental in confidence building, which led to greater academic achievement (Brown, 2013). The limitations of both dissertations were that they focused on bachelor degree-seeking students and were not specific to students in undergraduate and graduate social work programs. However, the dissertations provide solutions to contributing factors that affect the success of African-American males in higher education. With research on the issues that affect African-American males in social work education, the researcher hopes to assist social work programs in developing policies and programs that will enable African-American men to succeed in their program of study.

**Discussion**

The literature surrounding African-American males in social work education is very limited and the information reviewed support the argument that the social work curriculum has an effect on African-American males. The NASW reports that African-American men are amongst the lowest numbers of licensed social workers in comparing to other races. Social work education has not defined a clear way to measure the implicit curriculum that could be replicated by social work programs. Reasons for African-Americans to select social work as a major were gender differences, minority faculty present, academic reputation and school climate toward minorities. The attrition of African-American males in higher education is attributed to their secondary education preparation. Oppression was noted as a contributing factor for some African-American males who were the only males in their program with no support. Although some graduate programs address CSWE requirements on topics of race, power, privilege and cultural competence, more content on diversity specifically addressing African-American men is needed. That is why there are few African-American men in social work. It was discovered
social workers are not prepared to work with African-American males due to the lack of diversity courses offered in some social work programs. A contributing factor to African-American male’s success was attributed to support of peers, friendships and organizational memberships. In higher education in general a lot of research reports that the lack of African-American males in higher education is due to challenges with low GPA’s and SAT scores as well as, poor reading and writing skills. Findings from studies indicate the need to conduct future research on African-American males in social work (Farmer & Hope, 2015). It is significant to recognize the lack of African-American males in social work and possibilities of barriers that contribute to this dilemma. A limitation of this manuscript is the lack of information on African-American males in social work. A future qualitative study will be conducted to examining African-American men in social work to determine their challenges with the social work curriculum. The next step would be to interview more African-American men to validate factors that contribute or hinder their success in social work education. In reviewing studies in the body of literature, more research is needed in this topic area in order to support the limited number of African-American males in the social work profession.

Conclusion

African-American males are faced with many challenges in higher education and more specifically in social work education. It is imperative that more information is added to the literature deficit on the subject matter of African-American males in social work. CSWE would benefit by incorporating diversity assessment in social work programs across the country. It’s recommended that CSWE provide social work programs with suggestive curriculum guides and evaluation tools that include diversity as a key component. It is suggested that social work education embrace images and literature of African-Americans in teaching social work courses.
This paper will give insight to social work programs on ideas on how to support African-American males in their perspective programs. Support for African-American males in higher education and more specifically in social work education is needed.
Banded Dissertation Product 2:

Factors African-American Men Identify as Hindering Completion of a Graduate (MSW) Degree

Quincy Dinnerson

St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
Abstract

Afrocentricity theory, which gives authority to black ideals and values, was used in this qualitative, exploratory study as a framework of organization. Using semi-structured interviews, 15 African-American men were interviewed with the goal of understanding factors that hinder African-American males from completing a graduate social work degree (MSW). Important results fell under three major categories of isolation, racism, and social work curriculum. The key terms of this study were African-American males, isolation, racism, and social work curriculum. Statements from men such as “it’s hard because people look at you as you are speaking for everybody but you are speaking from your experience” describe isolation. The men also described racism in many scenarios, one in particular: “I was asked by one of my peers was I awarded advance standing because I was a minority.” In viewing the social work curriculum some of the men thought “the curriculum assumed I was female or white male.” Another obstacle shared by the men was financial hardships. Other strengths gained from the men’s statements were the need for support and mentorship. Implications of these findings coming from the respondents’ comments suggest for additional research and a more inclusive teaching as practice for the social work profession.
This study examined some of the factors that hinder African-American males from completing their graduate social work degree (MSW). In reviewing some of the literature around African-American males history around education provide some insight on the African-American male experience. African-American males account for 3.5% of the total enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities; however, they are disproportionately represented among students who are forced to withdraw, those with relatively lower academic performance, and those who have more negative college experiences (Davis, 1994). Since 2006, African-American undergraduate college students have had a graduation rate of 43% compared to 63% for their White counterparts (Robertson & Mason, 2008). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of African-American males who have completed a graduate social work degree (MSW) to understand the low numbers of African-American males in social work. The variables related to these men graduating including challenges and supports they identified are derived from the seven principles of the Afrocentric theory (Asante, 2009a). However, the researcher focused on three specific variables in the study: social work curriculum, racism, and sense of isolation. There are three key terms: social work curriculum is the explicit and implicit learning content that makes up the social work content, racism is the dislike of someone based on the color of his/her skin, and isolation is the feeling of not being included or the feeling of being alone. The researcher considered one overarching research question: “What are the experiences of African-American men in social work with regards to the social work curriculum?” Using a snowball sampling method, the researcher identified the study participants. The researcher’s sample of participants was recruited from the state of North Carolina. Fifteen African-American professional male social workers in the state of North Carolina were interviewed. The 15 participants had graduated from different universities across the United States. The qualitative
data were analyzed to provide an understanding of the experiences of this sample of African-American males who had completed a graduate degree in social work. Using a phenomenological method to analyze the data from the interviews, the researcher identified relationships among the statements given by the African-American males. Using codes that went on to be organized into larger themes, the researcher will present the findings of the interviews through narrative and validate the study by providing rich, thick descriptions and clarifying researcher bias (Creswell, 2007). The method of analysis was also informed by principles of grounded theory. Grounded theory considers the researcher’s and participants’ views, emphasizing reflexivity; adopts sensitizing concepts such as power, privilege, equity and oppression; and remains alert to variation and difference (Conlon, Carney, Timonen, & Scharf, 2015). With the push of diversity and inclusion within the social work curriculum, this research could add to support how to work with a specific population, specifically African-American males. This research is important as it brings attention to why there are so few African-American males with graduate social work degrees (MSW) and to inform the Council on Social Worker Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) as to how they better support African-American males as they work to attain an MSW degree.

In conducting a review of the literature, 17 articles were selected that were closely related to the research topic of the factors that may hinder African-American male success in graduate social work education. Using a systematic review method to research for articles:

1. Log onto the University of St. Thomas library webpage at http://www.stthomas.edu/1libraries/

2. Click the search menu.
3. First search for terms “African-American male MSW graduation.” There was a total of 1,458 results, out of which 15 had the search term “African-American male graduation”; two were selected for review.

4. Second, search for terms “African-American MSW University graduation.” There was a total of 2,249 results, out of which 13 had the search term “African-American male University”; four articles were selected for review.

5. Refining the search terminology to “Factors that hinder social work African-American students from graduating” resulted in one article found.

6. The search was refined by selecting a specific database. The selected database was social work abstract, using EBSCO host and the search was refined by selecting all types, document – articles, for the purpose of looking for peer-reviewed articles. A search using the words “Factors African-American social work graduation” resulted one peer-reviewed article, but it was not related to the topic.

7. Using EBSCO host under social work abstract, the terminology was changed to “African-American male MSW,” yielding no viable results.

8. The search engine was changed to Google Scholar and “Factors that hinder African-American males from obtaining graduate degrees” was searched, resulting in 24,300 items found. Two articles were selected.

9. These steps were repeated changing the terminology with each key term until 17 articles were selected.

Of the 17 articles, three were more relevant to the research. In relation to the research of factors hindering African-American male success in graduate social work education, Bell’s (2014) qualitative research revealed that participants detected a cultural mismatch with their
teachers; the participants in the study felt that teachers and the schools did not care about them, and participants demonstrated a willingness to be better students (Bell, 2014). Even though the participants in Bell’s study were undergraduate Black males and the current study’s focus is on African-American graduate student males in social work, Bell’s study provided supportive variables to consider in African-American male success.

Other characteristics to increase African-American graduation rates that were noted in this qualitative study consisted of six characteristics that are needed to increase students’ persistence: perseverance, patience, pillar, perception, participation, and preparedness (D. Grady, 2017). When looking at actual factors that hinder African-American males from completing graduate social work degrees, the search for articles specific to this topic yielded no results. One study focused on the completion rate of bachelor degrees for African-American males, indicating that it takes 5-27 years for an African-American male to complete a bachelor’s degree (Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015). Also noted was the fact that African-American males tend to complete their degrees at a higher rate if they attend a 4-year institution versus a 2-year institution (Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015).

**History of African-American Males in Education**

Many studies have been conducted concerning African-American male achievement and pitfalls in education. However, there is a gap in the literature that is specific to the achievement of African-American males in graduate social work education. This current research will help extend the efforts to understand variables important to the success of African-American males in social work education. In viewing the African-American male holistically, it is important to not only view the body and mind, but the environment as well. For the simple reason that
environment and life experiences may overlap and impact an African-American males perspective.

Noguera (2003), who explored the influences of environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of Black males, provides that perspective. Noguera’s study drew conclusions from a vast body of research on human development and the learning styles of Black children. Strategies for countering harmful environmental and cultural influences, both the diffuse and the direct, were explored with particular attention paid to educators, parents, and youth. Implications were made that future research be directed toward a greater understanding of youth culture and the processes related to cultural production (Noguera, 2003).

Taking into consideration the perception that African-American males have of education is an important factor to consider in supporting this research, as African-American men face many stereotypes. Nora and Cabrera (1996) documented the role that perceptions of prejudice and discrimination play within a theoretically based model of college persistence among minority and nonminority students. The sample was taken from the fall 1990 entering freshman class at a major public Midwestern university (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). The findings addressed several assertions that were categorized—the influential nature of academic preparedness within the persistence process, the extent to which separation from family and community facilitates a successful transition to college, the role of perceptions of prejudice on the adjustment to college environments and on college-related outcomes, and the extent to which existing models of college persistence are unique to nonminority students (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Findings provide a testimony to the survival and adjustment of these students in predominantly white institutions (PWIs).
Cuyjet’s (1997) overview of the current status of African-American male college students focused on the disparity in representation and accomplishment as compared to their female counterparts. A sample of 6,765 of students were surveyed to assess distinct needs. Implications were made for student affairs practitioners to be attentive to the under-preparedness and special interests of this population (Cuyjet, 1997).

**Retention of African-American Male Students**

There are many retention programs and studies on African-American males in education; however, there is limited research on how to sustain African-American males in graduate social work education. Literature pertaining to African-American male retention in education mirrors this current research in its methodology and its purpose in looking at barriers. Bell (2014) conducted a study of African-American male high school dropouts which sought to explain why Black males drop out of school. The sample consisted of 15 African-American male high school dropouts; the sample number is similar to the sample selected for this current research. The sampling method used was the snowball method for attracting African-American high school dropouts aged 18-55. The findings revealed a cultural mismatch with teachers, lack of care by teachers, and that participants want to excel (Bell, 2014). Academic reasons were not the ultimate reason Black males dropped out of school. Recommendations were for the community to implement social, cultural, spiritual, and physical health programs that will keep Black males in school and graduating (Bell, 2014). The strength of this article is that it is a completed qualitative study that informs the population about the plight of the African-American male graduation rate. Important barriers were discussed that could be used as variables in this current research. It is important to see if these barriers exist for African-American males in graduate social work education in this current study.
In another qualitative study that was selected, Rosser-Mims, Palmer, and Harroff (2014) focused on the experiences of reentrant adult Black male college students. This study is important because it focused on the experiences of African-American males, providing a different perspective that could parallel this current research as both studies consider the experiences of African-American males in education. The sample population for the study consisted of 15 Black males ranging in age from 25 to 45 who had previously attended a university and then returned to complete their education. The findings that emerged from the research were barriers to reentry and sources of support (Rosser-Mims et al., 2014). The authors identify an actual barrier that hinders African-American male reentry into college, which is support. The authors imply that greater attention to the experiences of the Black male student is warranted. This current research will do just that—explore the experiences of African-American males to see if support is a contributing factor to their success in graduate social work education.

**What Does the Literature Say Works and Doesn’t Work in Supporting Retention?**

This section acknowledges what helps the success of African-American males and highlights some barriers. In reviewing literature to discover what other researchers have identified using different theoretical models that discover barriers or provide solutions, one study stood out because the experiences of African-American males were considered. A study conducted by Robertson and Mason (2008) explained how African-American males are successful in school using Feagin’s (1998) theory of cumulative discrimination. The sampling model was a purposive sampling of 15 males at a mid-sized regional university in the south. The study included the finding that academic success emphasizes the importance of collegial faculty/student relations, understanding and dealing with racism, and extracurricular activities and programs (Robertson & Mason, 2008). The authors’ recommendations were that precollege
programs emphasize study skills, hire African-American faculty and staff, and add courses apart from the core curriculum that address the needs of Black people throughout the diaspora (Robertson & Mason, 2008). A strength of Robertson and Mason’s (2008) study was that it acknowledged the plight of Black males who attend a PWI. One implication is that classes that focus on the experiences of Black people can increase the self-esteem and educational achievement of Black males.

Davis’s (1994) study, which compares the experiences of Black males at two different universities, was intriguing for the simple reason that it provides two different levels of experiences. This is important to this current research because in this current study African-American males were interviewed who attended PWIs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Davis’s comparative analysis study examined the relationships between students’ backgrounds, college-level factors, and academic performance in college by examining how these factors differentially affect African-American males attending HBCUs and PWIs. The sampling model was a subsample that drew from a 4,094-student student opinion survey (SOS). Davis (1994) examined the academic achievement of 747 Black males. It is an important factor to see how different the experiences are for African-American males at PWIs and HBCUs. The findings were that Black males attending HBCUs were more integrated into the academic life of the campus, earned better grades, and perceived their colleges as providing more institutional support (Davis, 1994). Black males at PWIs reportedly demonstrated better study habits. Students at both types of colleges had comparable levels of peer relations. Racial congruency contributed the least, followed by college environmental factors, while these students’ personal and academic backgrounds accounted for a substantial portion. Davis (1994)
implies that providing a supportive academic environment for those who get to college is essential.

Another avenue of viewing the success of African-American men in education is to consider programs. Barker and Avery (2012) explored the ways in which a Black male leadership program (BMLP) can promote academic and social engagement for collegiate Black males. A qualitative methodology of phenomenology was used in working with a sample of eight Black males—three sophomores and five juniors in a 2-year cohort program (Barker & Avery, 2012). Findings from the program produced two themes: getting connected or forming cultural connections through BMLP, and connecting the dots or students’ exploration of race, gender, and engagement (Barker & Avery, 2012). The authors presented implications to encourage more BMLPs to make a positive impact on the lives of Black college males. This study provides themes that are similar to this current research. One potential limitation of Barker and Avery’s study was the small sample size of the program and proving reliability. However, the themes support possible barriers in this research.

Wood and Turner’s (2010) study is comparable to this current research as it examines factors at the community college level. In contrast, this current research views the barriers of African-American males in graduate social work education, so it is important to consider if there are similarities at the community college level that could support this research. Wood and Turner’s qualitative study, which examined the experiences of African American males in a community college, identified factors that affect their academic success. A convenience sample consisted of 28 Black male students in a midsized institution in the southwest United States. The factors that were found to affect their academic success were positive faculty-student relationships, being friendly and caring from the onset, monitoring and proactively addressing
students’ academic progress, listening to students’ concerns, and encouraging students to succeed (Wood & Turner, 2010). Being that isolation is a category in this research to consider as a barrier, these factors stood out. Wood and Turner’s (2010) implications for practice were discussed using the findings as basic components for faculty training and evaluation.

In viewing different perspectives of the success of African-American men, Strayhorn (2008) provided a look at the importance of relationships, as mentoring was mentioned in this research; it is important to see if mentoring correlates to others as a characteristic of support. The purpose of this quantitative study was to measure the relationship between academic achievement, satisfaction with college, and students’ supportive relationships with major socializing agents on campus including peers, faculty, and staff (Strayhorn, 2008). A random sample of undergraduate students from a broad sample of racial/ethnic backgrounds was drawn. The sample was restricted to include African-American first-year student sophomores, juniors, and seniors. This sample differs from the current research since the focus was on undergraduates and this current research is specific to African-American males. However, the data provide an arm of support for this current research. The findings have consistently indicated that the educational outcomes of African American students are not on par with those of their White and Asian counterparts (Strayhorn, 2008). Implications for future studies might be designed to test for differences between self-reported data and standardized measures using samples of African-American men.

**Common Obstacles Faced in Higher Education**

When considering some of the common obstacles African-American males face in education, it is best to gather this information from the lived experiences of African-American males. This section examines the successes and trials that African-American males face in
higher education. This research focuses on the factors that hinder African-American males from completing a graduate social work degree by interviewing African-American males to capture their experiences. In this section, the focus of the literature capsulizes the experiences of African-American males in education, and more specifically, social work. The purpose of the first study reviewed was to extend to the existing literature and theoretical framework of student persistence. D. Grady (2017) used phenomenological inquiry to understand the concerns and experiences of the students. Participants were selected using a purposive sample of six participants. The sample size was a small diverse group of five African-American men and women, ranging in ages from 19 to 30. The sample in D. Grady’s study is different from the sample in this current research in that women and men were a part of D. Grady’s study, whereas this current study includes African-American males only. But D. Grady’s study is important because it is specific to social work, which is a major focus of this research. The findings consisted of six characteristics that are needed to increase student persistence: perseverance, patience, pillar, perception, participation, and preparedness (D. Grady, 2017). The implications of these findings related to practice, research, leadership, learning, and service were discussed.

In addition to leadership characteristics, another factor that stood out was the impact that fatherhood had on African-American male experiences. Fatherhood is not specific to social work, but when one examines subjects like family systems, the father is a part of that system and it is important to see if it is a barrier to African-American male success on a personal level or when discussing the social work curriculum in a course that examines family systems. Cartwright and Henriksen’s (2012) study focused on exploring the experiences of collegiate Black males raised in absent-father households. Criteria sampling was used to select five Black male college students. A phenomenological approach was used for data collection. The findings
of this research resulted in five themes: a male role model or mentor, a supportive mother, wanting to achieve an education, respect for their fathers, and resiliency (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012). The sample size was rather small in comparison to this current research. However, the themes are consistent with the barriers of this research. Cartwright and Henrikson’s implications were made for research that focused on mentor programs with Black males raised in absent-father homes. This study pointed to the importance of mentoring programs as a tool to support the success of African-American men in graduate social work programs.

Looking more inwardly for factors that hinder African-American male success, Campbell (1996) investigated the relationships between the fear of success, racial identity attitudes, and achievement behavior among Black males. The sample comprised 129 Black male college undergraduate students at the City University of New York. The sample in this study is larger than the sample of this current research and the focus is on undergraduate versus graduate African-American males. The results of the multivariate analyses of variance looking at high and low Fear of Success groups and more and less racial identification groups yielded no significant multivariate or univariate effects due to the interaction of fear of success and no significant main effects due to racial identity (Campbell, 1996). Findings suggest that fear of success may be more likely to affect younger Black males. The fear of success was negatively related to age and study habits were positively related to age, suggesting that older Black male students demonstrated less fear of success and stronger study habits than did their younger counterparts (Campbell, 1996). Implications were suggested to help educate Black male students to the meaning, importance, and value of being Black in America through safe experiential activities designed to reveal and explore their understandable racial prejudices, to enhance their
racial pride, and to identify and take responsibility for shortcomings of the Black community (Campbell, 1996). Viewing these discrepancies adds another layer to the barriers that hinder African-American males.

In this current research, one of the research questions explores why social work is selected and if it is a barrier or not. A study by Bowie et al. (2005) looked into why social work is selected as a major. Bowie and colleagues’ study was an empirical examination of the factors that influenced 207 African American respondents’ pursuit of graduate social work education and examined what enrollment factors (EDFs) led them to select a social work program. A purposive sample consisted of MSW graduates from three PWIs in two southeastern states. The sample in Bowie and colleagues’ study is important to this current research because it focuses on graduate students, but it is not limited to African-American males. The findings included geographical location, type of social work program, class scheduling, and cost of tuition as factors that influenced the participants’ pursuit of a graduate social work education (Bowie et al., 2005). Recommendations were made for social work programs to create recruitment strategies for African Americans and how curriculum translates into future career options. These recommendations are consistent with some of the suggestions the African-American males who were interviewed for this current study.

A study by Warde (2009), who investigated the choices of selecting social work as a career, was identified to consider more barriers as to why African-American males are selecting or not selecting social work as a major. Warde conducted an exploratory study that investigated the influences on the social work career choice of recent graduates in 2007. Warde used a purposeful sampling to select seven students: two master’s level Black males, two master’s level Hispanic males, and three bachelor’s level Hispanic males. The downfall of this article in
relation to this current study is that it is not focused on African-American males. However, its value to this research is that it provides that social work connection and it is not just a general study. The findings comprised of five themes: personal experience with a social worker, wanting to give something back to the community, preexisting altruistic values, bringing a much-needed perspective to the field, and progress academically and professionally (Warde, 2009).

Implications were made to ensure that social work programs will be preparing and graduating prospective social workers who not only represent the diversity of the populations served by the social work profession, but who also have a personal and continued stake in working with poor and disadvantaged communities. This current research expands on possible ideas that will help generate more African-American males in the field of social work by exploring barriers to their success. As a conclusion to this review, many of the article selected closely relate to the current research from sample size to methods in collecting data. One supporting variable highlighted in the review was mentoring—leadership and positive relationships were important to the success of African-American males.

Conceptual Framework

**Afrocentricity theory.** The theoretical framework I chose to analyze is Afrocentricity theory. Using this theory adds great perspective to the research topic. Afrocentricity theory was coined by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante based on the idea that African people should reassert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity. Afrocentricity theory stretches long and wide with its roots grounded in African tradition. Afrocentricity theory is a shift in thinking proposed as a constructural adjustment to black disorientation. The theory gives authority to black ideals and values and expresses the highest forms of African culture. One of the key assumptions of the Afrocentric paradigm theory is that all relationships are based on centers and margins and the
distances from either the center or the margin (Asante, 2009a). For the majority of the research, the words Afrocentric and Afrocentricity are used interchangeably as both a theory for describing human phenomena, as well as a movement to strengthen and liberate African Americans from cultural oppression, spiritual alienation, and social injustice (Sherr, 2006). Afrocentricity is a paradigmatic intellectual perspective that privileges African agency within the context of African history and culture trans-continentally and trans-generationally (Asante, 2007). Afrocentricity traces its theoretical heritage to African ideas and African authors (Asante, 2007).

Method

The qualitative (QUAL) research question concerning the issues that may hinder African-American male success in graduate social work education was answered by interviewing 15 African-American males who had graduated with a master’s degree in social work (MSW). The qualitative interviews were not bound by strict rules and procedures but gave participants the opportunity to tell their stories in their own way. The method of collecting data was through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, where there was interaction between the researcher and participant with limited free responses, building around a set of basic questions from which the researcher had the ability to branch. A set of 11 open-ended questions were used to guide the conversation that lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour.

Since the researcher used primary data, approval was required from the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) which resulted in an expedited level of review. The researcher recorded the participants’ responses in a Google document that fell under the confidentiality clause that is governed by the IRB of the University of St. Thomas. An IRB approved announcement was distributed to the local universities in the Triangle (Raleigh,
Durham, and Chapel-Hill) and the Triad (Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and High Point) areas of North Carolina, as well as the Black Social Workers Association and Durham Public Schools social workers. The announcement specified that the study was looking for African-American men with an MSW degree.

Consent was discussed upon the participants’ qualification to participate in the research. Participants selected in the qualitative portion of this current study were chosen using the snowballing method to provide information through narrative interviews. The participants then selected a place most comfortable for them to conduct the interview. The researcher chose to sample African-American men with an MSW degree who live in the central region of North Carolina. Some of the men completed their master’s degrees outside of the state of North Carolina as well as attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs), which provided different perspectives. Using a nonprobability (snowball) sampling, participants with desired traits or characteristics gave names of further appropriate research participants.

To delineate some limitations of the study, the researcher limited the sample to African-American men living in North Carolina. The researcher acknowledges that the results may not be easily generalized due to the sample size and location of all of the men, but many parallels could be drawn based upon the men’s experiences since the men graduated from different universities and some outside of North Carolina.

The researcher then analyzed the data and the method of analysis was framed by grounded theory. Grounded theory recommends that the researcher reviews some literature at the beginning of the study in order to help frame the research questions (Grinnell et al., 2016). Then the researcher reviews more literature after the interviews, taking direction from the new
data that are collected (Grinnell et al., 2016). Grounded theory considers the researcher’s and participants’ views, emphasizing reflexivity; adopting sensitizing concepts such as power, privilege, equity, and oppression; and remains alert to variation and difference (Conlon et al., 2015). The data would then be transcribed after establishing general rules for the analysis of the written data. The researcher would then draw meaning from the analysis; that is, to identify relationships between the major themes that have emerged and to build theories around these for future testing.

The researcher used selective coding, placing the participants’ responses under three categories supported by the Afriocentric theoretical framework of isolation, social work curriculum, and racism. To further capture the participants’ experiences, five subheadings were used: common obstacles for self, common obstacles for others, supports/positive strategies for self, ineffective strategies and support, and major and minor reoccurring themes/statements. Themes were highlighted in different colors to distinguish each section. Social work curriculum was coded in shades of blue, isolation coded in shades of green, racism in shades of purple, common obstacles for self in shades of gray and silver, common obstacles for others in shades of red, supports/positive strategies for self in shades of yellow and gold, ineffective strategies and support in shades of brown, and major and minor themes were shaded in orange.

After the researcher established the themes, the instructions were handed to a secondary scholar to read and highlight themes following the directions of the researcher. Then the researcher compared the themes he identified with the first scholar’s themes and classified them together. Some themes matched, others were worded differently, and some did not match at all. For the themes that matched, the researcher decided how to establish common wording. Those
that did not match were set aside to investigate further at a later time. Then the researcher discussed with the secondary scholar why certain themes were selected and some were excluded.

Using the information established between the researcher and the first scholar, the researcher then created instructions and the categories with the themes, and had two additional scholars code themes using those instructions. The themes were compared and the percent match on the coding was determined. The purpose of these procedures was to provide inter-rater reliability, the aim of which was to establish 80% validity.

The researcher kept all research information in any form or format (e.g., notes, transcripts) secure while it was in his possession. This included keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password-protected files, closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer, keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet, and permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data. The researcher erased and destroyed all transcripts in any form or format (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks. Digital data were kept using Google Drive on a computer that was password protected. Data were shared with the dissertation chair through a read-only Google document. Consent files are stored in a locked file under the researcher’s care. Consent forms will be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the study. It is a strength to use other scholars to establish validity in the research.

Results

One research question was formulated to explore the variables that hinder African-American male success in completing a MSW degree in social work. The question is as follows: “What are the factors that hinder African-American males from completing a graduate degree in
social work (MSW)?” Most of the men in the sample ranged in age from 25 to 70. The researcher did not report demographics beyond an overall age range and the types of settings people were in at the time of the interview. However, the sample consisted of 15 African-American men who represent social work on different levels, from school social workers, mental health therapists, case managers, professors, hospital social workers, and department of social services social workers. The sample was very diverse in the sense that some men attended HBCUs and others attended PWIs. The interviewed sample was much like the projected target of African-American men in graduate school. The men’s experience speaks to the challenges that they have faced during their educational careers and the careers they witness through teaching or mentoring social workers as interns. The participants answered 11 questions, whose responses were recorded and organized into themes. The major reoccurring themes fell under the following categories: (a) social work curriculum, (b) racism, (c) isolation, (d) common obstacles for self, (e) common obstacles for others, (f) effective strategies, and (g) ineffective strategies. Important themes that emerged are discussed below according to how they rank under the subheadings.

A literature review was conducted to inform questions for a structured interview. After reviewing responses, the researcher and a second coder independently determined categories for coding the responses. These categories were compared and discussed to establish common wording. The categories were then tested by having several reviewers code a set of responses. Modifications were made, the directions were clarified, and another set of responses were tested. Inter-rater reliability was computed (89.4%) with a score agreement procedure. Two coders then coded the responses. Cohen’s Kappa (80.6%) was computed on the items classified into the
major categories of Social Work Curriculum, Racism, and Isolation. The percentages were computed first by category, and then computed by statements within each category.

The results showed that the primary categories were classified into statements about personal experience and observation of peers. The results showed that a majority of the statements fell into the major category of Isolation. Some of the isolation statements fell under the subcategory of being treated as the token black voice that speaks for all African-American men. One of the gentlemen quoted, “It’s hard because people look at you as you are speaking for everybody but you are speaking from your experience.” Under the umbrella of isolation, much emotion was discovered on how the men were feeling in that moment. “I was a diversity statistic until the next year when another black male came along, so I felt used to make the program look good.” Another example was, “as the only male in class you may hold back because you are the only one and being afraid that no one will understand your experience.” The two emotions that were exposed in those statements were fear and disappointment, such heavy emotions. How some of the men coped with their isolation was amazing. “I dealt with the feeling of being the diversity muse because I felt like I had to be the voice and it was important to share a strong opinion.”

In looking under the heading of social work curriculum, one of the categories that statements frequently fell under was the curriculum assumes students are female and white. Many of the men expressed concern with connection to social work. One responded stated that social work “did not connect to my reality.” Some men felt “none of the material applied to me personally.” Men felt excluded because “none of the material was not diversified, meaning using people of color or scenarios that involved people of color.” The men were not feeling inclusive with the curriculum. One respondent stated, “I think it’s a major disconnect from the case
studies and language that was used it seems like it was written from the dominant male perspective.” In viewing the last major heading, racism, one of the frequent categories under racism was coping with stereotypes. One respondent stated, “I found myself being a proxy for all black issues and problems and I did not feel comfortable and at times made me upset because I grew up with a lawn and my parents.” Many of the men faced challenges verbally from their peers and sometimes leadership. For instance, one respondent said, “I was asked by one of my peers was I awarded advance standing because I was a minority.” These comments are illustrated in Figures 1-4. Within each major category, statements were classified by subcategory, and reported separately for whether the statements were about personal experience or something observed about peers. The data revealed in the major themes that isolation was the largest contributor of hindrance to the success of African-American males in graduate social work, followed by the impact of the social work curriculum and racism. Some of the major statements that fell under isolation was dealing with stereotypes, treated as the token Black voice, and the limitations of other Black men. Viewing the racism category, the men were faced with a criminal background history that prevented them from advancing in the field, for example in applying for licensure, which prevents some males from pursuing a master’s degree. Racial stereotypes also fell under the category of racism in some situations when it was assumed by peers and faculty that the study participants were raised in a single-parent family or from poor neighborhoods. Ineffective/counterproductive well-intentioned White allies and Black versus White social workers tend to self-segregate in groups cliques are two subgroups that fell under the category of racism. Some of the men felt that they had an ally when they entered into their master’s program until they made a certain stance or another minority male entered the program. The men also stated that many groups were formed for support and for negative conversation,
creating barriers for collaborative communication. The second largest of the three major categories was with the social work curriculum. The men’s statements fell under four areas with the social work curriculum: (a) balancing social/work/family life with social work, (b) curriculum assuming all students are female, (c) curriculum assuming students are White, and (d) not enough real-world preparation. Many of the men expressed that it was difficult to balance social work classes with work and having a social life; finding a voice with a curriculum that assumed a majority of the students were female made it hard for the men to relate. The same applied with the curriculum assuming that the majority was White and not having many examples that pertained to people of color in case studies, pictures in books, or authors causing men to not feel included.

Some of the men felt as though there were not as prepared leaving their programs after graduation; the men felt like the curriculum shielded them from reality. Other subcategories were effective strategies, ineffective strategies, and common obstacles. Some of the common obstacles mention by the men were (a) awareness of social work as a major, (b) statistics, (c) writing well, (d) perceptions, (e) negative experience with a social worker, (f) low paying careers post-graduation, (g) no male professors/mentors, and (h) lack of exposure due to socioeconomic status. Many men shared they believed more men of color would possibly consider social work if they knew more about it, stating “social work is not advertised” or people don’t understand the degree, just thinking “social workers take babies”; some of the gentlemen shared there is not a plethora of information about social work.

Another obstacle shared by two men was having to take statistics; this was an obstacle because math was not a strong point and the men shared this course almost convinced them to change majors. The skill of writing well in order to survive in a social work program was shared
by the men who are currently teaching and a student who is practicing. The concern with writing was not knowing how to write at a scholarly level or having to relearn the APA rules.

Six of the men spoke about the constant perceptions that were very negative—perceptions by peers of being admitted solely for the sake of diversity ruse and not on the basis of scholarship or viewed as a threat because of tone of their voice, their size, or their demeanor. Other reasons the men listed as to why it was hard to get African-American men to complete a graduate social work degree was negative past experience with a social worker in a school or in the home. Also, many of the men mentioned that the pay rate could deter many men from the field of social work in comparison to STEM fields. Eight of the men spoke strongly about how not having male faculty as a representative or mentor made it hard to envision completing the work without a lived example to relate to or rely upon for support.

A few of the men relayed that the lack of exposure to different cultures and areas was a shock that took some adjustment in order to feel comfortable engaging in conversations. For example, one of the men who is a current professor spoke about how he notices how his African-American male students shy away from and do not participate in conversations when students are sharing experiences of traveling overseas and from state to state, not feeling like their experience is comparable. Another participant stated he felt “less than” when he could not relate to the experience because of his background.

A few of the men listed some effective strategies that helped them succeed through their program. Some of the strategies were self-identification, support from Black associations, organizations, and connecting with a Black male social worker mentor. Two of the men expressed the importance of self-identification, meaning being strong in who one is so that one is not ashamed or constantly second guessing oneself or devaluing oneself when others are sharing.
Many of the men spoke of the importance of finding support when times were hard or when they felt alone and discouraged; things that helped was connecting with a professor who looked like them or joining an organization like the Black Social Workers Association or different African-American organizations on their respective campus where they could speak freely without judgement. The literature also spoke to the importance of having support as a major avenue for the success of African-American males in education.

Some men listed ineffective strategies as they reflected in their interviews, noting that it was not helpful for their learning process or to social work to be silent and brush things off, meaning to overlook unbalanced opportunities in their learning. In a board overview of the data, some of the major themes were perceptions that social work is a female profession, not understanding fully the profession of social work, and having a mentor as a support. One minor contributor was the experiences of the men who attended an HBCU versus a PWI. Many of the men attending HBCUs spoke about their support and the encouragement to be successful versus the lack or nonexistence of support at PWIs. It was very liberating and empowering hearing the stories and struggles these men experienced in their journey to success of obtaining a MSW degree. These results follow.
Figure 1. Classification of structured interview comments by major category (N=113 statements).

Figure 2. Distribution of the statements about social work curriculum (N=34 statements).
Figure 3. Distribution of the statements about racism ($N=31$ statements).

Figure 4. Distribution of the Statements About Isolation ($N=62$ statements).
Other statements were classified as statements about obstacles and strategies for overcoming them. The most common obstacle mentioned was financial. In peeling back the layers of the financial piece, many of the men were challenged with the balance of families, work, and school. One participant responded, “Sometimes higher education is not affordable and it’s a struggle to get through undergrad because of cost.” Financial hardship was often mentioned as a barrier, so much so that at one point one gentleman took a semester off to save money. Figure 5 illustrates more common obstacles faced by these African-American men.

The results of the analysis highlight the common themes based on the frequency of the statements reported by the 15 participants. Two areas that stood out are financial obstacles and isolation. These areas and more are discussed in the next section.

![Figure 5. Distribution of statements about obstacles (N=55 statements).](image_url)
Discussion

Summary/Overview of data. Of the three main subcategories of Isolation, Racism and Social Work Curriculum, the results showed that a majority of the statements fell under the major category of Isolation. Next was the Social Work Curriculum, followed by Racism when looking at factors that hinder the success of African-American men in a graduate social work program. The results also showed that the primary categories were classified into statements about personal experience and observation of peers. Other statements were classified as statements about obstacles, and strategies for overcoming them. The most common obstacle mentioned was financial.

Afrocentric theory. The interviews allowed the men to become centered and liberated to speak freely, therefore acknowledging their culture and the essences of being African-American and male. One of the men spoke about the strength of self-identification and discussed perceptions openly and freely. Many of the men had to reflect deeply due to the amount of time since they were in school, so having to reassert themselves back into that space resurfaced some old feelings and sanity to the topic. Afrocentric theory was imbedded throughout the data for the simple reason that Afrocentricity traces its theoretical heritage to African ideas and African authors. The men who were interviewed were most definitely the authors to their own stories and ideas that they shared.

Implications. Coming from the respondents are a few implications of this study for research and teaching/training, as many of the men spoke about the perception of social work being a female-dominated profession or a lack of topics that involved men. Respondents strongly encourage social worker scholars to be inclusive of men in lessons, more specifically men of color. Include male theorists, and when speaking about families, make sure that the
father figure is included in that conversation about families. Dig deep in our history of social work and go further than discussing Jane Adams and Mary Richmond; bring into the fold conversations about Ida B. Wells-Barnett, E. Franklin Frazier, and Whitney M. Young Jr. Not being limited or narrow in instruction is a strong implication based on this research. More research is needed based solely on African-American men in social work to assist in promoting social work for men of color. Also look for more strategies, techniques, or interventions to support the success of African-American men in social work.

**Strength/Limitations.** A limitation of this study was that the sample consisted of only African-American men living in North Carolina. This limits the generalizability of the data because all of the perspectives came from African-American men living in the south. However, the sample could be a strength as well, being that the people range in age and location of where they completed their master’s degrees, therefore providing a different perspective. A strength of this study is that the researcher is of African-American descent, which provided a level of comfort to the men in sharing their stories. The men’s stories alone are a strength because of their richness and authenticity.

More research is needed to capture more African-American men’s experiences to determine the direction social workers should go in educating African-American men in social work. More research is also needed to speak to the different experiences African-American men experience in a social work program at a PWI versus an HBCU. The literature discussed how environmental factors, cultural factors, and stereotypes impact the learning of the African-American male (Noguera, 2003). These were also listed as obstacles in this research; the men discussed how these factors made them feel isolated and alone, making it hard to connect to the social work material. Davis (1994) discussed in the literature the importance of having a
supportive learning environment for African-American males. The importance of having that support, whether it is from a mentor, the program, or an organization, was also echoed in this current research—it is needed as another layer to complement the instruction. Cartwright and Henriksen (2012), in their research, spoke to the importance of a male role model. D. Grady (2017) discussed perceptions in his research that parallel the men’s perceptions in this current study of peers and faculty about their abilities and belonging to social work. One factor that the men in this research did not speak to directly was the importance of fatherhood in their success of completing their graduate degree in social work.

However, the men did speak to the importance of including conversations about fatherhood in the social work curriculum. One aspect that Cartwright and Henriksen (2012) listed as a barrier that did not come up in this study was the positive image or respect for fatherhood. Maybe fatherhood was not listed in this study because none of the questions directly asked about fathers. This research attempted to shed light on and start conversations about why there are so few African-American men in social work with graduate degrees. The research purpose was not to answer the question in its entirety, but to start that initial conversation and to spark more research in this area. Overall, more research is needed in this area to truly speak to strong assumptions as to why are there so few African-American males with graduate social work degrees. The researcher welcomes researchers to extend this research to continue the conversation for the betterment of the social work profession. In closing, writing as an African-American male in advocacy for African-American males, I urge you to take a moment to reflect. Reflect on how to be more inclusive; think on how the social work curriculum, the ideal of isolation, and racism may hinder that African-American student. To sit in isolation or cruise on
auto pilot wearing the mask of disguise, defeat, fear, or hero may be heavy. Could you be the one to add one more hindrance or be a bridge of support?
Banded Dissertation Product 3:

Presentation at North Carolina School Social Workers Association (NCSSWA)

Quincy Dinnerson

St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas

Author Note

This peer-reviewed presentation is part of the author’s banded dissertation for the Doctor of Social Work (DSW) program offered at St. Catherine University – University of St. Thomas School of Social Work. The author is the Director of Field Education at Kean University in Union, NJ. Correspondence concerning this presentation should be addressed to Quincy Dinnerson, Social Work Program, Kean University, Union, NJ 07083.

E-mail: quincyl86@gmail.com
Abstract

The profession of social work has attempted to articulate expectations for its engagement of diversity. Embracing the role as a social work educator means that teaching is about the transformation of learners through empowerment to become practitioners, advocates, and scholars. These presentations introduce first the conceptual framework to engage professional social workers in conversation around the social work curriculum as it relates to diversity. The second presentation presents the research around factors that hinder the success of African-American males in graduate social work programs.

Keywords: African-American, Afrocentric, social work curriculum
**Presentation Description**

This peer-reviewed presentation was presented at the North Carolina School Social Workers Association (NCSSWA) annual conference in Greensboro, North Carolina on October 18–20, 2017. Appendix A provides documentation the workshop was accepted by NCSSWA. The goal of these presentations was to bring awareness around the social work curriculum. Secondly to make sure field supervisors aware of the struggles African-American male social workers are facing. During a portion of each presentation, I facilitated dialogue with social workers who practice in the profession and supervise student interns around diversity concerns for African-American male social workers. This feedback will provide input to my ongoing scholarship to support an awareness of factors that may hinder African-American males from completing their graduate social work degree.

**Presentation Abstract**

The abstract printed in the NCSSWA conference brochure is as follows: “The use of the Afrocentric Theory to explore variables of social work curriculum, racism and sense of isolation from an African-American perspective.” This presentation informed how the social work curriculum isolates African-American and particularly African-American males. The presenter will share information to field supervisors on how to support students during their field placements. The second presentation, “What are the factors that hinder African-American males from completing their graduate social work (MSW) degree?” engaged school social workers culturally and brought awareness to the experience African-American male interns and colleagues face in the profession of social work. The study examined the factors that hinder African-American males from completing their graduate social work degree (MSW). The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences of African-American males who
have completed a graduate social work degree. The researcher will focus on three specific variables in the study, which are: social work curriculum, racism and sense of isolation. The researcher will consider one overarching research question: What are the experiences of African-American men in social work with regards to the social work curriculum?

**Presentation**

The PowerPoint presentation is copied below starting with “The Use of the Afrocentric Theory to Explore Variables of Social Work Curriculum, Racism and Sense of Isolation from an African-American Perspective,” followed by the second presentation, “What are the Factors That Hinder African-American Males from Completing Their Graduate Social Work (MSW) Degree?” The first PowerPoint began with a title slide followed by an overview and purpose (Slides 1-3) that explained to the participants the direction of the presentation. Next, Slide 4 made the connection to the topic and the Field Education experience. Slides 5 and 6 described the argument of the researcher. Slide 7 explained the theory of choice, which is Afrocentricity. Slide 8 explained to the participants implicit and explicit and how the characteristics play within the curriculum. Slides 9 and 10 focused on explaining and discussing with the participants the social work curriculum. Slides 11 and 12 incorporated the literature to support the topic. Slide 13 discusses the limitations of the conceptual article. Followed by the conclusion in Slide 14 which wraps everything up. Slides 15-18 displayed the references used for the presentation followed by a slide indicating a request to complete an evaluation.

The second presentation begins with a title page followed by an introduction and overview to establish a foundation for the viewers (Slides 1-3). In Slide 4 the conceptual framework for the research is explained. In Slides 5-9 a summary of some of the literature is presented and discussed on how it relates and supports the research. The next few slides (Slides
10-13) explain the sample and methods used in the research. Slide 14 displays the interview questions that were used to collect the data. Slide 15 provides a summary of the results of the research. Slides 16-20 display the data in graphs to provide a visual for the audience. The next three slides (Slides 21-23) provide the participants with a discussion of the research, implications based on the research, and the strengths and limitations of the research. The final slides (Slides 24-29) display the references used to support the research presented in the presentation and the slide indicating evaluation of the presentation. The PowerPoint slides are presented below.
OVERVIEW

• THIS PRESENTATION WILL PRESENT EVIDENCE FROM A CONCEPTUAL ARTICLE THAT USES DATA FROM THE COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK IN EDUCATION’S EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND ACCREDITATION STANDARDS TO SEE HOW DIVERSITY IS ASSIMILATED THROUGH THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM. IN THIS MANUSCRIPT, THE AUTHOR ARGUES THAT SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS LACK EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES, AND MORE EFFECTIVE SUPPORTS ARE NEEDED.

PURPOSE

• THE PURPOSE OF THIS PRESENTATION IS TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM HAS AN EFFECT ON THE LACK OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN SOCIAL WORK. THIS PRESENTATION EXAMINES THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN SOCIAL WORK, FOCUSING ON RACISM AND A DISCUSSION OF WHETHER THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM LACKS DIVERSITY THAT WOULD ALLOW AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES TO FEEL CONNECTED TO THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM.
CONNECTION

• EXPLICITLY: FIELD ADVISORS ARE SUPPORTS
• FIELD PLACEMENT IS THE SIGNATURE TO THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM PROVIDING DIRECT PRACTICE EXPERIENCE
• DO YOU HAVE A SAY IN SELECTING YOUR INTERN?
• DO YOU KNOW WHAT UNIVERSITIES OFFER SOCIAL WORK DEGREES?

POINTS OF ARGUMENT

• THE LATEST CURRICULUM IN 2015 SEEMS TO INSTRUCT SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS TO EVALUATE THE IMPLICIT CURRICULUM.

• IN 2007, THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (NASW) PUBLISHED AN ARTICLE ASKING, “WHERE ARE THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN SOCIAL WORK?” IN 2015, THE CSWE RELEASED THE LATEST EPAS THAT ADDED AN EMPHASIS ON THE IMPLICIT CURRICULUM SPECIFICALLY AIMED AT DIVERSITY.

• HAVE THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULA BLOCKED OR SUPPORTED AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN FROM COMPLETING A DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK?

• THERE ARE LIMITED ARTICLES THAT SPECIFICALLY DISCUSS IF THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM ISOLATES OR IS UNFAIR/RACIST TOWARDS AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN. THE MOST RECENT ARTICLES THAT ADDRESS THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM WERE PUBLISHED IN 2008. HOWEVER, THERE ARE SOME ARTICLES THAT ADDRESS THE BARRIERS AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN FACE IN HIGHER EDUCATION.
POINTS OF ARGUMENT

• AFROCENTRIC THEORY HELPS IN FINDING THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN VOICE IN THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM BECAUSE THE THEORY GIVES AUTHORITY TO BLACK IDEALS AND VALUES AND EXPRESSES THE HIGHEST FORMS OF AFRICAN CULTURE.

AFROCENTRIC THEORY

• AFROCENTRICITY THEORY WAS COINED BY DR. MOLEFI KETE ASANTE AND IS BASED ON THE IDEA THAT AFRICAN PEOPLE SHOULD REASSERT A SENSE OF AGENCY IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE SANITY IN THEIR WAY OF THINKING (ASANTE, 2007). AFROCENTRICITY THEORY STRETCHES WITH ITS ROOTS GROUNDED IN AFRICAN TRADITION. AFROCENTRICITY THEORY IS A SHIFT IN THINKING PROPOSED AS A CONSTRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT TO BLACK DISORIENTATION. THE THEORY GIVES AUTHORITY TO BLACK IDEALS AND VALUES AND EXPRESSES THE HIGHEST FORMS OF AFRICAN CULTURE.

• AFROCENTRICITY BECOMES A REVOLUTIONARY IDEA BECAUSE IT PRESENTS IDEAS, CONCEPTS, EVENTS, PERSONALITIES, AND POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROCESSES FROM A STANDPOINT OF BLACK PEOPLE AS SUBJECTS AND NOT AS OBJECTS, BASING ALL KNOWLEDGE ON THE AUTHENTIC INTERROGATION OF LOCATION (ASANTE, 2009).

• USING THE AFROCENTRIC THEORY KEEPS SOCIAL WORK GROUNDED IN VIEWING ALL PERSONS EQUALLY AND ENSURES INCLUSIVENESS. THE AFROCENTRICITY THEORY CONTRIBUTES TO THE FAIR ALLOCATION OF SOCIETAL RESOURCES AND TO THE EXTENSION OF OPPORTUNITIES TO MORE SOCIAL GROUPS.
**EXPLICIT/IMPLICIT**

- The social work curriculum is divided into two parts—the explicit curriculum, which mainly focuses on the structure and course material, and the implicit curriculum, which deals with the educational environment within which the explicit curriculum is delivered. The Afrocentric theory can apply to both the implicit and explicit curricula, as outlined in the following sections.

**SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCIES**

- Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
- Engage diversity and difference in practice
- Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice
- Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice
- Engage in policy practice
- Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM

• Faculty at California State University, East Bay examined the intersection between the teaching of racism and their role as educators. The faculty created a teaching note that displayed a case study of a newly-established MSW program committed to infusing content on racism into its curriculum (Phan et al., 2009). The faculty implies that one course is not enough to prepare effective multicultural social workers to be ready for practice. This one teaching note describes how faculty are experiencing difficulties applying diversity to the curriculum. However, once some form of diversity is applied the results are encouraging.

LITERATURE

• The literature surrounding African-American males in social work education is very limited and the information reviewed support the argument that the social work curriculum has an effect on African-American males. The NASW reports that African-American men are amongst the lowest numbers of licensed social workers in comparing to other races. Social work education has not defined a clear way to measure the implicit curriculum that could be replicated by social work programs. Reasons for African-Americans to select social work as a major were gender differences, minority faculty present, academic reputation and school climate toward minorities. The attrition of African-American males in higher education is attributed to their secondary education preparation. Oppression was noted as a contributing factor for some African-American males who were the only males in their program with no support. Although, some graduate programs address CSWE requirements on topics of race, power, privilege and cultural competence, more content on diversity specifically addressing African-American men is needed.
LITERATURE

• A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE’S SUCCESS WAS ATTRIBUTED TO SUPPORT OF PEERS, FRIENDSHIPS AND ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIPS. IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN GENERAL A LOT OF RESEARCH REPORTS THAT THE LACK OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IS DUE TO CHALLENGES WITH LOW GPA’S AND SAT SCORES AS WELL AS, POOR READING AND WRITING SKILLS. FINDINGS FROM STUDIES INDICATE THE NEED TO CONDUCT FUTURE RESEARCH ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN SOCIAL WORK FARMER AND HOPE (2015). IT IS SIGNIFICANT TO RECOGNIZE THE LACK OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN SOCIAL WORK AND POSSIBILITIES OF BARRIERS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS DILEMMA.

LIMITATION

• A LIMITATION OF THIS MANUSCRIPT/PRESENTATION IS THE LACK OF INFORMATION ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN SOCIAL WORK. A FUTURE QUALITATIVE STUDY IS NEEDED TO EXAMINE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN SOCIAL WORK TO DETERMINE THEIR CHALLENGES WITH THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM.
CONCLUSION

- African-American males are faced with many challenges in higher education and more specifically in social work education. It is imperative that more information is added to the literature deficit on the subject matter of African-American males in social work. CSWE would benefit by incorporating diversity assessment in social work programs across the country. It’s recommended that CSWE provide social work programs with suggestive curriculum guides and evaluation tools that include diversity as a key component. It’s suggested that social work education embrace images and literature of African-Americans in teaching social work courses. This presentation will give insight to social work programs on ideas on how to support African-American males in their perspective programs. Support for African-American males in higher education and more specifically in social work education is needed.

REFERENCES

REFERENCES


EVALUATION

FACTORS THAT HINDER AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES FROM COMPLETING THEIR GRADUATE SOCIAL WORK (MSW) DEGREE

QUINCY DINNERSON MSW, AC | MSW
ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE
INTRODUCTION

• This study examined some of the factors that hinder African-American males from completing their graduate social work degree (MSW).

• The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of African-American males who have completed a graduate social work degree (MSW).

OVERVIEW

• The variables related to these men graduating including challenges and supports they identified are derived from the seven principles of the Afrocentric theory (Asante, 2009). However, the researcher focused on three specific variables in the study: social work curriculum, racism, and sense of isolation. There are three key terms: social work curriculum is the explicit and implicit learning content that makes up the social work content, racism is the dislike of someone based on the color of his/her skin, and isolation is the feeling of not being included or the feeling of being alone. The researcher considered one overarching research question: “What are the experiences of African-American men in social work with regards to the social work curriculum?”
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- The theoretical framework I chose to analyze is Afrocentricity theory. Through the readings and understanding the differences between theories, perspectives, and paradigms, one may learn that Afrocentricity is a theory. Using this theory adds great perspective to the research topic, “Factors African-American Men Identify as Hindering the Completion of a Graduate (MSW) Degree.” Afrocentricity theory was coined by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante based on the idea that African people should reassert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity. Afrocentricity theory stretches long and wide with its roots grounded in African tradition. Afrocentricity theory is a shift in thinking proposed as a constructural adjustment to black disorientation. The theory gives authority to black ideals and values and expresses the highest forms of African culture. One of the key assumptions of the Afrocentric paradigm theory is that all relationships are based on centers and margins and the distances from either the center or the margin (Asante, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

- In conducting a review of the literature, 17 articles were selected that were closely related to the research topic of the factors that may hinder African-American male success in graduate social work education.

- One study focused on the completion rate of bachelor degrees for African-American males, indicating that it takes 5-27 years for an African-American male to complete a bachelor’s degree (Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015). Also noted was the fact that African-American males tend to complete their degrees at a higher rate if they attend a 4-year institution versus a 2-year institution (Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015).
LITERATURE REVIEW

HISTORY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN EDUCATION

- Noguera’s study drew conclusions from a vast body of research on human development and the learning styles of Black children. Strategies for countering harmful environmental and cultural influences, both the diffuse and the direct, were explored with particular attention paid to educators, parents, and youth. Implications were made that future research be directed toward a greater understanding of youth culture and the processes related to cultural production (Noguera, 2003).

- Nora and Cabrera (1996) documented the role that perceptions of prejudice and discrimination play within a theoretically based model of college persistence among minority and nonminority students. The sample was taken from the fall 1990 entering freshman class at a major public Midwestern university (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). The findings addressed several assertions that were categorized—the influential nature of academic preparedness within the persistence process, the extent to which separation from family and community facilitates a successful transition to college, the role of perceptions of prejudice on the adjustment to college environments and on college-related outcomes, and the extent to which existing models of college persistence are unique to nonminority students (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

LITERATURE REVIEW

RETENTION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

- Bell (2014) conducted a study of African-American male high school dropouts which sought to explain why Black males drop out of school. The findings revealed a cultural mismatch with teachers, lack of care by teachers, and that participants want to excel (Bell, 2014).

- In another qualitative study that was selected, Rosser-Mims, Palmer, and Harroff (2014) focused on the experiences of reentrant adult Black male college students. This study is important because it focused on the experiences of African-American males, providing a different perspective that could parallel this current research as both studies consider the experiences of African-American males in education. The findings that emerged from the research were barriers to reentry and sources of support (Rosser-Mims et al., 2014).
LITERATURE REVIEW

- Grady (2017) used phenomenological inquiry to understand the concerns and experiences of the students. Participants were selected using a purposive sample using six participants. The findings consisted of six characteristics that are needed to increase student persistence: perseverance, patience, pillar, perception, participation, and preparedness (Grady, 2017). The implications of these findings related to practice, research, leadership, learning, and service were discussed. The findings of this study may not completely relate to this current research, but the characteristics of leadership and practice stand out in relation to this research.

- Cartwright and Henriksen’s (2012) study focused on exploring the experiences of collegiate Black males raised in absent-father households. Criteria sampling was used to select five Black male college students. A phenomenological approach was used for data collection. The findings of this research resulted in five themes: a male role model or mentor, a supportive mother, wanting to achieve an education, respect for their fathers, and resiliency (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

- A study by Bowie, Cherry, and Wooding (2005) looked into why social work is selected as a major. Bowie et al’s study was an empirical examination of the factors that influenced 207 African American respondents to pursue graduate social work education, and examined what enrollment factors (EDFs) led them to select a social work program. The findings included geographical location, type of social work program, class scheduling, and cost of tuition as factors that influenced the participants to pursue graduate social work education (Bowie et al., 2005).

- A study by Warde (2009), who investigated the choices of selecting social work as a career, was identified to consider more barriers as to why African-American males are selecting or not selecting social work as a major. Warde conducted an exploratory study that investigated the influences on the social work career choice of recent graduates in 2007. The findings comprised of five themes: personal experience with a social worker, wanting to give something back to the community, preexisting altruistic values, bringing a much-needed perspective to the field, and progress academically and professionally (Warde, 2009).
SAMPLE

- 15 Participants selected in the qualitative portion of the case study were chosen using the snowballing method to provide information through narrative interviews. The participants then selected a place most comfortable for them to conduct the interview. The researcher chose to sample African-American men with an MSW degree who live in the central part of North Carolina.

METHOD

- The qualitative interviews were not bound by strict rules and procedures, but gave participants the opportunity to tell their stories in their own way. The method of collecting data was through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, where there was interaction between the researcher and participant with limited free responses, building around a set of basic questions from which the researcher had the ability to branch. A set of 11 open-ended questions were used to guide the conversation that lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour.
- Using a nonprobability (snowball) sampling, participants with desired traits or characteristics gave names of further appropriate research participants.

- The researcher then analyzed the data and the method of analysis was framed by grounded theory. Grounded theory recommends that the researcher review some literature at the beginning of the study in order to help frame the research questions (Grinnell, Williams, & Unrau, 2016, p. 374).

- The data were then transcribed after establishing general rules for the analysis of the written data. The researcher would then draw meaning from the analysis; that is, to identify relationships between the major themes that have emerged and to build theories around these for future testing.

- The researcher used selective coding, placing the participants’ responses under three categories supported by the Afriocentric theoretical framework of Isolation, social work curriculum, and racism. To further capture the participants’ experiences, five subheadings were used: common obstacles for self, common obstacles for others, supports/positive strategies for self, ineffective strategies and support, and major and minor reoccurring themes/statements.

- After the researcher established the themes, the instructions were handed to a secondary scholar to read and highlight themes following the same directions as the researcher. Then the researcher compared the themes he identified with the first scholar’s themes and classified them together. Some themes matched, others were worded differently, and some did not match at all. For the themes that matched, the researcher decided how to establish common wording. Those that did not match were set aside to investigate further at a later time. Then the researcher discuss with the secondary scholar why certain themes were selected and some were excluded.

- Using the information established between the researcher and the first scholar, the researcher then create instructions and the categories with the themes, and had two additional scholars code themes using those instructions. The themes were compared and the percent match on the coding was determined. The purpose of these procedures was to provide inter-rater reliability, the aim of which was to establish a 80% validity.
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What are the issues hindering African-American male success in graduate social work education?
- How was your experience in graduate school?
- What challenges did you face in graduate school?
- In your opinion what are some of the challenges African-American males face in graduate school?
- Why are there few African-American male social workers (MSW)?
- How do African-American males cope with the emotional undertaking of being the only African-American male in class?
- How do African-American males face oppression in social work?
- How do African-American males struggling to feel accepted into class discussions or with their cohort manage?
- How do African-American males feel emotionally supported by their faculty or peers?
- How do African-American males handle isolation and the feelings of being pigeonholed for the diversity muse in class?
- How do African-American males connect with the social work curriculum?

RESULTS

- Inter-rater reliability was computed (89.4%) with a score agreement procedure. Two coders then coded the responses. Cohen’s Kappa (80.6%) was computed on the items classified into the major categories of Social Work Curriculum, Racism, and Isolation. The percentages were computed first by category, and then computed by statements within each category.
- The results showed that the primary categories were classified into statements about personal experience and observation of peers. The results showed that a majority of the statements fell into the major category of Isolation.
FIGURE 1. CLASSIFICATION OF STRUCTURED INTERVIEW COMMENTS BY MAJOR CATEGORY (N=113 STATEMENTS).

FIGURE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF THE STATEMENTS ABOUT SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM (N=34 STATEMENTS).
FIGURE 3. DISTRIBUTION OF THE STATEMENTS ABOUT RACISM (N=31 STATEMENTS).

FIGURE 4. DISTRIBUTION OF THE STATEMENTS ABOUT ISOLATION (N=62 STATEMENTS).
DISTRIBUTION OF STATEMENTS ABOUT OBSTACLES (N=55 STATEMENTS).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial issues concurrent with</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Being an “Affirmative”</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No male professors/mentors, only female</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobody Knows Becoming Social</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black male children separated from</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of exposure &amp; socioeconomic status</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Pay after graduation</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to Learn to Write Well</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to take Statistics</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

- In summary a lot of the literature discussed characteristics that hinder or help African-American males success in higher education. Some of the characteristics that were mentioned in the literature that influenced African-American males decision positively or negatively are: geographic location, personal experience, leadership, role model and mentorship. The literature may not have a direct match to the research findings mainly because the researcher focus on African-American males with a completed graduate social work degree. The main characteristics that stood out were social work curriculum, racism and isolation as major contributors to the success among African-American males success in graduate social work. However, in subcategories under these major characteristics themes populated such as mentorship, personal experience and having role models or being a role model.

- Overall, more research is needed in this area to truly speak to strong assumptions as to why are there so few African-American males with graduate social work degrees. The researcher welcomes researchers to extend this research to continue the conversation for the betterment of the social work profession.
**IMPLICATIONS**

- I offer a few implications of this study for research and teaching/training, as many of the men spoke about the perception of social work being a female profession or lack of topics that involved men. I strongly encourage social worker scholars to be inclusive of men in lessons, more specifically men of color. Include male theorists, and when speaking about families, make sure that the father figure is included in that conversation about families. Dig deep in our history of social work and go further than discussing Jane Adams and Mary Richmond; bring into the fold conversations about Ida B. Wells-Barnett, E. Franklin Frazier, and Whitney M. Young Jr. Not being limited or narrow in instruction is a strong implication based on this research. More research is needed based solely on African-American men in social work to assist in promoting social work for men of color. Also look for more strategies, techniques, or interventions to support the success of African-American men in social work.

**STRENGTH/LIMITATIONS**

- A limitation of this study was that the sample consisted of only African-American men living in North Carolina. This limits the generalizability of the data because all of the perspectives came from African-American men living in the south. However, the sample could be a strength as well, being that the people range in age and location of where they completed their master’s degrees, therefore providing a different perspective. A strength of this study is that the researcher is of African-American descent, which provided a level of comfort to the men in sharing their stories. The men’s stories alone are a strength because of their richness and authenticity.
REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES

Attendee Demographics

A majority of persons attending the PowerPoint presentations (combined) were school social workers \( (n=55, 85.9\%) \). The position/role of other attendees included School-Based Support Program Manager or Specialist, Family Liaison, School-Based Mental Health: Co-Located Providers, and Other. Three attendees \( (4.7\%) \) chose not to identify their position/role. See Table 1 for summary of the position/role of attendees for both presentations.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position/Role</th>
<th>Both Presentations</th>
<th>Presentation 1 ( (N=38) )</th>
<th>Presentation 2 ( (N=26) )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Social Worker</td>
<td>54 (84.4)</td>
<td>31 (81.6)</td>
<td>23 (88.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Based Support Program Manager or Specialist</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (3.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>School-Based Mental Health: Co-located Provider</td>
<td>2 (3.1)</td>
<td>2 (5.3)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Liaison</td>
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<td>1 (2.6)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>1 (3.8)</td>
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<td>3 (4.7)</td>
<td>2 (5.3)</td>
<td>1 (3.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Attendees indicating Other included Assistant Professor/School Board Member, Associate Professor of Social Work, Retired School Social Worker, and Director/Executive Director. Note that the percentages do not equal 100% because some attendees responded to more than one category.

When asked with which grade level they worked, a majority of total attendees worked with elementary students \( (n=38; 59.4\%) \). An equal number of attendees worked with middle and high school students \( (n=32; 50\%) \), and \( n=7 \) attendees \( (10.9\%) \) worked with a community agency, a charter school, a private school, or other school. See Table 2 for attendee grade levels in aggregate and by presentation.
Table 2

Attendees’ Grade Level (N=64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Both Presentations (N=64)</th>
<th>Presentation 1 (N=38)</th>
<th>Presentation 2 (N=26)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>38 (59.4)</td>
<td>22 (57.9)</td>
<td>16 (61.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>32 (50)</td>
<td>19 (50.0)</td>
<td>13 (50.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>32 (50)</td>
<td>18 (47.4)</td>
<td>14 (53.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Agency</td>
<td>4 (6.3)</td>
<td>2 (5.3)</td>
<td>2 (7.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter School</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
<td>1 (2.6)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private School</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (3.1)</td>
<td>1 (2.6)</td>
<td>1 (3.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Attendees indicating Other included the university level. Note that the percentages do not equal 100% because some attendees responded to more than one category.

Summary of Feedback from Attendees

Presentation 1. Presentation 1 was titled, “The Use of Afrocentric Theory to Explore Variables of Social Work Curriculum, Racism, and Sense of Isolation from an African-American Perspective.” Feedback was obtained from attendees using a questionnaire consisting of five questions:

1. How well did this session address Social Work Curriculum concerns and issues that were relevant to you?
2. How much did today’s session increase your understanding of social work?
3. How helpful do you think today’s session will be in your work with student interns?
4. How helpful do you think today’s session will be in your consultation with social work peers about student interns with academic, behavior, or mental health concerns?
5. How helpful do you think today’s session was to your diversity knowledge of social work?
For Question 1, 37 of 38 attendees (97.4%) responded that the session addressed Social Work Curriculum concerns and issues that were relevant to them “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal.” For Question 2, 33 attendees (86.8%) responded that the session increased their understanding of social work “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal.” For Question 3, 37 attendees (97.4%) thought the session would be “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal” helpful in their work with student interns. For Question 4, \( n = 36 \) attendees (94.7%) thought the session would be “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal” helpful in their consultation with social work peers about student interns with academic, behavior, or mental health concerns. Finally, responses to Question 5 indicated \( n = 36 \) attendees (94.7%) thought the session was “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal” helpful to their diversity knowledge of social work.

**Presentation 2.** Presentation 1 was titled, “Factors that Hinder African-American Males from Completing Their Graduate Social Work (MSW) Degree.” Feedback was obtained from attendees using a questionnaire consisting of five questions:

1. How well did this session address African-American male concerns in social work?
2. How much did today’s session increase your understanding of factors that hinder African-American males in social work?
3. How helpful do you think today’s session will be to the field of social work?
4. How helpful do you think today’s session will be in your consultation with interns and peers?
5. How helpful do you think today’s session will be on the future of social work?

For Question 1, 24 of 26 attendees (92.3%) responded that the session addressed African-American male concerns in social work “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal.” For Question 2, 25 attendees (96.2%) responded that the session increased their understanding of factors that hinder
African-American males in social work “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal.” For Question 3, 24 attendees (96.2%) thought the session was “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal” helpful to the field of social work. For Question 4, n=21 attendees (80.8%) thought the session would be “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal” helpful in their consultation with interns and peers. Five attendees (19.2%) answered this same question with “Somewhat.” Finally, responses to Question 5 indicated n=24 attendees (92.3%) thought the session would be “A Good Bit” or “A Great Deal” helpful to the future of social work.

**Reflection on Learning**

The opportunity to present my scholarly work enhanced my total banded dissertation. The process of proposing and preparing a presentation to my colleagues was helpful to my professional development and added to my scholarship agenda. Presenting at the state level NCSSWA conference help build my confidence to apply to conferences on a National level. With that build of confidence, I applied to present at the National Association of Social Workers conference (NASW) and was accepted. Going through this process provided me with the guidance and preparation to move forward to apply to additional conferences. Also, the feedback from the participants was helpful in improving my presentation skills and the overall scholarship.

The presentation of my work overall was a positive experience, but there were some challenges. One of the challenges was formatting the presentation to fit the allotted time given. Another challenge was with the title being able to make room for the title. For future presentations I will work on shorten my titles to fit most national conference call for proposals. Another challenge was deciding how much information to present on each slide and how much
literature to pull to support the argument and research. Consideration to the feedback from the participants will be considered and used for the next presentation at NASW conference.

Finally, I have considered methods to improve my presentation and overall view of the material. Based on my feedback and my own reflection, I learned I tried to cover too much content in my presentations. While the material was well received by the participants I could improve in slowing down in explaining the material and having less content on each slide. It would have been helpful to bullet talking points and allow more discussion. Also presenting twice at a conference was a very exhausting experience. Which limited time to prepare and review notes on the content. I would not recommend presenting once at conference to allow prep time so you are not feeling rushed. Overall the presentations were a great learning tool for myself and a great method for increasing the awareness about African-American men in social work. These presentations were great milestones in my professional career and added to my scholarship agenda.
Appendix A

Feedback Questionnaires

St. Catherine University and The University of St. Thomas
The Use of Afrocentric Theory to Explore Variables of Social Work Curriculum, Racism, and Sense of Isolation from an African-American Perspective
October 19, 2017

Directions: This information is being requested to help me plan future training sessions and to share findings with stakeholders, community partners and others in the field of school social work. Please help me learn more by fully completing the questions below:

What is your position/role?

___ School Social Worker
___ School Psychologist
___ EC Case Manager
___ C.O.P.E. Teacher or Facilitator
___ Family Liaison
___ MTSS Facilitator
___ School-Based Mental Health: Co-Located Provider
___ School-Based Support Psychologist
___ School-Based Support Program Manager or Specialist
___ Director/Executive Director
___ School Nurse: CFST or CHAPP
___ Building Administrator
___ Intern
___ Other:

What grade do you work with?

___ Elementary
___ Middle
___ High School
___ Community agency
___ Charter School
___ Private School

Today’s Session:

1. How well did this session address Social Work Curriculum concerns and issues that were relevant to you?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at All  A Little  Somewhat  A Good Bit  A Great Deal

2. How much did today’s session increase your understanding of social work?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at All  A Little  Somewhat  A Good Bit  A Great Deal

3. How helpful do you think today’s session will be in your work with student interns?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at All  A Little  Somewhat  A Good Bit  A Great Deal
4. How helpful do you think today’s session will be in your consultation with social work peers about student interns with academic, behavior, or mental health concerns?

1  2  3  4  5 
Not at All  A Little  Somewhat  A Good Bit  A Great Deal

5. How helpful do you think today’s session was to your diversity knowledge of social work?

1  2  3  4  5 
Not at All  A Little  Somewhat  A Good Bit  A Great Deal

Please share your thoughts and suggestions:
Directions: This information is being requested to help me plan future training sessions and to share findings with stakeholders, community partners and others in the field of school social work. Please help me learn more by fully completing the questions below: What is your position/role?

___ School Social Worker
___ School Psychologist
___ EC Case Manager
___ C.O.P.E. Teacher or Facilitator
___ Family Liaison
___ MTSS Facilitator
___ School-Based Mental Health: Co-Located Provider
___ School-Based Support Psychologist
___ School-Based Support Program Manager or Specialist
___ Director/Executive Director
___ School Nurse: CFST or CHAPP
___ Building Administrator
___ Intern
___ Other:

What grade do you work with?

___ Elementary
___ Middle
___ High School
___ Community agency
___ Charter School
___ Private School

Today’s Session:

1. How well did this session address African-American male concerns in social work?

   1 Not at All  2 A Little  3 Somewhat  4 A Good Bit  5 A Great Deal

2. How much did today’s session increase your understanding of factors that hinder African-American males in social work?

   1 Not at All  2 A Little  3 Somewhat  4 A Good Bit  5 A Great Deal

3. How helpful do you think today’s session will be to the field of social work?

   1 Not at All  2 A Little  3 Somewhat  4 A Good Bit  5 A Great Deal
4. How helpful do you think today’s session will be in your consultation with interns and peers?

1  2  3  4  5
Not at All  A Little  Somewhat  A Good Bit  A Great Deal

5. How helpful do you think today’s session will be on the future of social work?

1  2  3  4  5
Not at All  A Little  Somewhat  A Good Bit  A Great Deal

Please share your thoughts and suggestions:
Appendix B

Feedback Results

Presentation 1:
“The Use of Afrocentric Theory to Explore Variables of Social Work Curriculum, Racism, and Sense of Isolation from an African-American Perspective”

Question 1: How well did this session address Social Work Curriculum concerns and issues that were relevant to you?

Question 2: How much did today’s session increase your understanding of social work?
Question 3: How helpful do you think today’s session will be in your work with student interns?

Question 4: How helpful do you think today’s session will be in your consultation with social work peers about student interns with academic, behavior, or mental health concerns?
Question 5: How helpful do you think today’s session was to your diversity knowledge of social work?
Presentation 2:

“Factors that Hinder African-American Males from Completing Their Graduate Social Work (MSW) Degree”

Question 1: How well did this session address African-American male concerns in social work?

Question 2: How much did today’s session increase your understanding of factors that hinder African-American males in social work?
Question 3: How helpful do you think today’s session will be to the field of social work?

Question 4: How helpful do you think today’s session will be in your consultation with interns and peers?
Question 5: How helpful do you think today’s session will be on the future of social work?