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Exploring African American Women's Transition from High School to a Postsecondary Setting

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Keniesha Johnson

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University

2021

Abstract

Exploring African American Women's Transition from High School
to a Postsecondary Setting

by

Keniesha Johnson

MS, Springfield College, 2009

BS, Eastern Connecticut State University, 2008

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Social Work

Walden University

August 2021

Abstract

African American women encounter obstacles that diminish the effectiveness of mental health treatment received through postsecondary school-based service. Consequently, there is a reduction in the population's socioeconomic outcomes. The purpose of the study was to increase awareness of the mental health treatment experience of African American women and identify strategies that would be helpful to prepare African American women for the postsecondary setting. Black feminist theory was used to guide the research questions for the study, which examined the experiences of African American female students and identified strategies used by certified school social workers, that African American women thought prepared them for postsecondary transition. Semistructured narrative interviews were used to screen and collect data from 11 participants. Participants were African American women, a minimum of 18 years old, educated in the local magnet school district, and worked with a school social worker. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcribed interviews. Results show participants experienced adequate support from school social worker regarding their financial transitions. However, there was limited support pertaining to the social emotional transition. African American female students may benefit by learning about their intersectionality, barriers to successful transition, and skills to overcome barriers. This knowledge may support positive social change as African American females could be better prepared to address challenges associated with the social emotional transition to postsecondary settings.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Lucille Ernesta Johnson. Your spirit and love will continue to motivate me. Love you always.

Acknowledgments

First, I thank God for giving me the strength and perseverance to persist. To my precious children John and Joseph, you are my calm during the storm. I look forward to watching each of you grow in your own unique way. To my aunt Janette Gordon, thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

The historical mental health experience and treatment of the African American population has resulted in certain present barriers to therapeutic service including, a lack of utilization and the need for more culturally authentic support. Historical stigma, misdiagnosis, and biased treatment have caused many African Americans to recoil from treatment, and instead internalize trauma and abuse, and develop mental health conditions that have long-term negative physical, emotional, and economic consequences (Burkett, 2017). Recently, conversation has increased regarding the need for culturally relevant mental health support specifically for the African American population (Kawaii-Bogue, et al., 2017). Harden Branford (2018), founder of Therapy for Black Girls, explained that, in addition to the traditional pressures experienced by the female population, African American women also experiences increased socioeconomic and racial stressors. However, as a population, African American women have been conditioned to be strong and not to seek support outside of their family or church (Branford, 2018).

Despite the ongoing conversation regarding the need for culturally authentic and gender specific support, areas of concern remain. The victimization and educational experience of the African American female student population do not receive the attention they deserve. Morris (2016) addressed the school-to-prison pipeline that directly affects the mental, emotional, and socioeconomic outcomes for the African American women population. The criminalization of this population in conjunction with other socioeconomic disparities negatively affects African American female students' mental

health functioning and their transition from the high school system to the postsecondary setting (Morris, 2016). When victimization and negative life experiences occur, school social workers are responsible for providing supportive therapeutic services to mitigate with their impact on mental health (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). However, the implications of this service delivery have yet to be thoroughly researched from the perspective of African American women.

I used basic qualitative research methodology and conducted phone interviews with 11 volunteer African American women for data collection and analysis. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), in-depth qualitative interviews provide an opportunity to obtain a wide range of information specifically pertaining to participants' perspectives. I used a semistructured interview format to obtain detailed information on participants' experience with school social workers and facilitate uniformity with the interviews. Ravitch and Carl, (2016) suggested that semistructured interviews include open-ended questions designed by the researcher, and that these types of questions could bring awareness regarding the participant's experience. Open-ended questions also allow for follow-up questions that will yield responses upon which interview participants can elaborate (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After collection, I used NVivo to analyze the qualitative data for trends.

The data generated in the research study have potential for positive social change. Researchers could use the data to bring awareness to the treatment experience, to identify additional strategies, and to gather knowledge on how school social workers can use

Black feminist theory to support the mental health treatment of the African American female student population in the transition to the postsecondary setting.

In the following subsections, I elaborate on the problem statement and how it forms a foundation for the importance and relevance of this study. In the purpose statement, I explain the rationale for obtaining data from the African American female population. Subsequently, I present the research questions. Throughout the nature of the study section, I provide information on how I obtained data and how participants' information and identity were kept confidential. In the significance of the study section, I outlined how the marginalized population could experience positive social change as an outcome of this study. In the theoretical framework section, I provide a lens through which readers can interpret and understand the problem, collected the data, and the data analysis. Finally, in the terms and definitions section, I identify vocabulary frequently used throughout the study that is relevant to understanding the research project.

Problem Statement

As a result of their collective and diverse characteristics, including culture, race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status, adolescent African American women face barriers that decrease the effectiveness of the social and emotional service treatment they receive through school-based service delivery (Williams et al., 2012). This gap in practice results in a marked decrease in the population's long-term outcomes in terms of meeting its socioeconomic needs in the postsecondary setting (Stone, 2017) or receiving mental health treatment. Zimmerman (2018) noted that, starting as young as preschool age, school social workers observe African American female students differently due to

their race and gender. Additionally, Corbin et al. (2018) noted that African American females are in a constant battle between being identified as strong versus being seen as angry or, as having an attitude. According to Jacobs (2016) female African Americans have to fight throughout their adolescence against preconceived ideas of the norm to develop adequate self-identity. Jacobs also noted that, unless someone specifically teaches them, African American girls will not develop the ability to look beyond the norm and develop *oppositional gaze*, or the ability to know their worth. Booker (2016) noted that African American female students often feel pressured to represent the population verbally, feel unsupported by faculty, and feel socially isolated in postsecondary settings. Ji et al. (2015) noted that African American youth are more likely to continue in vocational and two year or community college programs rather than a four year college settings, which decreases the potential for both timely or successful graduation and higher income. Ji et al. (2015) also demonstrated that the employment outcome for the African American population is the lowest at 35.2%. The employment rate for women is 45.7% compared to 62.2% for men. Despite intersectional barriers, cultural expectations still hold that African American women will have balanced, successful outcomes.

Current research demonstrates that therapeutic service delivery in school-based settings results in negative long-term socioeconomic outcomes for the African American female population (Ji et al., 2015). The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL, 2018) categorized Hartford, Connecticut the primary location for this study, as having the lowest median income in the state of Connecticut. The community has the highest

population of African Americans living in poverty, many of whom are female and the head of single-parent households. Within Hartford, African American women account for more than 50% of the minority population, and more than 40% are living in poverty according (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). These statistics indicate the need for additional work to take place during the early intervention stages with African American female population, such as in high school, to decrease the mental health barriers that prevent them from overcoming poverty.

Research shows the postsecondary educational outcomes and college graduation rates for African American women continues to be an area of concern (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). I conducted this qualitative research project to better understand the impact therapeutic treatment from school social workers may or may not have on the African American female population's preparation for postsecondary transition.

Since the 1920s, there has been an ongoing increase in African American women's college attendance (Bertaux & Anderson, 2001). However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), only 11% of African American women over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree, in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts, who are twice as likely to obtain a bachelor's degree. This data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2009) indicate the educational gap between ethnicities continues to increase as the educational level achieved also increases. Without a basic college education, it is difficult to meet and maintain basic economic needs. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2018), African American women between the ages of 25 and 54 were the second largest unemployed population in 2017 and 2018. Additionally, those who have less than a

bachelor's degree account for most the individuals currently unemployed (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018).

School social workers are responsible for the social-emotional development of students (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1992). Through clinical services, they provide support to ensure successful functioning in high school as well as preparation for and transition to postsecondary education and beyond (Russo, 2019). However, cultural, environmental, historical, and present circumstances can include barriers to the successful preparation of African American female students. Such student-related barriers can be difficult to navigate for school social workers (Brown et al., n.d.). Limited time, inadequate preparation, and insufficient interventions are also barriers.

In 2014, leaders of the School Social Worker Association of America implemented a second edition of their National School Social Workers survey and received in excess of 3,500 responses, which was almost double the number of survey responses received in 2008. The survey was used to better understand various elements of school social work practice, including the professionalism, the environment, and the tools available for use during therapeutic treatment (Kelly et al., 2016). The results revealed that school social workers are aware of the need for evidence-based practices and interventions (Kelly et al., 2016). Kelly et al. (2016) also noted there is concern regarding implementation, as most social workers are reporting engaging in reactive treatment rather than proactive interventions. Kelly et al. (2010) further suggested that school social workers continue to need initial and continued professional training. More specifically, the training should include how to treat the needs of students with multifaceted concerns.

Such training may include the African American female population and their transition to the postsecondary education setting.

There is a lack of ethnic minority practitioners who engage in clinical work with the African American female population. In their assessment of the professional demographics, Curtis et al. (2012) noted that African Americans accounted for 3% of school psychologists, compared to 3.4% of Hispanics; Caucasians accounted for an overwhelming 90.7% of professionals, of whom the majority are female. Kelly et al. (2010) also described the population of school social workers to be 91% female and 82% members of an ethnic majority population. The data illuminated the importance of targeted interventions and the need for practitioners to be cognizant of their therapeutic approach in urban neighborhoods, schools, and agencies when engaging with a population that has intersectional needs.

Gender and culture are intersectional characteristics that affect emotional expression and are factors that need to be addressed with African American female adolescents. Reigeluth et al. (2016) noted that societal expectations are different for males and females, and expectations also differ in reference to their ethnicity. For example, Caucasian women are expected to have high levels of emotional expressiveness and communicate their needs, African American women are expected to express negative attitudes and anger (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). This stressful expectation is potentially overwhelming to female adolescents' mental well-being. According to Cooley et al. (2018), people only perceive African American women as warm and inviting when they are smiling; otherwise, people ignore them as a result of the African American women's

intersectionality. Lewis et al. (2016) echoed the idea of the exaggerated perception of the angry Black woman syndrome and the sexually explicit content of African American women. Given the negative societal expectations of their performance, navigating the treatment of African American women's emotional preparation for postsecondary transition is essential. Without targeted strategies or interventions from school social workers, this marginalized population may not feel adequately prepared and may continue to perform in relation to current statistical socioeconomic and educational trends.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 93% of Caucasian high school students are likely to graduate within 4 years of entering high school, whereas 76% of African American students are likely to complete high school within the same time frame. The African American population also comprises a majority of the population not enrolled in school or employed. Of these cohorts aged 18 to 24 years old, African Americans account for 18% of the youth and 24% of the young adults. In Hartford, Connecticut, the focus area of this study, African Americans account for 38.7% of the population, more than any other ethnicity. African American women account for 51% of the African American community, with 30% considered the householder by the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), and 18.2% of those women are single parents, of which 40.7% are living in poverty with their children.

The data provided by National Center for Education Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau demonstrate that African American women continue to trail behind their Caucasian counterparts in postsecondary achievement. Despite the presence of supportive

services, there is a decreased availability of diverse treatment that can implement in academic settings. School social workers are not able to implement services that include a focus on increasing the outcomes for African American women. Gherardi (2017) noted there have been various changes to school social work practice over the decades. However, none of the changes identified the need for treatment that recognizes, acknowledges, or prioritizes a racial lens.

As a result of these trends, it is important to understand the gap in practice, including the missing characteristics of treatment and what the population needs from school social workers in reference to their postsecondary transition. However, to understand and make positive social change, retrieving this information from the perspective of the African American female population is essential.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to bring awareness to the service treatment experience of African American women when working with school social workers regarding their social and emotional preparation for the postsecondary setting. A secondary purpose was to identify additional strategies that are not in use but would be helpful to prepare African American women for the postsecondary setting. Finally, the data derived from this study may also produce knowledge regarding how to use the Black feminist theory in the social-emotional preparation of African American girls who are transitioning to the postsecondary setting. The design that I chose for this study was basic qualitative research that consisted of individual narrative phone interviews with 11 volunteer participants. By engaging in narrative interviews, the African American women

who participated had the opportunity to share their stories and experiences. More specifically, they shared information related to the social and emotional preparation they receive from working with a school social worker for postsecondary transition.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do African American women who received therapeutic services from certified school social workers describe their experience related to social and emotional preparation for postsecondary transition?

RQ2: What strategies used by certified school social workers do African American women feel would have prepared them for the transition to the postsecondary setting?

This qualitative research study has the potential to influence positive social change for this marginalized population. It can shed light on the barriers that need breaking down. Zimmermann (2018), stated social isolation for this population begins when they are in elementary education, extends to unfair consequences or treatment in secondary school (Bell, 2015), and beyond into the justice system should protect everyone (Crenshaw, 1991).

Key Terms

The study includes a number of key concepts used frequently to indicate the seriousness of the marginalization experienced by the population of African American female students. The terms are as follows:

African American: Any individual who self-identifies as Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

Educational institution: Public education settings that receives funding from federal, state, and local resources in which instructors deliver free public education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Postsecondary setting: The environment chosen after graduating from secondary school (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Practice approach theory: The process in which social workers identify and use theoretical strategies to support students identifying a concern, setting goals, and engaging in resolution (Lub, 2019).

School social worker: In the state of Connecticut, the focus of this study, school social workers must hold a school social worker certification. Outlined by the NASW Connecticut (n.d.), the requirements state that individuals who hold a Connecticut educator certificate must also have a master's in social work and a minimum of 36 hours of special education course work. Individuals who do not hold a Connecticut educator certificate must have a master's in social work, a passing score on the praxis, and 36 hours of special education course work. For the purpose of this study, school social workers include individuals who meet these requirements and engage in treatment in an educational institution (Connecticut Department of Education, n.d.).

Social emotional preparation: The individual's ability to demonstrate satisfactory progress in the 5 areas of social emotional learning (SEL) outlined by The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). They include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017).

Transition: The time during which a student matriculates from secondary education and progresses to higher education (Rodriquez et al., 2017).

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative design to gather data from individual phone interviews with African American female participants. The focus of the interviews was the participants' perspective on their service treatment experiences and the additional strategies the school social worker could use. Levitt et al. (2018) explained that qualitative research involves using spoken language to explore and articulate experiences and formulate the necessary data to analyze. The data were then used to address the gap in practice. In this study, I used phone interviews with African American women to learn more about the experience of the African American women and their interactions with school social workers. The process also revealed additional strategies not currently in use but that might be helpful in preparing them for the postsecondary setting.

I recruited potential participants by engaging local school districts and asking them to provide my study invitation to alumni via social media and other communication platforms. I used purposeful sampling to recruit 20 potential participants. However, the study included only 11 volunteer African American female student participants for the individual narrative phone interviews. After I identified the maximum number of participants, they have agreed to participate, I discussed logistics regarding the interview process, such as confidentiality, recommendations for a meeting space, a meeting time that allows for an in-depth phone interview, and incentives.

I conducted each interview individually and digitally recorded it using voice transcription software that I also used to transcribe the interviews. This interview and documentation process provided the opportunity to return to the media piece and repeatedly listen to the information presented during the interview and to review the transcription for accuracy. Rubin and Rubin (2012) pointed out that, by recording, researchers do not have to rely on their own memory, which can sometimes be inaccurate. In addition to being a more reliable source, the recordings offer the opportunity to review and take notes.

After all the interviews were completed, I transcribed and coded the information. I used NVivo to code the narrative qualitative data into categories and themes. According to Laureate Education (2016), coding the information produced from the interview involved taking the information discussed, looking for similarities in the ideas, and grouping them together to identify common themes.

Significance of the Study

The findings from the study may provide information about social and emotional support for African American women who are receiving treatment from school-based social workers. Based on the data received from the African American female population, school social workers may better understand the practice gaps in service intervention and delivery and be able to modify their approach to best fit the needs of the African American female population. With identified and focused treatment interventions, school social workers may identify and prioritize the social-emotional treatment needs of African American females during service delivery. In addition, school social workers

may use the outcomes gained from the study to increase positive outcomes for the African American female students. With a better social and emotional foundation, African American females may be able to transition more successfully to the postsecondary setting and meet their educational and socioeconomic needs.

The findings from the study may provide support for practitioners in research, practice, and policy. Research involving individuals who have experienced or are experiencing marginalization in society provides a voice to that population. In this case, I used the voice of African American women to hear the current strengths, deficits, and areas of need within the school social work process pertaining to a postsecondary transition. The data derived from the interviews might help to bridge the gap between services currently offered and the needs identified to see improvement in postsecondary statistics.

Exploring this topic may lead to new information to provide to school social workers who engage with this population to advocate and further produce a change in the way policy makers respond to social justice issues specifically pertaining to African American women.

As a result of this study, ideas produced and interventions implemented by school social workers may also decrease the need for future community-based interventions, resulting in a decrease in long-term cost. Le Cook et al. (2015) noted this is especially true among minority populations; outpatient mental health treatment often reduces the cost of long-term inpatient treatment as a result of being able to see a health care provider

in a timely manner, on a consistent basis, and in a less stigmatized setting. This social change can positively direct the trajectory for African American women.

Theoretical Approach

The theory chosen for this study is Black feminist theory, which researchers use to analyze the intersection of race, gender, and socioeconomic status, specifically regarding how it affects African American women. Salzman (2006) shared that, in the fight for equity, African American women did not have access to various political movements, including the feminist movement and the million-man march. African American women faced criticism, including being called deserters, when they challenged the efforts to have their needs recognized, considered, and prioritized (Salzman, 2006). Few (2007) noted the notable amount of research conducted regarding African American women and their families. Not using Black feminist theory in research is a sign of bias and diminishes the importance and exclusiveness of Black women's experience. The choice not to use Black feminist theory continues to hold Black women to the traditional standard that their experience is the same as other women. Opara (2018) indicated researchers also need to use Black feminist theory during direct client service. Using Black feminist theory will acknowledge historical experiences that affect the current understanding and functioning of Black females. It will also identify the systemic barriers that contribute to their development.

Different African American female scholars developed and updated the Black feminist theory over a number of years as they recognized the marginalization of African American women. bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Kimberle Crenshaw are three

notable African American women known for their scholarly work and influence on the development of Black feminist theory.

In her writing, bell hooks, speaks to many of the concerns faced by African American women, including the effect slavery continues to have on the image and mental health of African American women, media portrayal, and the need for a reformation of the feminist movement, including race, gender, and culture, not to just continue or make changes to the current broken system. hooks (1981) explained that the racist and sexist stereotypes that existed during slavery and continued in the 20th century devalued the worth of African American women. hooks addressed the conditions African American women experienced during slavery and asserted that sexism led to dehumanizing experiences, including repeated rapes that resulted in the birth of numerous children, who also became slaves. In addition, hooks shared that the provision of jobs in the home and in the fields was a tactic to create a false sense of hope for African American women and also to create division between African American women and men. She also asserted that the present-day perspective of slavery highlights African American men as victims but fails to acknowledge the experiences of African American women. hooks also emphasized the marginalization experienced during the feminist movement.

hooks (1981) also addressed the marginalization of the African American women left out of mainstream America's feminist movement. hooks asserted that the privilege that White women occupied in their ethnicity, level of education, and socioeconomic status was narrow. She contended that the racism and sexism within slavery had a direct contribution to the feminist movement and that, because African American women

experienced this disparaging treatment, even White women came to develop a racist perspective and think of Black women as less than themselves. hooks (1984) also emphasized the need for theory to acknowledge race, gender, and socioeconomic status. She analyzed America through the lens of a White male and explained the positive and negative attributes of the feminist movement. She then explained that, although the feminist movement had a limited perspective, the feminist movement can be taken steps further to acknowledge and understand the prejudice in America's society based on race, gender, and class; and then accept that work is necessary to reform systematic oppression.

Collins furthered the development of Black feminist theory. Her writings outlined Black feminist thought, highlighted the experience of Black females within their community, and described the influence of the education system on the progression of the African American community. With the release of *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* in 1990, Collins developed a framework to understand the experience of Black women through interviews and interactions with such women from various perspectives. The book also included the overarching ideas of Black feminist thought: (a) outsider within, (b) intellectual activism, (c) matrix of domination, (d) controlling images, and (e) self-definition (Collins, 1990). Using the key concepts in the book, Collins explains how the media have influenced and continue to influence public perception of African American women as aggressive and having a bad attitude, the help in someone else's home, or sexually promiscuous. However, it also asserts that, through the various intellectual realms, African American women should

continue to voice the concerns of various communities of Black women and also take back their power elitists in defining who they are. Collins also published *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* in 1998. Here she articulated the outside-within concept regarding how African American women have to fight oppression experienced in the Black community. As a result of this unique oppression, African American women should transition from thought to theory using their social injustice as a lens for the problems of other marginalized population for others to understand them. In *Another Kind of Public Education: Race, Schools, the Media and Democratic Possibilities*, Collins (2009) encourages facilitators of the public education system to be mindful of the discrimination African American children experience and to act as agents for positive social change.

Finally, Crenshaw (1989) conceived the concept of intersectionality, within which she has acknowledged that the development of this theory was not a production of her own thoughts and work, but a culmination of the African American female scholars who preceded her. Crenshaw used intersectionality to explain how the legal system does not acknowledge the gender and race experiences of African American females. The Anita Hill sexual harassment case against Clarence Thomas highlighted this. The sexual harassment case resulted in the African American community and the feminist community having different opinions and expecting Ms. Hill to pick a side that met their needs. They did not understand that, as an African American woman, she should not pick a side because she should not deny a part of who she was. Another example of Crenshaw's work in Black feminism that also demonstrated the need for a greater

understanding and implementation of intersectionality was her work with the African American Policy Forum for the #WHYWECANTWAIT campaign. This campaign highlights the exclusion of Black females from the My Brother's Keeper initiative commissioned by President Obama. The letter written to President Obama from the African American Policy Forum (2014) noted that the experiences of African American males are valid and important. However, this should not discount the racist, sexist, biased, and marginalized experiences of African American females. These programs are likely to receive \$2 million in financial support over the next 5 years to provide African American males the skills, strategies, and resources they need to adequately compete for socioeconomic equality. A limited number of programs provide such support to African American females (Aston & Graves, 2016). For example, Sisters of Nia is a similar program intended for African American girls but it does not receive support from policymakers or financial entities to ensure African American females have access to them or access to the skills, strategies, and resources essential for long-term survival. Data from the African American Policy Forum (2014) underscores that many of today's African American households are dependent on female socioeconomic well-being for survival, so excluding them from such an initiative will be detrimental in the short and long term to both African American males and females.

The historically negative treatment and experience of African American women have led to biased action and marginalization of the population. Black feminist thought provides a way to use historically circumstances to understand current discriminatory experiences of African American female students preparing for transition to the

postsecondary setting. Key concepts of Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 1990) include (a) acknowledging Black women's historical struggle against multiple oppressions; (b) acknowledging that Black women and their families consistently negotiate the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class; (c) eradicating malignant images of Black womanhood; (d) incorporating activist perspectives into research by co-creating knowledge with informants and consciousness raising; and (e) promoting empowerment in Black women's lives. If these key concepts can be included in the school social workers approach when working with African American females in preparation for postsecondary transition, they will be better prepared to transition and navigate later experiences.

Theorists use Black feminist to analyze the intersection of race, gender, and socioeconomic status but specifically how it affects African American women. In its application to this study, Black feminist theory will frame the mental health services within the educational institutions provided to African American adolescent females. Black feminist theory may serve as a framework in which to understand the potential barriers of African American female students. It may also contribute to understanding the social-emotional treatment approach for African American adolescent females related to potential concerns in the postsecondary setting.

Values and Ethics

Members of the NASW designed the National Association of Social Work Code of Ethics to guide and support professionals in treatment, practice, and research. The Code of Ethics outlines values, principles, and standards according to which

professionals must perform. It holds professionals accountable for their actions and ensures the work conducted is in the best interest of the marginalized population. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to bring awareness to the service treatment experience of African American females when working with a school social worker regarding their social and emotional preparation for the postsecondary setting. Ethical values, principles, and standards will guide this research study and my professional performance in reference to the study.

The ethical values relevant to this study include service, social justice, and the importance of human relationships, which are then further described by ethical principles. According to the ethical principle service, social workers act on behalf of people in need and address the presenting social problems that are preventing marginalized populations from reaching their fullest potential. By engaging in the research study, I am conducting indirect service that might first help to develop and then increase awareness and understanding of the problem for those in need. Then, by intentionally engaging in this research study to acquire information based on the opinions of African American female, I am prioritizing the needs of this specific population. By doing so, I am moving beyond their own self-interest to engage in service that expands their knowledge and skills to address a larger social injustice.

Thrift and Sugarman (2018) explained there is no concrete definition for social justice. Rather, the ideas and practices of the individuals or groups of activists implementing it operationalize the definition. Social justice, or the active pursuit of positive social change on the behalf of oppressed and vulnerable populations, may look

different based on the population. Grimes et al. (2013) suggested increasing the present knowledge of the current elements relevant to the African American female population. As the researcher conducting this study with the African American female population, I intend to do that by engaging in individual phone interviews to acquire information directly from the female population. Next, Grimes et al. (2013) suggested, with the knowledge gained from the interviews, school social workers should then use it to work with the African American female students to acknowledge barriers and inequity but also empowering the females to seek solutions in response to those barriers. I will also ask the females interviewed what they believe are the next best steps in their interest and in the overall interest of the African American female population.

The ethical principle *importance of human relationships* serves to guide clinical social work practice in the area of school social work practice because it recognizes the relationship that can develop between school social workers and African American female and that such relationships are a catalyst for potential change. This principle encourages social workers to value their relationship with females but also use the relationship to build capacity within the students. Through the intentional effort put into engaging and strengthening the relationships, social workers are able to help females strategically and intentionally plan for next steps in their postsecondary setting. By also engaging in this supportive relationship, the females increase their own functioning in the short and long term. In the present moment, African American female students are able to receive what they need to be successful academically and emotionally in high school.

When looking forward, African American female students understand that, while there will be barriers, there are also ways to overcome those obstacles.

The ethical standards include six overarching themes: social workers' ethical responsibilities to clients (Standard 1), social workers' ethical responsibilities to colleagues (Standard 2), social workers' ethical responsibilities in practice settings (Standard 3), social workers' ethical responsibilities as professionals (Standard 4), social workers' ethical responsibilities to the social work profession (Standard 5), and social workers' ethical responsibilities to the broader society (Standard 6). Information on the standards appears in more detail under various subheadings. Although all are essentially important to the professional practice, the only subheadings described further for their application to the study are those from social workers' ethical responsibilities to clients (Standard 1), social workers' ethical responsibilities in practice settings (Standard 3), social workers' ethical responsibilities as professionals (Standard 4), and social workers' ethical responsibilities to the social work profession (Standard 5).

Within the first ethical standard, social workers' ethical responsibilities to clients, the following individual standards are suitable for guiding clinical social work practice in the area of research: informed consent (1.03), cultural awareness and social diversity (1.05), privacy and confidentiality (1.07), access to records (1.08), and referral for service (1.16). To provide more guidance, the NASW code of standards (2017) provides more detailed scenarios within the ethical standards. This section can serve as a resource or model to guide planning and execution for the research process. For example, ethical standards that highlight the need for researchers to be conscious of their interactions with

African American females are informed consent (1.03) and privacy and confidentiality (1.07). Standard 1.03 implies that a researcher provides information about the research study and then allows a potential participant to take the opportunity to make an educated and informed decision about participation. Standard 1.07 ensures the researcher will make every effort to protect the identity and interview data collected from the participant. Standard 1.08 allows the volunteer research participants to have access to their information at any time during and after the study without any repercussion. Finally, Standard 1.16 guarantees researchers will provide referrals for follow-up services to participants in the event they are necessary as a result of the study.

Next, within cultural awareness and social diversity (1.05) there are four standards. The standards demonstrate the necessity for a social worker to seek knowledge about and understand culture, work toward understanding how culture affects the client's behaviors, and integrate culture into service delivery. In this area of practice, it is important for school social workers to understand that the culture of an African American female will be different from an African American male or a White female. The intersection of their race and gender has historically led to the sidelining of African American women, and understanding, acknowledging, and including that in social workers' work with Black girls is essential to their planning for postsecondary transition.

In addition, the ethical standard *social workers' ethical responsibilities in practice settings* includes Standard 3.04, client records. In reference to this study, the handwritten and electronic data, as well as the audio-recorded data, will remain maintained and protected under double lock and key for 5 years to ensure privacy. This 5-year time frame

will also allow reasonable access to the participants if necessary. After this time, I will destroy all the data by permanently erasing electronic and audio data and double checking its removal. I will shred all handwritten information and hard copies of the data pertaining to the study and then trash them with an agency compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, such as Shred It.

Next, the ethical standard *social workers' ethical responsibilities as professionals* includes Standard 4.02, discrimination, and Standard 4.04, dishonesty, fraud, and deception. Standards 4.02 and 4.04 ensure that, as a service professional, researchers engage honestly and without bias throughout the research process. The purposeful volunteer selection process will serve to reinforce these standards. I will avoid discrimination and bias by creating a criterion for participation. From there, I can select volunteers on a first come, first served basis. The proposed objective of the study and the research questions will be available to volunteer participants. I will be available to answer all questions and inquiries pertaining to the study, and I will keep an analytic journal to document the study.

Finally, ethical standards that govern social workers' ethical responsibilities to the social work profession include Standard 5.02, evaluation and research. Standard 5.02, evaluation and research, is twofold and helps to guide this area of practice in a variety of ways (NASW, 2017). This standard serves to explain first how to use research in practice and second how researchers should conduct themselves. The human environment is ever developing and changing; consequently, keeping abreast of research and evaluation is important to remain aware of new strategies and interventions to implement in practice.

Next, the standard indicates researchers should conduct the research process itself with caution to ensure the protection of the participants and to ensure the information generated from research is accurately reflected, trustworthy, and generalizable. The NASW standard calls for consent and confidentiality procedures to be in place to protect volunteers and, if necessary, for the provision of follow-up services to ensure participant well-being (NASW, 2017).

This basic qualitative research includes in-depth phone interviews to bring awareness to the service treatment experience of African American females when working with a school social worker regarding their social and emotional preparation for the postsecondary setting. This research study supports the following principles and standards of the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2017): service, social justice, importance of human relationship, cultural awareness/social diversity, evaluation and research. Using research to understand more about the experience of African American females will result in knowledge generated to become more aware of the culture and oppression of this marginalized population. With an increased understanding, school social workers can engage in positive social change by building relationships and delivering service that will promote the population being more successful in the postsecondary setting.

Literature Review

Walden University's library databases were the primary search engines that I used to retrieve credible article related to this topic. Databases such as ERIC, PsychINFO, Sage Journal, and ProQuest provided the largest number of academic resources.

However, throughout the research process, government websites also served as resources from which to gather the most current statistics regarding education and socioeconomic status. The process also involved using nonprofit internet resources to gather information pertaining to the social work profession and school social work position. The diverse information was important to gather to frame the problem, identify the gap in literature, and justify the need for further research regarding this topic.

Key terms I searched included *African American female education*, *African American academic achievement* (as well as *female* separately), *high school transition*, *school social worker*, and *mental health*. All resources were from academic peer-reviewed journals and books. The criteria for the time frame initially covered the years 2015 to 2019 but later expanded before 2015 to provide additional theoretical and contextual information. Expanding the time frame also led to historical information to demonstrate the lack of information specifically related to this population.

Present Data

Socioeconomic status refers to a combination of an individual or family's presence in a society based on the ability to afford basic needs, including food and shelter, level of education, type and status of employment, and position in relation to others (Bullock et al., 2018). According to Maslow (1954), having your basic socioeconomic needs met directly affects an individual's ability to be motivated and acquire the skills necessary to transcend. Present research shows that the postsecondary status of the African American population is behind those of their Caucasian and Asian peers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2017) showed the

socioeconomic status of African American female households is below the poverty threshold. According to Hutton (2015), the stress experienced by populations in poverty can affect decision-making skills in all areas of their lives. Therefore, making the preparation for and transition to the postsecondary setting is increasingly difficult for adolescent African American girls.

Insufficient preparation for, and poor transition to, the postsecondary setting can lead to negative socioeconomic outcomes for African American women. Belman et al. (2015) highlight that women are always more impacted by financial wages, which aids in determining their socioeconomic status more than their male counterparts. Belman et al. explained that women constitute a majority of low-wage job holders. Women account for 47% of employed individuals and make up 59% of those employed in minimum wage jobs (Belman et al., 2015). Such jobs include food service, retail, and hospitality services. Of the 59% whose income is minimum wage, the majority of women are earning up to \$15 per hour while, some earn more and others earn less. Analyzing the data by age reveals individuals in young adulthood who also fall into the postsecondary setting make up 60% of the population who make no more than 10% to 50% over the minimum wage. In Connecticut, this population earns approximately \$11 to \$15 per hour. Finally, by race, African Americans account for a smaller amount of the employed workforce and a larger part of the unemployed population. Those able to secure and maintain employment hold 14% of the minimum wage jobs (Belman et al., 2015) and will not have an hourly income that exceeds \$15 but may fall below \$10.10.

As a result of not having their basic needs met, African American women are unable to achieve a higher level of functioning that contributes to increasing their socioeconomic status. Assari et al. (2018) reported that some of the long-term effects of low socioeconomic status include low mental health status, decreased physical health, and low academic achievement. To combat the concerns that develop as a result of low economic status, school social workers should be cognizant and implement interventions designed to understand and combat these areas of need and increase services that reflect positive social change.

African American Women

The needs of Caucasian individuals are prioritized over those of African American individuals due to the decades of racism in the United States. This bias is now an embedded systemic cycle of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) that continues to negatively affect the African American female population. As a result, the bias creates opportunity for the majority population and those in positions of power and authority to discriminate continuously against the African American female population. The effect of this discrimination appears in various areas such as education, employment, and health care.

The educational and counseling experience of African American women in the secondary educational setting directly affects the decision-making process for postsecondary transition. The motivation to proactively continue their education is reinforced directly and indirectly by a continuum of school-based experiences with adults and peers. In a literature review, Neal-Jackson (2018) reviewed 37 articles that indicated

how African American women perceived that school staff treated them differently than their peers. Neal-Jackson revealed that, when prompted, school staff ultimately focused on the behavioral concerns of female students, such as attitude, citing their lack of conformity with expected skill sets for who they perceived as academically advanced students, and discussing non-academically-related talents such as how helpful they could be. Research conducted by researchers for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010) in Healthy People 2020 revealed that African American female adolescents in Connecticut ages 16 and 17 (the age of postsecondary transition) are the largest group of individuals who feel they have no one to talk to.

Morris and Perry (2017) completed a multilevel model and longitudinal data analyses from the Kentucky School Disciplinary Study data collected from August 2007 to June 2011. The disciplinary referral data came from 30,202 children in Grades 6–12 from 22 schools and highlighted the increase in behavior discipline allocated to African American female students. They insisted that teachers and school officials use the benchmark displayed by Caucasian students to evaluate African American girls. As a result, the African American girls received unfair consequences for minor infractions, culturally different behavior, and age-appropriate behavior. White (2018) contended that zero-tolerance policies do not allow room for understanding the context of a situation. For minor infractions, they increase the likelihood that African American girls will receive punishment for noncompliance, disruption, and other noncriminal behaviors. Over time, such punishment decreases attendance, school engagement, and motivation to pursue education and social-emotional well-being.

The level of education achieved by African American women lacks in comparison to those of women from other cultures. Winkle-Wagner (2015) proposed identifying specific factors that affect African American women's ability to consistently obtain higher education and who are ultimately responsible for this accomplishment. Winkle-Wagner conducted a literature review to analyze current data and information, noting the literature pertaining to African American women was minimal. Most of the information obtained was in comparison with African American boys and men or other ethnicities. Winkle-Wagner concluded that 47% of the authors in the literature reviewed noted African American women were individually responsible for attaining their education, and 32% of the authors in the literature reviewed noted relationships with others, which primarily consist of one-to-one affiliation with staff members, family relatives, and other individuals, play a part in attaining an education. Finally, 21% of the authors in the literature reviewed attributed the decision to attain an education to institutional support such as the school environment (Winkle-Wagner, 2015), which reinforces the importance of school social workers' interaction with the African American female population.

Burke and Carter (2015) acknowledged the educational growth that African American women have experienced and offered an increased understanding of the perception African Americans hold regarding networking and their career advancement opportunities. Burke and Carter (2015) used a quantitative survey that also included a request for narrative information. This approach provided access to in-depth information about the phenomena that was not quantifiable. The research showed the potential and desire African American women have to transition to the postsecondary setting and be

successful in their long-term outcomes, which reinforces the importance of the mental health support the African American female population receives while planning for transition to the postsecondary setting.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality has developed over the decades to include the various social constructs that describe who people are and how they experience things around them. However, Villesèche et al. (2018) emphasized that Crenshaw (1989), referred to the experiences of African American women in intersectionality's original conception. When applied to the experiences of African American women, intersectionality considers their race, gender, age, and socioeconomic status and the way these factors are working against them. Intersectionality demonstrates how African American women experience marginalization in their mental health preparation for their transition to the postsecondary setting.

Socioeconomic status greatly affects the functioning of African American women. According to the analysts at the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), of all the ethnicities, households whose members are African American have the lowest income. When arranged by gender, the female population has the lower income. The low-income African American female population is also the largest affected by minimum wages (Belman et al., 2015). Research has repeatedly demonstrated that low wages directly impact family functioning, mental and physical health, and the ability to learn, which consequently increases the need for supportive services.

Specifically, for African American families with female children, low wages affect the provision of basic needs, including food, shelter, supervision, safety, and quality family interaction. Dodson and Albelda (2012) reported that families with low income must often decide between essentials that determine the quality of life for their children. For example, after-school programs lead to increased benefits in physical health, positive adolescent adjustment, relationship building, and school engagement (Zarrett et al., 2018). However, African American female adolescents are frequently left at home after school to care for themselves and siblings as a way to save their family money. Therefore, they miss the opportunity to participate in enrichment activities and after-school programs and forfeit valuable experiences that may aid in their mental health development.

Within the community they reside, safety may also be a concern. Low wages limit housing availability and the location options for African American families to reside. Disenfranchised neighborhoods often have high levels of violence and crime, which forces children to remain indoors. The resulting decrease in peer-to-peer interaction hinders social and mental health development. Burdick-Will (2016) noted that early and excessive exposure to violence affects academic progress. Due to the stress, adolescents are more likely to worry about and focus on their safety rather than education, which hinders students' ability to meet their academic demands in the secondary setting and to think objectively about progressing to the postsecondary setting to the best of their ability.

Adolescent development is tumultuous and influenced by the social power theory identified by Goodrich and Mangleburg (2010). Goodrich and Mangleburg (2010) explained social power is when adolescents perceive that peers have the ability to reward and punish, which increases the perceived desire for adolescents to yield to peer pressure of various forms, and their friends outweigh choices of higher moral importance. The impact of social power on the adolescents' perspective increases the chances that adolescent students will make decisions that may negatively affect their transition to the postsecondary setting. African American adolescents are more at risk when they live in impoverished, low socioeconomic neighborhoods where violence, theft, crime, and drug use are frequent. Tillyer and Tillyer (2016) noted that the data obtained from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health surveys through the National Crime Victimization Survey identified that African American youth are more likely to participate in underage drinking, recreational drugs, sneaking out of the home, and skipping school, all of which are considered risky, inappropriate age behaviors in adolescence and are precursors for other deviant behaviors in adults in the postsecondary setting. Whereas Voisin and Kim (2018) emphasized the behavioral impact that the environment can have on African American youth, Silk et al. (2017) confirmed that, in alignment with their development, negative words and influences are directed toward adolescents who are already experiencing stressors affects their brain functioning. This makes mental health preparations for African American youth who will be transitioning to the postsecondary setting is essential.

Concerns are growing regarding the effect of low wages, low socioeconomic status, lack of safety, and heightened peer influence on the adolescent African American female population and their transition to the postsecondary environment. However, the U.S. government is not implementing interventions for African American girls as compared to their male counterparts (African American Policy Forum, 2014). Initiatives like My Brother's Keeper and other African American male initiatives developed within high schools, colleges, universities, and other community-based or nonprofit organizations are plentiful as a result of the focus and as a result of publications referring to African American male issues. As a result of their various intersectional constructs, female African Americans are exposed to the same risk factors. They are offered fewer supportive services but are still expected to function academically and behaviorally. This increases the importance of the mental health support provided by school-based social workers who are working with female African Americans to prepare them for their postsecondary transition.

School Social Workers

The profession of school social work began in the early 1900s in various parts of the world (Vicary et al., 2018). Vicary et al. (2018) noted that the development of social work has its own bias. Social work in its inception was developed from a middle-class, Caucasian, American, male perspective as a response to the social and economic inequality experienced by marginalized populations as a result of the systemic oppression enforced by privileged populations (Vicary et al., 2018). In the early 1900s, visiting teachers, currently known as social workers, were responsible for creating and sustaining

a connection between the school, community, and families of underprivileged children (Kopels, 2016). The school social work profession has since developed into more than a home visiting program. In addition to the previously noted responsibilities, as a result of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), school social workers are responsible for providing evidence-based counseling support for a broader population, including children, and emotional support for the families of those who receive special education services (Teasley, 2016). School social workers connect families to necessary resources not provided by the school or not immediately available in their communities. With the increase in violence in schools, bullying, and the desire to increase student outcomes, there is a greater need to hire more social workers and increase their responsibilities.

The purpose of school social work is to focus on and assist in the healthy social, emotional, and behavioral development of adolescents. Kelly et al. (2010) noted that the framework for school social work dictates using Response to Intervention practices within their work. These practices include capacity building, evidence-based, tried interventions that are data driven (Kelly et al., 2010). In 2012, the leaders of the NASW updated the NASW Standards for School Social Work Services (NASW, 2012). The text identifies that school social workers should be ethically aware and use assessments to determine what is in the best interest of the child. Husky, Kanter, McGuire, and Olfson (2012) conducted research that reinforced the need to use assessments and that school-based assessments would be beneficial for treatment planning with African American children. School social workers must provide interventions with a focus on improving

student development (NASW, 2012). These social workers are also responsible for using evidence-based interventions to provide culturally appropriate care.

The Standards for School Social Workers stipulate the professionals should demonstrate knowledge in connection to the population they serve and that ongoing professional development is suggested to ensure appropriate services (NASW, 2012). This standard is meant to take into account the socioeconomic concerns that also affect the ability of African American students to engage and develop.

Being licensed and trained are other factors that affect social workers' ability to provide relevant support to African American women. According to the NASW Connecticut Chapter (n.d.), no mandate requires school social workers to receive additional continuing education credits. The school-based training they receive, which received approval by the U.S. Department of Education, is sufficient. However, the requirements for other social workers, including Licensed Master Social Workers and Licensed Clinical Social Workers, are different, as they must engage in 15 hours of continuing education yearly. The continuing education credits should pertain to specific topics, including cultural competency and veterans or their families (NASW Connecticut Chapter, n.d.). Excluding school social workers from this requirement hinders their ability to consistently and continuously receive in-depth training on the most recent theories and interventions for the marginalized population identified. The gap in the mandated training requirements for school social workers limits their ability to access ongoing knowledge and education that benefits the marginalized populations they serve, including African American women. Consequently, this lack of ongoing training affects

the African American women who interact with school social workers because they are not receiving adequate preparation to transition to the postsecondary setting.

Present Clinical Engagement

The rate of participation for African American individuals in therapeutic services is low (Smith, 2015). The rate is even lower for African American women (Jones et al., 2016). Research has shown that, as a result of historical circumstances, African Americans are less likely to participate in counseling and other mental health services. Smith (2015) explained that the present theories and interventions that exist and that are being used in therapy do not reflect the needs of the African American population. The resistance to accepting services has become increasingly significant, as previous research noted the marginalization of women, especially African American women, in many areas of their lives. The theories previously created do not include the impact of racism, economic well-being, or gender and therefore are not fit for all (Vicary et al., 2018). Data from The National Alliance on Mental Health estimates that up to 20% of youth and 18% of adults who are African American experience a mental health disorder, which is less than individuals of other races. However, of that amount, only 10% seek mental health treatment, which is also significantly less than their White counterparts, who seek and participate in therapeutic intervention. A 2016 report published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Mental Health noted that African Americans are less likely than their White counterparts to seek care but more likely to receive treatment from a primary care physician as a result of reporting somatic complaints. As result of lack of care, African Americans are more likely to have long-

term physical health problems, including heart disease and high blood pressure (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Mental Health, 2016).

Some of the barriers to African Americans accessing mental health services include stigma, lower quality of care, lack of transportation, lack of insurance coverage, the associated financial costs, and care not being culturally relevant (Kawaii-Bogue et al., 2017). Smith (2015) noted that as society develops, the present conditions of systematic oppression do not disappear. Systematic oppression and its severity increase, reflecting the need for competent and relevant service delivery where it is accessible, for example, in schools. Woods-Giscombe et al. (2016) highlighted that, as African American women age into the postsecondary setting, their socioeconomic status and other responsibilities negatively influence their motivation to obtain and use of mental health services. Jones et al. (2016) shared additional consequences of low socioeconomic status includes, low self-esteem, doubting their performance, anxiety, and withdrawal. Consequently, it is vital to provide considerable mental health support during the secondary setting before transition.

School-based counseling services present as an alternative environment for African American females to access mental health care. According to Harper et al. (2016) U.S. government has identified educational institutions as one of the most convenient places to access adolescents in need of mental health care and an environment to implement those services as a result of the amount of time spent there. Given the identified lack of support for African American females noted in Healthy People 2020, officials at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010) believe that action should be taken to support this marginalized population.

Current Intervention

Research from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2011) draws attention to the need to decrease the numerous health disparities, including mental health, identified between racial categories of Blacks, Latinos or Latinas, and Whites. Current research demonstrates the need for culturally competent care in the mental health and other settings to counteract the disparities (Cuevas et al., 2017). Cuevas et al. (2017) identified some of the areas that contribute to culturally competent care, which include identifying and framing the presenting problem in relation to racial or ethnic identity, actively listening to the needs and desires of patients, and being attentive to their needs. Being a full participant in their care was also a priority, which means the provider integrates the desires of the patient into the action plan for treatment.

Barnes, Williams, and Barnes (2014) noted that the patient-provider ratio in relation to race may never be in balance. Therefore, differentiating the strategies and interventions used with the African American population to improve care is one alternative. Modifiable strategies include interventions that identify and prioritize the needs of African Americans and consider gender as a factor. A client-centered approach that includes spirituality and culturally sensitivity and awareness is desirable. Roysircar (2009) found that the intersection of this criteria has been beneficial for the minority population. One of the present evidence-based interventions that has attempted this approach is cognitive behavior therapy, which social work professionals are using to treat adolescent disorders including depression, anxiety, and behavioral concerns (Rith-Najarian et al., 2018).

Wilson and Rocco (2012), in their review of the literature, noted that the use of cognitive behavioral therapy without adaptations for African American youth was inconsistent. Cognitive behavioral therapy is the process of changing the way individuals think, which will ultimately affect the way they feel and act. Wilson and Rocco (2012) pointed out gaps in treatment that were reflected in the literature. These include attrition rates, differentiating between children and adolescents, sample size, gender, and appropriate fit. They did not mention culture. Nicolas and Schwartz (2012) also reported that after evaluating the evidence-based intervention, the Adolescent Coping With Depression Course, with a focus group of minority adolescents, they identified numerous cultural gaps that would make it difficult for the adolescents to engage in and benefit from the treatment. However, emerging research shows the importance of including culture and specific aspects of culture in mental health care. For example, the youth in a study by Ngo (2009) reported an increased quality of care and decreased symptoms after social workers manipulated their intervention to include cultural components. Healey et al. (2017) called for more research to further highlight and support the significance of this need.

A final component of care that may be applicable to the African American female population is faith. Social workers often do not often inquire about, identify or utilize faith in therapy. Statistics show that up to 97% of African Americans believe in God, and 83% have unwavering faith (Hankerson et al., 2018). Most African American individuals seek refuge in the religious teachings of the church and other community faith-based services (Hankerson et al., 2018). Almost 70% indicate they find solace in worship on a

weekly basis (Hankerson et al., 2018). This gathering of individuals has supported increasing knowledge in other areas. The Black Church is an asylum that over the years has increasingly recognized and positively worked toward educating African Americans on health disparities that affect them the most and could do the same for mental health. Hays and Aranda (2016) noted that, for African Americans, faith and spirituality could be an element incorporated into interventions. Breland-Noble et al. (2015) found that faith-based interventions alleviated depression symptoms for African American youth participants in their study. Faith is culturally relevant, and the population demonstrated spirituality is an area that would be supportive for them. If the African American population identifies faith as a viable resource, then school social workers should include faith in the preparation and planning for African American female adolescents' transition to the postsecondary setting.

Summary

The data and information in the literature review indicated the need for school social workers who provide school-based mental health services to prioritize the African American females transition to the postsecondary setting. Given the disadvantageous economic circumstances many African American female experience, school social workers must fill the gap in the practice of service delivery for positive social change among African American females. When viewed through the Black feminist lens, as a result of their intersectional characteristic's, African American female are at a disadvantage as they do not have the same opportunities as their Caucasian. Clinical engagement in mental health services among the African American population is low

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Mental Health, 2016). Current interventions are biased and do not take into account the racial identity and needs of the African American population (Barnes et al., 2014). However, delivering mental health services through school-based providers is a viable option to provide support for African American females as they transition to the postsecondary setting.

The problem presented in Section 1 includes barriers that decrease the effectiveness of the social and emotional service treatment that African American female receive through school-based service delivery. The purpose of the study is to bring awareness to the service treatment experience of African American female when working with the school social worker regarding their social and emotional preparation for the postsecondary setting. The significance of the study outlined how to fill the identified gap and support the professional practice of school social workers. The nature of the study indicated the study will include a qualitative research design to gather data from research participants. Finally, the theoretical approach explained the historical context and framed the problem clearly, while the literature reviews further explained the social work problem and provided justification for conducting the research. In section two the research design and data collection process will be outlined.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

In the educational setting, African American girls have been the target of school-based disciplinary action, which puts them at increased risk to disengage from school and consequently drop out (Annamma et al., 2019). Additionally, a biased perception exists that African American women are hostile, combative, and salacious (Greene, 1990). With all the negative experiences, perceptions, and stressors, female African Americans, including adolescents, are at an increased risk for mental health concerns (Social Science Research Council, 2015) that ultimately affect the transition of African American females from high school to the postsecondary setting.

Section 2 includes a description of the research design and data collection process. The research design subsection includes a review of the problem and presents research questions to address the concern. Section 2 contains a description of the research methodology, participants, and instruments. Also included in Section 2 is the data collection which includes information regarding trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and dependability strategies. Section 2 also described how the purpose of the study appropriately aligns with the methodology selected to conduct this study.

Research Design

Statistics show African American women are increasingly struggling to make a successful transition from high school to the postsecondary setting (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Therefore, understanding their experience and what is still necessary to improve the process is essential. Ishiyama (2007) demonstrated intervention strategies with African American women to be effective. Ishiyama (2007) articulated the perspective of minority

students. Through interviews, Ishiyama revealed that the engagement, relationships, and discussions surrounding their goals and future well-being positively affected minority students. Patton (2009) specifically looked at mentoring relationships for African American women and noted that pre-intervention approaches provide opportunities to plan, implement, and recognize growth while sharing the experience and feeling connected.

School social workers have the responsibility of supporting students throughout this decision-making process on what they will engage in after the completion of secondary education. Transitional planning is a necessary part of a student's individual education plan as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Thus, as they exit high school, students should have the ability to be reflective and articulate their strengths, areas of need, and a potential action plan that aligns with their goals (Rehfeldt et al., 2010). However, the methods to achieve this are not consistently in agreement with other professional mandates or the cultural needs of the students.

In this study I used a qualitative approach to clarify the service treatment experience of African American women when working with a school social worker regarding their social and emotional preparation for the postsecondary setting. By conducting qualitative interviews with African American women, I gathered information to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do African American women who received therapeutic services from certified school social workers describe their experience related to social and emotional preparation for postsecondary transition?

RQ2: What strategies used by certified school social workers do African American women feel would have prepared them for the transition to the postsecondary setting?

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), qualitative interviews are rich with information from asking open-ended questions. Within the semistructured format selected for this study, I was able to adjust the presentation of the interview so it was the best fit for the participant and to produce the necessary data. Within this format, I was able to present follow-up questions and probes to add to the evidence produced to answer the research questions. Qualitative interviewing is emergent and includes flexibility in what the researcher uses, and the information produced (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The purpose of the study was to understand the therapeutic experience of African American women while preparing for their transition to postsecondary settings. By enlisting African American women as conversational partners, as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012), I demonstrated a level of respect for their experience and expertise. Exploring the research questions through narrative inquiry from the perspective of female students will generate knowledge that might further enhance school social work practice in unique and dynamic ways. I conducted one-on-one phone interviews to gather information. During these meetings, I used a digital recording device to record the interviews accurately. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested using a recording device in addition to taking individual notes or memos at the time of the interview. By doing so, I made sure the information from the interview was accurately transcribed for factual information rather than using inconsistent or inaccurate memories that may include bias.

Individual memos also service a unique purpose that voice-recorded interviews cannot capture. During this time, interviewees have the opportunity to note any concerns to which they may need to come back.

After the first round of interviews were completed, I followed the coding process outlined by Ravitch and Carl, (2016). I reviewed the transcribed information. Once transcribed verbatim, I coded the transcriptions for emerging categories and themes. Next I offered the participants an opportunity to review the transcription and initial coding of their interview individually or in a follow-up meeting with me to ensure participant validation. The participants reviewed their responses and the identified themes and categories to ensure accuracy and to confirm the transcription relays the correct information. Based on the identified themes, codes, and categories, I wrote a descriptive summary to relay the identified information and possibly suggest alternative approaches to increase the successful transition of African American women.

Methodology

Data

I used phone interviews as the primary method for data collection for this study. Interviews support responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By using this approach, I built a positive relationship by being non-confrontational which allows for present and future relationships between the researcher and the participants. During the interviews, I asked a series of predetermined questions. Those questions were reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the interviews. Conducting a

semistructured qualitative interview allowed for the differentiation of questions and provided the opportunity for change in the process that lead to more information.

I used narrative inquiry as the method to collect information for this study. Channa (2015) described this method of collecting data as a verbal review and discussion of participants' experience. Narrative inquiry provides the opportunity in qualitative research for researchers to reuse the data in future studies and to build upon the presenting issue (Andrews et al., 2013). In this research study, I used the foundation of narrative inquiry, which is knowledge about a particular topic and experience, to increase the benefits to the participants and the greater marginalized population.

Hutchinson (2015) reviewed Dewey's criteria for narrative inquiry, continuity, and interaction. Interaction refers to the intersection between the social environment or what has occurred and the internal feeling or reaction. Multiple interactions build to create different experiences and shape an individual's perspective. Continuity explains the experience of multiple interactions build on each other. In this study, the multiple experiences of African American women, including their education, social engagement, and family and cultural influence, ultimately affected their interactions with the school social worker. Continuity and interaction demonstrate the story of African American women and their experience with the school social worker.

Concepts I focused on throughout the study include African American females and certified school social workers. Another focus I had was the practices approach (strategies, theories, or framework) used during interactions. Centering the project on

these concepts helped to gather data that was essential to answering the proposed research questions.

Participants

Recruitment involved using purposeful sampling to obtain a maximum of 20 participants. I engaged 10 of the volunteers to conduct a phone interview. I engaged the remaining 10 volunteers for participation in the event of attrition. Prospective participants were African American, female, a minimum of 18 years old, and were engaged with a school social worker during their high school attendance.

The purposeful sampling method was suitable for identifying and recruiting study participants. Purposeful sampling is a systematic approach that involves recruiting participants based on their qualifications or other commonalities specific to a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This purposeful sampling method was most suitable, as it ensured the African American women who participated had been treated, by school social workers and have other commonalities, including their race. The sample of the marginalized population of African American women reflected the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of this population.

As potential participants responded to the research study invitation, I identified and responded to 20 potential participants who met the criteria by e-mail them information about me, the study, its purpose, and the selection process. The letter I sent included my contact information for those who would like to ask questions, show interest, or decline participation and request no further contact. After I completed the purposeful sampling process, participants who agreed to participate were contacted by

phone. During this phone call, I reviewed the study, explain confidentiality, and discuss potential implications and benefits of the study. I made a formal request to participate, with the understanding that withdrawal from the study can occur at any time. Potential participants who declined were thanked, and I destroyed their contact information. Those who agreed to participate were thanked and I provided follow-up information such as days and times, to conduct the interview.

After 10 participants agreed to participate, I scheduled individual appointments to conduct interviews. The interviews took place by phone, which provided an opportunity to record verbal responses to the questions asked. The data retrieved from the interviews reflected the perceptions of the African American women and their experience when interacting with the school social worker regarding their transition to the postsecondary environment. The sample size of 10 participants was appropriate and provide credibility to the study. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), it is not the quantity of the data that is important but who is providing the data. By intentionally selecting African American women, I built credibility from the information in the interviews regarding their experience, which enabled me to understand the data through the lens of female African Americans so that other school social workers working with African American women can read, understand, interpret, and implement the data and suggested strategies to be increasingly effective with their treatment approach.

Instrumentation

The study included a questionnaire with 10 questions developed to inquire about the experience of African American women who worked with school social workers to

use throughout the interview process. The 10 open-ended questions lead to answers I extended into a conversation between the interviewee and myself. The open-ended questions also provided an opportunity for further probes, when necessary, to better understand and gather data in reference to the research questions.

Separate from the interview questions, I used additional instruments to collect information. I used a basic demographic sheet to collect information, including participants' name, and provide an alternative way to identify each participant. I also used the sheet to collect information on gender, ethnicity, year of graduation, and where they are in their journey toward their transition to the postsecondary environment. Other information I collected was date and beginning and end time of the interview. There was a recorded verbal consent at the beginning of the interview that served to ensure the protection of participants' confidentiality and their agreement to willfully participate in the study. I noted the verbal consent provided by the participant on the consent form with the date and time the verbal consent was received.

I conducted each phone interview. I used a private office to ensure confidentiality. I encouraged study participants to conduct the interview in a private quiet location of their choice. After I collected the preliminary information, the interview began. I audio recorded interviews for accuracy and transcription purposes. I transcribed the interviews and put them into Microsoft Word documents with the speakers clearly differentiated. I used a Microsoft Excel document to identifying categories, themes, and codes that emerge from each interview.

My role in this study was an instrument for data collection. Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained that researchers should address reflexivity, which encompasses issues such as social isolation, positionality, and bias. The position of the researcher is unique to qualitative research. The ideas for topics often originate from a researcher's personal or professional connection and interest (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers should ensure impartiality and remain unbiased toward individuals' experience while continuing to prioritize the epistemology and ontology of the participants.

One aspect of my social location (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) is being a female African American provider and someone who transitioned from secondary to postsecondary education; I chose this topic as an extension of my personal and professional interest. My interest in the successful academic accomplishments of African American women stems from my positionality and social identity (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Like many researchers, my interest in a specific topic is a result of personal or professional experiences. The intersectionality between my race, gender, and social class also plays a role. Throughout my academic career, I was not cognizant of the low number of minority female teachers I interacted with and the impact it was having on my personal and educational development. However, as I became more involved in my career, my knowledge regarding the socioeconomic disparities, systematic oppression, and intersectionality grew, and I reflected on the deficit in this area. My awareness of the focus on the deficits in education and other areas of life for African American men led me to wonder about the status of African American women. As a school social worker, I consciously make an effort to be intentional in my work, interactions, and conversations

with female African Americans in order to prepare them for the postsecondary transition. Therefore, when conducting this research study, it was important to consistently be conscious of, and practice, some techniques to limit its impact on the research process. This included journaling, member checking, or peer review (see Laureate Education, 2010).

I wrote memos and journal entries as strategy during the study to reflect on my identity, the research experience, and other experiences throughout the study. This process provides transparency in a study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Ensuring I made every effort to remain true to the design of the study while noting major and minor details and changes in the study to build trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

The sources I selected to gather data for this study were narrative phone interviews conducted by me with volunteer African American women. After the interviews were completed, I analyzed them for similar categories, themes, and codes. Throughout the interview sessions, I audio recorded each interaction using a digital recorder and then uploaded it to Nvivo for transcription. After the interviews were complete, I cross-referenced the transcription with the digital audio recording. I read along while listening to the recording to ensure the text written by the software accurately captured the words spoken during the interview. This process took place twice.

After this process was completed, the next step was coding the information. Saldana (2016) referred to codes as a smaller more concise reflection of richer textual information. Coding was essential to finding the commonalities among participants and

to produce social change, as it identified the areas of need or ways to effectively treat the areas of need for marginalized populations. I used NVivo to support this process. As I read the qualitative interviews for a third time, I noted the first codes. The simple terms and statements served as a summary of the interviewee's main point in response to the question and the population discussed.

After I identified the codes throughout the interviews, I categorized them by reviewing the individual codes and creating categories based on their similarities. While putting the codes into specific classification or category, I recognized bigger systems they belong to or what Saldana (2016) referred to as their consolidated meaning. Finally, I applied themes to ensure the information answered the research questions.

To ensure accuracy, I provided the data information I formulated from the individual interviews and collective interviews to each participant for review. Birt et. (2016) shared that returning individual verbatim transcripts to the participants to member check encourages accuracy and credibility. Given the lack of trust the African American population has with research because of how they were previously treated negatively, member checking was beneficial, as it helped to build the relationship between me and the interviewee and increase stakeholder investment in the research process. Returning the synthesized information leads to overall validation and ensures it is reflective of the participants' experience (Birt et al., 2016).

Trustworthiness

Shenton (2004) noted the importance of ensuring doctoral students sufficiently understand that, in qualitative research, credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability are important to building trust in a study. These elements ensured the results acquired from research accurately captured the population's opinion and truth and are not simply a product of the researcher's perspective. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability also contribute to the validation of a study.

Credibility

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), credibility refers to a researcher's ability to understand all aspects of the results of a research study. This is important to the trustworthiness of a study because it ensures the researcher can and will share all the information acquired within a study, despite its alignment with the purpose or the goal of the research. The study included a variety of approaches to ensure credibility of the study. First, following each individual phone interview, I completed a reflective journal. Second, after transcribing the interviews verbatim, reading alongside the audio recording and reviewing the transcription for accuracy, and analyzing the data, I participated in member checking with participants. Korstjens and Moser (2018) explained member checking helps to ensure what researchers report in the research findings is representative of the participants' perspective and validated after their review. In this study, participants were asked as an optional part of the study to read and review the coded, summarized information from their interviews. Another method that enables a researcher to cover different perspectives of a study and increase credibility of the study is triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this process, a researcher uses other sources to validate or deny methodological, data, and theoretical claims, as well as others put forth in the study. To ensure the triangulation process in this study, the proposal draft was submitted to the

first and second chair and as well as the UUR committee member to review the purpose of the study and the research design, including data collection method, instrument, and data analysis method for alignment.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the applicability of findings to different settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability requires the researcher to take the gathered data, themes, and categories from the individual interviews and explores whether they are applicable to a similar demographic population. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted the importance of transferability is not to mitigate the findings from a study to make them applicable. However, the data gathered should be abundant and descriptive enough to allow individual decision making regarding their relevance. To accomplish transferability, researchers use thick description. Thick description is the process of describing a participant's experience in such great detail that the conclusions drawn are evident and applicable to other individuals in similar settings and situations (Amankwaa, 2016).

Dependability Strategies

Shenton (2004) described dependability strategies as strategies integrated into the research process that allow proper documentation of the study. To produce documents that enable duplication of a qualitative study, researchers should sufficiently describe the process, including the methods, design, and implementation, to allow other researchers to review the study and determine if the data are reflective of the study. In addition, to increase dependability, Lincoln and Guba (1982) suggested researchers conduct inquiry

audits or use researchers not included in the study to review and critique the process of conducting the study and the outcome of the study. Elements of a study include the purpose, selection criteria of research participants, methods of collecting data, findings, and interpretations of the data.

Confirmability

To ensure confirmability in qualitative research, researchers share how their personal experiences may create bias and prejudice in the research. As qualitative studies are a product of personal or professional interest, some subjectivity is likely. Ravitch and Carl (2016) encouraged researchers to ensure they thoroughly recognize, explore, and document these biases. I used reflective journals to understand how my personal and social identity have influenced the study. I also used triangulation. Other professionals reviewed the data to confirm they are authentic and not a product of my biases.

Ethical Procedures

Participation in this research project is voluntary. All participants received information regarding the intention and goal of the study for certified school social workers and African American females. Additionally, they were notified of the procedures and the potential benefits or risks that may result. Such notification reinforces the NASW Code of Ethics Standard 4.04, dishonesty, fraud, and deception. Participants received this information in writing and provided verbal confirmation for informed consent agreement and had the opportunity to discuss prior to the interview. Any participant who did not provide consent or requested to withdraw from the study was allowed to do so immediately without penalty.

To protect the privacy of the participants, each African American female received a sequential three-digit code according to when she agreed to participate. For example, the first person to volunteer will be Participant 001, the second volunteer will be Participant 002, and so on. This identification process established consistency and ensured organization throughout the research process. Prior to the interview, I notified the participants of this procedure, their numerical assignment and its intent to keep their identity confidential.

After the interviews were completed, I transcribed them. I identified the speaker using her code, and I referred to myself as the interviewer. After the transcription was completed, the electronic data was stored on a password-protected personal computer. The digital audio recording of the interview, demographic information, and informed consent remained in a locked file cabinet. Moving forward permission to access this information will only be given to Walden University staff members involved with the project, such as the IRB, chair, or committee members. Those volunteers involved in the research process who would like to have access to information from the study will be permitted access to their specific interview or the summarized results of the study after it has been reviewed and edited to protect confidentiality.

After 5 years, I will destroy the electronic written and audio-recorded data accumulated during the research project. Additionally, I will destroy the demographic information, informed consent forms, and any other information connected to the participants. The destruction of data ensures the identity of study participants will remain protected. The destruction procedures will be as follows. I will permanently delete any

information stored electronically from its original and back-up storage locations, and I will shred any information in hard copy with a personal shredder and then use a professional company that guarantees security, such as Shred It.

Summary

I collected the data necessary to answer the research questions through narrative phone interviews with African American females. The interviews were digitally audio recorded as well as recorded and transcribed through a speech-to-text software program. I cross-referenced the transcription with the audio recording for accuracy. After I confirmed the transcript for accuracy, I reviewed and coded the information. Then I categorized the data and assign themes according to the commonalities. To increase trustworthiness, I ensured credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability by conducting member checks, inquiry audits, and triangulation and kept reflective journals throughout the research process.

Section 3 includes the findings based on the data collected through narrative interviews with the stakeholder population. The section includes a review of the barriers encountered and greater detail regarding the timeline, data analysis process, and validation process.

Section 3: Presentation and Findings

The purpose of the study was to bring awareness to the service treatment experience of African American women when working with school social workers regarding their social and emotional preparation for the postsecondary setting. A secondary purpose was to identify additional strategies that are not in use but would be helpful to prepare African American females for the postsecondary setting. Participants were graduates from the local magnet school system. The following research questions guided the investigation.

RQ1: How do African American women who received therapeutic services from certified school social workers describe their experience related to social and emotional preparation for postsecondary transition?

RQ2: What strategies used by certified school social workers do African American women feel would have prepared them for the transition to the postsecondary setting?

I collected data via individual phone interviews. There was a total of 11 interviews. During the planning stage of the research process, I originally determined 10 interviews would be sufficient for data collection. However, technical difficulty was experienced with Interview 2 and the call was disconnected. I re-engaged participant 002 and the interview was completed. However, after consulting the research chair, it was determined I would conduct an additional interview to ensure enough data for saturation. During the interviews, I asked a series of predetermined questions. These questions underwent review and were approved by the IRB prior to the interviews (Approval

number 07-10-20-0516072). I conducted semistructured qualitative interviews to ensure I could change the process and gain more information. I distributed the flyers on a weekly basis on Wednesday afternoons until the maximum participants was met.

I conducted individual interviews as outlined in Section 2, research design and data collection. I added an 11th interview due to the technical difficulty experienced with Interview 2. I completed the data collection via phone from the privacy of my personal office. I led the interviews using the questions identified in Appendix D. I collected informed consent prior to data collection, and interviewees were audio recorded with permission from all participants.

In the following section I report results from the thematic analysis of the individual interviews and collective data. Section 3 begins with a description of the data analysis process that was implemented. Then I provide study findings, a step-by-step breakdown of the coding, theme development and description of the sample. The section closes with a summary and transition to Section 4, a discussion of how findings apply to professional practice and implications for social change.

Data Analysis Techniques

I collected data for this study over a 3-week period starting August 5th, 2020 and ending August 20th, 2020. Each interview was approximately 20 minutes but did not exceed 30 minutes. I conducted the interviews as outlined earlier in Section 2. I collected data for the research study by conducting narrative interviews. I recorded each interview using a digital audio recorder and then uploaded it to Nvivo for transcription. Next, I cross-referenced the transcription with the audio recording to ensure the text transcribed

by the software accurately captured the spoken word. After the interviews were completed I uploaded them to Nvivo. I used the following process was:

1. I reviewed the transcript produced by Nvivo while listening to the audio recording to make necessary corrections.
2. I cross-referenced the transcript with the audio recording a second time to confirm accuracy.
3. I generated a list of codes from the interview data.
4. I combined the codes into themes.
5. I defined and analyzed the themes.
6. I provided the individual and group analysis to each participant for member checking.
7. I wrote up the analysis results.

Sample Description

The final sample consisted of 11 African American women who graduated from a local high school; all participants were 18 years old or older. Of the 11 participants, three are employed part time; seven are currently enrolled in the postsecondary setting as freshmen, sophomores, or juniors, and two are seniors. The remaining two have graduated. The following is an overview of the participants:

Participant 001: Participant 001 was interviewed first. She is an African American woman currently enrolled in a 4-year postsecondary educational setting.

Participant 002: Participant 002 was interviewed second. She is an African American woman currently enrolled in her senior year in a postsecondary educational setting and employed part time.

Participant 003: Participant 003 was interviewed third. She is an African American woman currently enrolled in a 4-year postsecondary educational setting.

Participant 004: Participant 004 was interviewed fourth. She is an African American woman currently enrolled in a 4-year postsecondary educational setting.

Participant 005: Participant 005 was interviewed fifth. African American woman who recently graduated from a 4-year postsecondary educational setting.

Participant 006: Participant 006 was interviewed sixth. She is an African American woman who recently graduated from a 4-year postsecondary educational setting and is currently enrolled in a master's degree program.

Participant 007: Participant 007 was interviewed seventh. She is an African American woman currently enrolled in her senior year at a 4-year postsecondary educational setting.

Participant 008: Participant 008 was interviewed eighth. She is and African American woman currently enrolled in a 4-year postsecondary educational setting and employed part time.

Participant 009: Participant 009 was interviewed ninth. She is an African American woman currently enrolled in a 4-year postsecondary educational setting and employed part time.

Participant 010: Participant 010 was interviewed tenth. She is an African American woman currently enrolled in a 4-year postsecondary educational setting.

Participant 011: Participant 011 was interviewed eleventh. She is an African American woman currently enrolled in a 4-year postsecondary educational setting.

I became familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews. During the second step of the research process, I read and coded key responses from the participants, assigning codes to ideas and phrases that were stated in response to the interview questions. I identified key responses as statements that either described the experience of participants' interactions with school social workers or strategies participants thought would have prepared them for their transition to the postsecondary setting. Next, I organized the codes in an Excel spreadsheet, with the final list consisting of 49 codes. These codes and their frequency are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1*Code data*

Code	Frequency
Academic achievement high school	2
Academic preparation high school	5
Acceptance in new environment	2
Activities high school	5
Advisor alumni	11
Advisor capability	22
Advisor commitment	30
Advisor negative attitude	5
Advisors transition	45
Advisor unavailability	19
African American female culture high school	3
Alumni experience	14
Bias ethnicity	10
Character traits advisor	17
Effective communication	34
Emotional needs transition	20
Emotional support African American women	9
Emotional support outside transition	5
Emotions evoked by transition	25
Ethnicity impact transition	35
Extended support high school years	5
Extent transitions sessions	29
Feelings of abandonment	13
Financial familial circumstances	5
Financial criteria requirements institutions	6
Financial support activities	1
Financial support postsecondary	7
Impact of gender on transition	29
Lack of activities emotional preparation	11
Lack of transition support activities	14
Lacking advice social transition	47
Lacking number of transition sessions	5
Mental health	10

(table continues)

Code	Frequency
Need to share with peers	24
Negative experiences transitions sessions	58
Negative perceptions applications process	8
Negative perceptions social needs transition	18
Perceptions about African American females	4
Perceptions about ethnicity	24
Perceptions high school	14
Positive experiences transitions sessions	42
Positive reinforcement abilities	12
Positive reinforcement transition	11
Social emotional transition	18
Socio economic status impact on transition	18
Suggested strategies emotional transition	29
Topics transitions advice sessions	104
Transition support activities	16
Value of emotional transition support strategies	7

As outlined in Table 1, the most common codes refer to topics transitions advice sessions ($n=104$), negative experiences transitions sessions ($n = 58$), followed by lacking advice on social transition ($n = 47$). Other important codes to note include advisors transition ($N=45$), positive experiences transitions sessions ($N=42$), ethnicity impact transition ($N=35$), and effective communication ($N=34$). The remaining codes range from 1 to 30. The remaining codes range between 1 and 30. I selected the frequency of 30 as the cutoff because it captured the most common codes.

For Steps 4 and 5, I reviewed codes and arranged them into themes and subthemes with corresponding codes, and then I defined each theme (Table 2). I began by finding similarities between codes and arranging them into groups. After completing this process, 49 individual codes were condensed to the following four themes: (a) characteristics, (b) financial impact on transition, (c) feeling unprepared, and (d) lacking

emotional preparation. The following subthemes emerged. Subthemes for Theme 1 include (a) positive characteristics, (b) negative characteristics. Subtheme for Theme 2 is (a) providing resources/information. Subtheme for Theme 3 is (a) lacking advice transition support. Subthemes for theme 4 is (a) gender, with corresponding suggested transitional activities, (b) ethnicity, with corresponding suggested transitional activities, and (c) lacking advice on social transition, with corresponding suggested transitional activities.

Represented in Table 2 is corresponding themes, subthemes and codes. Finally, I defined themes according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) Phase 5 of using thematic analysis in psychology.

Table 2*Coded Data with Themes and Subthemes*

Themes and subthemes	Codes
Characteristics	
Positive characteristics	Advisor capability Advisor commitment Advisors transition Character traits advisor Effective communication Positive experiences transitions sessions Positive reinforcement abilities Positive reinforcement transition
Negative characteristics	Advisor unavailability Advisor negative attitude
Financial impact on transition	
Providing resources/information	Financial familial circumstances Financial criteria requirements institutions Financial support activities Financial support postsecondary Socioeconomic status impact on transition
Feeling unprepared	
Lacking transition support	Lacking number of transition sessions Negative experiences transitions sessions Lack of transition support activities Negative perceptions applications process
Lacking emotional preparation	
Gender:	Emotional needs transition Emotional support African American women Emotions evoked by transition Lack of activities emotional preparation

(table continues)

Themes and subthemes	Codes
Suggested transitional activities	Emotional support outside transition Social emotional transition Suggested strategies emotional transition Value of emotional transition support strategies
Ethnicity	Perceptions about African American females African American female culture high school Bias ethnicity
Suggested transitional activities	Ethnicity impact transition Perceptions about ethnicity
Lacking advice on social transition	Negative perceptions social needs transition Feelings of abandonment Lacking advice social transition
Suggested transitional activities	Impact of gender on transition Transition support activities Alumni experience Need to share with peers Advisor alumni

After defining the themes, I conducted member checking. Member checking enables participants to become co-researchers by allowing them to participate actively in the data analysis process. To conduct member checking, I sent copies of the initial analyses to participants by email and asked them to review the initial analysis to ensure it aligned with the ideas and thoughts they had intended to communicate during the individual interview process. The member checking period lasted two weeks to ensure that I received responses from all participants. Feedback from all 11 participants was positive and there were no changes to the initial analysis. Lastly, Step 7 consisted of writing up study results, which I will present in the findings section.

Findings

The research findings indicated that several supporting themes are associated with the research questions. Based on the interviews and the identified themes, there is evidence that justifies what African American students believe they received and needed from school social workers to promote a positive transition to the postsecondary setting.

Characteristics

The first theme, characteristic, is defined as the way school social workers impacted African American female students during the postsecondary transition. This theme consisted of two subthemes. The first was positive characteristics: encouraging features that support the successful transition. The second was negative characteristics: undesirable features that impacted the transition to the postsecondary setting. The majority of the participants identified positive characteristics which aided in the development of the relationship and transition. In contrast, other participants in the study identified experiences that did not support the role of the school social work.

Positive Characteristics

School social workers were friendly, positive, and open minded which nurtured positive relationships. Participant 006 said, "I think we had a good rapport." They provided positive reinforcement about achievements. Participant 001 stated, "She was very friendly, very positive as to my future and what I could accomplish" Participant 007 shared, "I felt like knowing that there was confidence in my achievements, like knowing, them having confidence in how I'm going to be and how I'm going to do in college."

The social workers also facilitated conversations. Participant 001 shared, “She was very open minded to the things I needed to say, she was a very good listener.” Participant 003 shared, “I always went to my advisor whenever I needed to talk.”

Finally, participants also noted school social workers were authentic and transparent. For instance, Participant 011 said, “Any advice I was given; it wasn’t like sugar coated.” Participant 005 indicated “she tried to prepare me for what I would have to deal with like just with my life in general.” The positive characteristics identified by participants throughout the interviews supported the experience of African American females who were transitioning. Most participants identified the social worker was pleasant, sociable, approachable and having their best interest at heart. These characteristics create an inviting and engaging environment where African American can be open processing their concerns as well as hear and learning constructive feedback.

Negative Characteristics

African American females also experienced negative characteristics, or undesirably features that impacted the transition to the postsecondary setting. For example, participants identified time as an element that interfered with the relationship. Participants 002 stated, “it was more of like, Ok, I'm doing my job. I know I have to meet you at least twice. So that was kind of it.” Participant 005 indicated “you know when I try to like, meet up with her, she wouldn’t be in her office or she’s with somebody else.”

Participant 006 noted the missing sustenance “but it was never in depth, it was always just general information.” Participant 004 detailed, “And I feel as the, my social worker, would dismiss that eagerness to learn and be ready for, you know, school after

high school or like undergrad and everything, so, yes.” She also went on to say, “I guess you could say they're very absent in my college experience.” Lack of availability and time to deeply engage about postsecondary transition were identified by some participants as characteristics that were not supportive throughout their transition journey. Consequently, this may impact their level of knowledge regarding potential barriers and familiarity with skill to overcome those obstacles.

Financial Impact on Transition

The information provided by school social workers to help African American women with the postsecondary financial requirements. For example, African American women students were provided sufficient information on financial aid, scholarships, and other resources and information. This increased their understanding and ability to make informed decisions pertaining to the postsecondary transition. Participants indicated they were supported with understanding and completing the financial portion of the requirements for postsecondary transitions. Participant 001 “Yes, so a lot of the scholarships that were referred to me by my social worker were for specifically African American and African American women.” Participant 003 “Yes, when it came down to picking the universities. Like which school gave me the most money, you know.” Participant 006 “Oh, yeah definitely, think I like that was the biggest thing they focused on.” Participant 007, “We talked about what I could get from financial aid as well.” Participant 009, “We haven't talked about it much, but we did get a clear understanding that we have to apply to as many scholarships as we can.” Based on the interview data, this area of strength is essential to the postsecondary transition for African American

women students. Understanding the financial obligation that is required and the resources available to meet those needs is crucial to knowing that higher education is attainable despite the high and rising cost. This education also provides information to increase their understanding of the potential positive and negative impact finances have on their long term goals and overall wellbeing.

Feeling Unprepared: Lack of Transition Support

Participants described experiencing a lack of support during their transition to the postsecondary setting. For example, participant number 001 noted “When it finally came down to it, she was unavailable a lot of the time. So, I think that's probably a big negative”. Participant 002 stated:

So I kind of went along with it, cause I thought they knew more than I did or what my abilities would be. And now it makes me feel like I regret doing that, instead of just going to what my plans were originally.

Participant 005 said, “And there was a lot of seniors asking the same questions, and everybody was just like really trying to figure out what to do.” These participants described feel unprepared regarding their transition to the postsecondary setting. As a result, they made uninformed decisions some presently regret. In addition, these uninformed decisions could not only impact their transition but potentially impact their postsecondary outcome as well.

Lacking Emotional Preparation

The discussions pertaining to transition and social/emotional concerns such as ethnicity and gender were not equally discussed. The lack of engagement about topics

including social/emotional concerns such as ethnicity and gender left some participants feeling unprepared while others believed they were provided sufficient information.

There were a variety of areas that were identified by African American girls as needing more support. They are divided into subthemes to include social emotional topics such as ethnicity and gender. Also included in the following section is the experience of African American female participants who believed they were provided satisfactory information pertaining to ethnicity and gender.

Gender

Participants noted deficits about the discussions pertaining to gender and the preparation or transition of African American girls to the postsecondary setting. Participant 001 noted, “not that I can recall. But I know that she really believed in me.” Participant 002 noted during her interactions she did not discuss how ethnicity or gender would impact her transition to the postsecondary setting and went on to state “Not really. Just more focused on the fact that I would be going into a different school, but not what would come about it.” Participant 005 stated, “They didn’t try to prepare us for anything of that.” Participant 011 noted, “she told me, that you have to be careful of my surroundings.” According to most participants, the manner in which gender influences the postsecondary setting was not discussed. Hence, African American females were not privy to understanding the intersection of gender on their transition, experiences, and future outcome.

Ethnicity

There were scarcities with discussions pertaining to ethnicity and the preparation or transition of African American women to the postsecondary setting. Participant 003 explained, “No, it was never. They never really brought that up, but I kind of see it for myself. I know I did my research on every school, like the ethnicity and like the ratios of what race is there, what is what. So I just choose wisely.” Participant 007 shared, “It's not a big topic of conversation.” And lastly, participant 008 stated, “I don't remember, like, no, I don't think so.” There was also a shortage of information provided about the influence of race and ethnicity. The absences of these conversations may possibly be a disadvantage if African American females were not properly prepared or equipped with the information to advocate for themselves throughout or after the postsecondary transition.

Sufficient Information Pertaining to Race and Gender

Participants recognized they did participate in discussions pertaining to race, gender, and the preparation or transition of African American girls to the postsecondary setting. It is important to note that participant 009 and 011 recalled discussing both gender and race as factors impacting their transition. In addition, participant 010 recalled discussing race but not gender as influential. Participant 006 explained how media played a role. “Briefly. I mean, we would have discussions, especially where things would be going on in the news.” And “we would have like all of those kind of conversations about those obstacles, like we face as African American females especially, like in any career or anything. And, you know.” Although it was less reoccurring some participants noted in-depth conversations about race and/or gender.

One participant noted these conversations were prompted by situations what would happen in the media. The frequency of these conversation is an area of concern. If these conversations are not happening enough, exposure to the potential barriers are not being discussed adequately. In addition, the on the whim occurrences of the conversations means they are not intentional or preplanned to provide the most exploration, exposure, or skill building for African American women.

Suggested Strategies for Emotional Gender and Ethnicity

Participants were able to conceptualize and articulate various ideas about activities to support their transition to the postsecondary getting. Participant 001 stated, while there weren't any activities she benefitted from "getting a group of us and sat down with us and just let us talk freely about, you know, our worries, what we're excited about and just gave us insight. I think I that would have really helped us out." Participant 003 shared, "We should have probably had a class on that" and "I just wish I could have talked more to people that were already in college. Every month to just talk to us how to do this, this and that. Instead of send us like that for college."

Participant 004 stated, "I guess just being there and offering the services, not only when we are in school, but when we leave. Focusing on like a child's well-being, and it should really come from the heart" Participant 10 shared, "Just about the overall different experience you're going to get at a PWI and a HBCU." Participant 011 noted, "I guess just more like, more counselling, more of those, you know, open conversations."

Majority of participants noted they would have benefitted from more time to talk. They wanted time to engage in more in-depth conversation about their concerns with their

school support system which consists of school staff and peers. This may have increased the positive transition experience for African American women students.

Social Transition

Social support was the final area participants felt unsupported. Lacking advice on social transition left participants feeling unprepared to engage with peers of the own age and postsecondary setting staff members. Participant 002 stated, “Just more focused on the fact that I would be going into a different school, but not what would come about it.” And again she commented, “I felt pretty alone and by myself, it was difficult for me to kind of engage or, you know, put myself out there to be a part of whether it was a program or activities.” Participant 003, “When I entered college, I was really scared to talk to my professors.” Participant 010, “I don't think I'm particularly ready for that kind of change yet.” Also, “I feel like it's just going to be a whole another environment that I just don't know anything of yet.” Participant 011 identified “your tone can be perceived different from what you expected.” The final area that participants felt unsupported was regarding their social transition. They felt ill-equipped to engage with their peers, educators, and coaches. This lack of training is a potential hindrance to their development. If African American females lack the skill to socially engage and advocate for themselves, they will be unable to get what they need to be successful in the short and long term.

Lacking Social Preparation

These findings pertain to social interactions and the preparation or transition of African American girls to the postsecondary setting. Participant 001 identified there were

no activities conducted to socially prepare her for the transition but “she would tell me like, how it’s going to be different or how people acted different in college.” Participant 005 “I feel like maybe they didn't prepare me socially.” Participant 008 “actually we never really had actually like a lot of activities.” Participant 011 “No, we never did any activities.”

Suggested Strategies for Social Preparation

The following suggested strategies are activities identified by African American girls as potentially useful for their social preparation or transition to the postsecondary setting. Participant 001 shared, “college tour.” Participant 003 stated, “If they brought in people that graduated from the high school and the people that would talk.” Participant 004, shared, “creating a like, active scenario of like what it's going to be like out in the real world, like the type of social interactions that we will be having. You know, like from a phone, from an email to a phone call to an interview to a meeting.” Participant 006 stated, “I think like having, allowing like more of a network, like if there was a network, a way that I could have connected with people prior.” Participant 007 stated, “I feel like maybe encouraging more club activity at university.” Participant 010 stated, “maybe like putting you in contact with somebody who goes to school that you might have been looking at.” Participant 011 stated, “like me how to communicate with like adults better.” Activities for social preparation would benefit all transitioning students. Female African American students would benefit due to their intersectional characteristics.

Unexpected Findings

Throughout the study there were some unexpected findings pertaining to race and gender. Based on the high temperature of social and racial climate while the students were attending secondary school and preparing to transition to the postsecondary setting, these conversations did not occur frequently. It also seems there was no preparation for the interactions or depth to the conversations. This is a disadvantage to the population because they are potential informed by untrustworthy sources in social media or left with unresolved emotions and confusion about what this means and how it impacts them.

Summary

The purpose of the study is to bring awareness to the service treatment experience of African American females when working with school social workers regarding their social and emotional preparation for the postsecondary setting. A secondary purpose is to identify additional strategies that are not in use but would be helpful to prepare African American females for the postsecondary setting. Data collected from eleven interviews identified ways that support is being offered and what additional strategies would be useful. The following themes emerged (a) characteristics, (b) financial impact on transition, (c) feeling unprepared, and (d) lacking emotional preparation. The following subthemes emerged. Subthemes for Theme 1 include (a) positive characteristics, (b) negative characteristics. Subtheme for Theme 2 is (a) providing resources/information. Subtheme for Theme 3 is (a) lacking advice transition support. Subthemes for theme 4 is (a) gender, with corresponding suggested transitional activities, (b) ethnicity, with

corresponding suggested transitional activities, and (c) lacking advice on social transition, with corresponding suggested transitional activities.

Overall participants recalled the emphasis placed on and importance of finances and the transition to the postsecondary setting. If the financial obligation was not attended to for tuition, room and board, and possibly books, it was unreasonable to expect long term successful transition. Therefore, the primary obligation was to understanding and obtaining financial assistance. This was accomplished by ensuring a better understanding of familial financial circumstances, socioeconomic status impact on transition. As well as providing resources/information via financial support activities and financial support in the postsecondary setting.

In addition to ensuring financial security for the postsecondary transition, they also recalled the positive characteristics that influenced their transition. Traits include effective communication, advisor capability, advisor commitment and positive motivation provided. These traits were essential to developing trust, opening the lines for communication, and building a positive relationship. The support they received increased developed resiliency, personal responsibility, and faith for future accomplishments. Strategies were also suggested for improvement in these areas.

Chapter 3 provided a comprehensive analysis of study results. Although it was not identified as a direct concern by participants, data from interviews showed that during their interactions there was little to no conversation or preparation regarding race, gender, or social preparation. Therefore, section 4 contains a discussion of these data results, specifically how they may be applied to the school social work discipline.

Recommendations for school social work practice are provided, and also a discussion of implications for social change. Finally, the study concludes with my reflection.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

The purpose of the study was to bring awareness to the service treatment experience of African American women when working with school social workers regarding their social and emotional preparation for the postsecondary setting. A secondary purpose is to identify additional strategies that are not in use but would be helpful to prepare African American women for the postsecondary setting. I collected data in 11 individual interviews. The participants were graduates of magnet schools in Connecticut.

The following research questions were used to guide the research project,

RQ1: How do African American women who received therapeutic services from certified school social workers describe their experience related to social and emotional preparation for postsecondary transition?

RQ2: What strategies used by certified school social workers do African American women feel would have prepared them for the transition to the postsecondary setting?

The following themes materialized from interviews and analysis of the data of interviews with African American women to play a role in their transition to the postsecondary setting: (1) characteristics, (2) financial impact on transition, (3) feeling unprepared, and (4) lacking emotional preparation. The following subthemes emerged, (1a) positive, (1b) negative characteristics, (2a) providing resources/information, (3a) lacking advice transition support, (4a) gender, with corresponding suggested transitional

activities, (4b) ethnicity, with corresponding suggested transitional activities, and (4c) lacking advice on social transition with corresponding suggested transitional activities.

Participants noted receiving information regarding financial security for the postsecondary transition, they also recalled the positive characteristics that influenced their transition. Traits include effective communication, advisor capability, advisor commitment and positive motivation provided. These traits were essential to developing trust, opening the lines for communication, and building a positive relationship. The support they received increased developed resiliency, personal responsibility, and faith for future accomplishments.

Findings from the study may contribute knowledge to the school social work practice in the magnet school district and may be used to improve the experience of African American female students when transitioning to the postsecondary setting. Prior to the study, limited research existed on the experiences of African American women experience who were transitioning to the postsecondary setting. I used this research study to explore the gaps in practice and indicates strategies for improvement in these areas. Using the data from this research to understand the experience of the African American female students from this district and their interactions with school social workers as they are transitioning to the postsecondary setting may support a smooth and prepared transition for long term positive outcome.

In the final section of this research project I provide a discussion of the study data and how the results can be applied to professional practice. Chapter 4 begins with a discussion of how results can be applied to the professional ethics of social work practice.

Next, I provide professional recommendations for school social workers. Finally, I discuss important implications for social, and the section closes with concluding sentiments.

Application to Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

I guided this research study by using the NASW code of ethics. The ethical principle importance of human relationships serves to guide clinical social work practice in the area of school social work practice because it recognizes the relationship that can develop between school social workers and African American women and that such relationships are a catalyst for potential change. An explanation of how the finding from the research can be applied to the ethical principle of the importance of human relationships is provided.

The purpose of the study was to bring awareness to the service treatment experience of African American women when working with school social workers regarding their social and emotional preparation for the postsecondary setting as well as identify additional strategies that are not in use but would be helpful to prepare African American women for the postsecondary setting. Finding from the study highlighted that African American female students from this district believe school social workers are initiating positive interactions, building trust worthy relationships, ensuring they are financially prepared, and have a good understanding of the financial implications when transitioning to the postsecondary setting.

The second NASW ethical principal related to the research problem was social justice. Highlighting the current barriers that prevent the African American female

population from reaching their fullest potential is an approach to promoting social justice (Grimes et al., 2013). The NASW code of ethics notes that social workers should focus their change efforts on issues including poverty and unemployment. These are two primary areas of concern for African American women. According to Ji et al. (2015) approximately 45.7 % of African American women are not gainfully employed, leading to increased likelihood of residing in poverty. Although the finding from the study cannot be generalized the findings may impact school social work practice, with the increased awareness they can address the injustice by supporting African American women to transition knowledgably and smoothly to the postsecondary setting. With the knowledge gained from the study, school social workers from the magnet school can diligently prepare to engage in conversations about interception of the financial obligation, race, and gender. These conversations should occur when regardless of what is happening in the media. When the frequency of circumstances pertaining to race and gender does occur in the media these should be used as talking points rather than prompts to engage in conversations.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

Data from the study revealed valuable strategies that African American women from the study believe are helpful to improve their transition to the postsecondary setting. The findings revealed a gap in strategies that is an area for potential improvement. Based on the findings I presents possible recommendations for school social workers in the following section.

Research participants noted how positively school social workers they engaged with influenced their transition with nurturing their relationships. By giving hope, providing positive affirmations, and being open minded, school social workers are important to facilitating a smooth transition to the postsecondary setting. Participants acknowledged that by having this level of comfort they were able ask questions as needed to ensure an understanding of the process. Without adequate understanding these African American women may have been less likely to transition without barriers.

Accordingly, a key recommendation that may be utilized by school social workers is to encourage positive interactions and relationships. School social workers should consider following these steps in an effort to foster relationships while making sure African American women understand their role in the transition process. As noted by one participant, they can treat each student as an individual human, take the time to understand each students short and long term goal, and inquire about other circumstances that may impact their decision making. Then, school social workers should engage in conversations about the student's present secondary school experience, explore intentions for the postsecondary setting, engage in active action planning, and follow up on the individual's progress.

Another recommendation for school social workers is to ensure a firm understanding of the financial impact on transition to the postsecondary setting. According to research participants, this was achieved by providing resources and information, engaging in discussions for increased understanding, as well as support with completing necessary tasks. Based on the feedback from research participants, school

social workers should continue to keep abreast of and changes, available resources that help African American female students overcome financial barriers that may hinder their transition, indirect support by providing resources, and making connections to other financial programs. Providing direct support with their time and knowledge is also essential. Staff should also ensure that in addition to providing the resources they provide support by helping African American girls to access and navigate the resources for immediate and future use.

The next recommendations based on the data provided by interview participants that could potentially impact the transition to the postsecondary setting is engaging in discussions, activities, or providing resources that would prepare transitioning African American women to understand how race and gender may impact their transition to the postsecondary setting. Many participants noted a deficit in this area. Engaging in such discussions would inform African American women of the socioeconomic disparities that exist for their intersectional characteristics and emphasize the importance of a successful transition to and outcome from the postsecondary setting. Thus, it may be crucial for social workers to receive education or obtain support for this area of concern. Engaging in this extended learning could provide long term benefits for the African American female population.

Practice as an Advanced Practitioner

As a school social worker, I believe findings from the study can be applied to my professional practice. I often engage and work directly with female African Americans who are transitioning to the postsecondary setting. I will be motivated to pursue a deeper

connection and facilitate relationships build on trust and open mindedness. I can integrate the suggested strategies into their goals, weekly meeting discussions, and activities.

Lastly, as opportunities for extended learning are provided, I will engage in ongoing exposure and education pertaining to the impact of race and gender on the socioeconomic status of African American women.

Broader Policies in Social Work Practice

Due to the persistent low-income outcomes and poverty concerns that directly impact the socioeconomic status of African American women, findings from this research study may be used to support revision of current policies that impact school social worker's interactions with African American female students. The services provided to African American female students should be comprehensive. It is vital to understand that African American female students have intersectional needs that must be consecutively met to enhance their postsecondary transition and outcomes. For example, it is equally as important for African American women to have a clear understanding of the college application process and the impact of race during and after the postsecondary transition process. Similarly, it is also important that they understand the role of gender in their transition as much as the financial requirements and obligation required for the transition. Therefore, policies including those that determine continuing education credits and mandates for school social workers must acknowledge the importance of intersectionality. The role of gender and race should not be an afterthought, instead school social workers should be required to learn about and implement these characteristics into their daily work.

Limitations

The research study was subject to limitations. I collected data from a small sample of research participants consisting of 11 individuals from different magnet schools. This small percentage of participants and nature of the study may hinder the results from being generalizable beyond the local magnet school system. However, if the number of participants increased, there would be more discussion resulting in data to be analyzed. In addition, the size and geographic location posed limitations to the scope of the study. Perhaps other African American women from a different school district would have varying experiences and opinions pertaining to their experiences with school social workers. Finally, prior to and during the collection of data, the world experienced the onset and spread of COVID -19. During this time many families were confined to their homes and schools, and business were closed. There were several months of quarantine with isolation from loved ones and a normal way of life. Many individuals experienced sickness and possibly death directly and indirectly. Consequently, this disease could have influenced the transition process and mental health status of research participants.

Recommendations for Further Research

Findings from the study demonstrate tentative opportunities for future research projects. This research could be expanded to include more participants or a traditional public school governed by their local town. Including these criteria could potentially increase the participants, provide different perspectives, valuable insight, data, and strategies to support African American women.

Further research can be conducted to understand the perspective of other African American women from different school districts. Conducting research to hear specifically from other African American women regarding their current level of understanding about intersectionality and its role or impact during and after the postsecondary transition could aid in better understanding of what is content is needed. Finally, it is also possible to further research what the content regarding race and gender would look like.

Recommendations for Dissemination of Findings

Findings from the study should be disseminated to stakeholders. Those include research participants, school employees ranging from social workers to administration, the board of education, and policymakers. I will compose a short one-page summary of the purpose, finding, and recommendations of the study. This document will be shared with school social workers and administration employed by the magnet school district. Another way the findings will be disseminated is by confidentially emailing the brief document to research participants. It is important for research participants to understand the results of the findings and recommendations of what could be done to alleviate this concern for others in the future.

Implications for Social Change

The following is a discussion on the implications for social change. My findings indicated these implications may be applied to various levels including micro, macro, and social work practice.

Microlevel

At the microlevel, recommendations can be applied to the experience of African American women. At the microlevel, strategies can be applied to help African American women improve their experience and outcomes. When they understand the role of the school social worker, their intersectionality, and the barriers this may create for them, they are better prepared to learn strategies to overcome them. This interaction and experience with the social worker could create a foundation that is important to a successful transition and positive long-term outcome.

Macrolevel

Strategies that also support African American women at the macrolevel have implications for social change. The data from the study indicated it may be possible that other African American female students do not have present knowledge or through understanding of their intersectional characteristics it is difficult for them to understand its impact in reference to their Caucasian female counterparts. Ensuring a firm understanding equips African American women to be prepared by having knowledge and necessary coping skills to persist beyond barriers.

Practice

Findings from the study suggest practical strategies school social workers can use to improve their interactions with and the experience of African American women. As indicated by the data they are (1) positive / negative characteristics, (2) providing resources/information, (3) gender, ethnicity, social, and (4) providing support.

Additionally, to improve their practice insisting that school social workers are trained on cultural competency and the role of race and gender are essential.

Summary

African American women continue to struggle with low socioeconomic outcomes. They often lack the knowledge regarding their intersectional characteristics, the support and interactions to understand it, and how this impacts their transition and outcomes. As they are an oppressed population, school social workers are responsible ensuring the needs of Black girls are met. An approach to doing so might be ensuring school social workers are equipped with the knowledge to prepare African American women on the influence of race and gender. Prior to this research study very little information existed on the experience of African American women and their experience with school social workers as they were transitioning to the postsecondary setting.

The secondary purpose is to identify additional strategies that are not in use but would be helpful to prepare African American women for the postsecondary setting. Analysis of the data revealed (1) characteristics, (2) financial impact on transition, (3) feeling unprepared, and (4) lacking emotional preparation. The following subthemes emerged, (1a) positive, (1b) negative characteristics, (2a) providing resources/information, (3a) lacking advice transition support, (4a) gender, with corresponding suggested transitional activities, (4b) ethnicity, with corresponding suggested transitional activities, and (4c) lacking advice on social transition with corresponding suggested transitional activities. Majority of the research participants were open, accepting, and grateful for the experience and interactions with the school social

workers. Therefore, it is essential to use the relationships for capacity build and successful transition to the postsecondary setting that may positive long term socioeconomic status.

African American women face hurdles that impact their socioeconomic, social and emotional wellbeing. Interventions aimed at preparing them to navigate these hurdles are imperative. The preparation to transition to the postsecondary setting should equally involve financial preparation and information regarding intersectional characteristics such as race and gender. Therefore, the recommendations that materialized from this study for the micro, macro, and practice level should be implemented.

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Appendix A: Demographic Form

Study Participant Code: ___ ___ ___ Date of Interview: ___ ___/___ ___/___ ___

Demographics

The purpose of this interview is to explore African American female experience as they were transitioning from high school to a postsecondary setting. The interview/questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes and your answers will be audio recorded, transcribed, and used for research purposes.

The following questions are general information about you.

1. What is your current age?
2. How do you racially identify yourself?
3. When did you graduate high school?
4. Where are you in your transition to the postsecondary setting? (student, graduate, employee, etc.)

Appendix B: Interview Tracking Form

Exploring African American Females Transition from High School to a Postsecondary

Setting:

A Qualitative Study

Time of Interview: Begin: _____ End: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Study Participant Code: _____

Appendix C: Research and Interview Questions

Interview Questions

The following questions are related to your experiences as a school social worker. If any of the questions make you uncomfortable, let me know. Please remember to speak clearly. As a reminder your information will be kept strictly confidential and you are welcome to withdraw at any time.

1. As you prepared to transition out of high school did you discuss next steps after High school? Who was that with?
2. Did you guys ever discuss how ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status may impact your social or emotional transition to the postsecondary setting?
3. Can you describe the positive characteristics of the interaction as you were socially preparing for your postsecondary transition?
4. Can you describe the negative characteristics of the interaction as you were socially preparing for your postsecondary transition?
5. Can you describe the positive characteristics of the interaction as you were emotionally preparing for your postsecondary transition?
6. Can you describe the negative characteristics of the interaction as you were emotionally preparing for your postsecondary transition?
7. Can you describe the activities (strategies) you participated in to help you prepare for the social transition to the postsecondary setting?
8. Can you describe the activities (strategies) you participated in to help you prepare for the emotional transition to the postsecondary setting?
9. What strategies do you believe would increase your social preparation for the transition to postsecondary setting?
10. What strategies do you believe would increase your emotional preparation for the transition to postsecondary setting?
11. How do you feel these strategies prepared you socially for the transition to the postsecondary setting?
12. How do you feel these strategies emotionally prepared you for the transition to the postsecondary setting?

13. Is there any other information pertaining to the social and emotional preparation you received that we have not reviewed but you believe is pertinent to share?

Appendix D: Researchers Interview

Comments that may not be adequately captured through the audio-recording

Impressions,

Environmental contexts,

Behaviors,

Nonverbal cues

Appendix E: Reflective Journal

Event:

Date:

Time:

Thoughts	Feelings	Expectations