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High School to College Transition Among Black Males: An Action Research Project

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MSW, Fordham University, 2000

BA, The Evergreen State College, 1995

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

A participatory action research project involving social workers as stakeholders from high schools and the local community college in Nassau County, New York, provided the basis for an inquiry that addressed the effectiveness and implementation of clinical social work practice with Black male students transitioning to community college from high school. This study addresses how clinical social work practice may be utilized to enhance the experience of the transition process for Black male students from high school to college. Through the use of a qualitative in-depth interview process, 16 school-based social workers provided professional perspective and expertise that resulted in a transformational change project identifying key aspects of psychosocial treatment planning most relevant to the needs of Black male students hoping to persist from high school to college graduation. Social exclusion theory formed the theoretical basis for understanding the socioeconomic and psychosocial experiences of Black male students, whereas grounded theory provided a foundation for theory generation through a process of identifying and classifying emerging patterns and themes within the in-depth interview transcripts. As a result of this doctoral capstone project, key deficiencies in school social work practice, such as the need to adapt to a more community-based form of social work practice, were identified and addressed at a local level through a summary of recommendations, forming the basis for a credible and transferable knowledge base that can be used to improve social work practice. Ultimately, the outcomes of this project improve services for Black male students transitioning from high school to college, and it will lead to positive social change for this student population.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work in its entirety to the generations of young Black men who endeavor to seek out a college education. To all of you, it is my hope that this work serves as a contribution to the high school to college transition process, a process that can be further enhanced by a professional reworking of clinical school social work practice.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the doctoral committee members who helped make this project a reality. To Dr. Sean Hogan, my rock, I thank you for your steadfast guidance and support. To Dr. Takeisha George, thank you for your insight on our committee. To Dr. Camille Huggins, thank you for keeping me on track by reviewing the entirety of this work to facilitate quality assurance. I very much appreciate the gentle guidance and sound advice of various colleagues who assisted me along the way, including Dr. Regina Varin-Mignano, Dr. Wendy Eisner, Dr. Linda Lopez, Marilyn Monroe, and Leigh Sumter. Without your support on this end, I would have felt that I did not have the local field guidance I needed to make this happen. To the school social workers who participated in this project, I cannot possibly thank you enough for your profound reflections on a most vital constituency, the youth of the current generation. To my mother, Felicia Jewett, and my sister, Nanita Jewett, I thank you for your kind and loving support throughout this process. To my uncle, Arthur Klansky, and aunt, Erlinda Klansky, I thank you for believing in me. Lastly, to my dear friend, Helene Guttenberg-Menco, I thank you for always being there to help me through the inevitable bumps and scrapes of this process. To all, I thank you for the greatness you represent, and for helping me focus on the needs of Black male youth. To those young men, it is my hope this work helps in some way to bring a clinical social work perspective on issues that provide a vital link to some of the most pressing issues of transition planning in schools today.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

Introduction

Social workers in high school and community college settings work with Black male students by providing psychosocial supports as a way to facilitate their transition and persistence to high school graduation, and, for those who indicate an interest in college, to college graduation. Once the transition between high school and college has occurred, the minimal communication that exists between school systems regarding individual students ceases. Before the termination of that relationship, social workers, as members of transition-focused teams in the high schools, work without direct contact with their college-based counterparts who will eventually work with Black male students once the students have transitioned from high school to the community college. Added support, in the form of increased and improved communication between school-based social work practitioners, is critically important to the successful transition of Black male students from high school to college.

Black male students represent the lowest graduation rate when compared with other students (Schott Foundation, 2015). Black students are particularly vulnerable to stress-induced difficulty in persisting through college to graduation (O'Connell et al., 2009). Much of the research on Black male student success focuses on the deficits and how the development of an effective scaffolding of support can help to bridge identified deficits (Harper, 2014). Deficits, such as a difficulty in coping with stress or depression, are consistently referred to in the literature on supports needed for persisting to graduation from college (O'Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009). In addition, research has

emphasized the importance of providing psychosocial supports in the form of primary prevention for these students, because the absence of an understanding of how to access tertiary prevention leads, in part, to the majority of Black male students not persisting to graduation from college (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Lee, Germain, Lawrence, & Marshall, 2010). Although social workers bridge access to needed tertiary prevention in high school settings, it remains unclear how, or with what formal or informal mechanisms, social workers in high school and college settings can work to develop a fluid understanding of consistent supports for Black male students transitioning between systems (Tan, Battle, Mumm, Eschmann, & Alvarez, 2015). Furthermore, because the majority of research on work with Black male students has focused on deficits and providing psychosocial supports (Harper, 2014), it is critical for social workers to focus on incorporating relevant frameworks that emphasize and incorporate identified strengths from within the Black community as a way of moving beyond existing intervention models to a renewed sense of the need for a truly holistic approach (Johnson, 2015). The understanding of a need for the development of a more culturally-focused intervention is supported by research that consistently shows how Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been successful in aiding in the persistence of Black male students (Lee, 2010). *Persistence* refers to the ability of the student to persist to graduation, the problems associated with that ability, and supports that aid students to persist to graduation.

This is a participatory action research (PAR) project that preliminarily focused on an understanding of the experiences of social workers who provided psychosocial support and transition assistance for Black male adolescent students in transition from high

school to college. In-depth interviews of social workers in high school setting and community college settings provided a qualitative understanding of the experiences of social workers who work with transitioning Black male students and their perception of the development of psychosocial supports for these students. I developed open-ended questions to glean an understanding of the social worker experiences of working with Black male students in transition, and how these experiences inform social worker observations of societally entrenched oppression, inequality of opportunity, and impoverishment. The conceptual framework for this project was social exclusion theory (SET). The interviews provided individual narratives as foundational material for a PAR project in which the interviewed social workers were told by the researcher of the themes derived from the in-depth interviews. As an outgrowth of the interviews and resulting analysis of themes, study participants participated in an iterative, stakeholder-driven process to change and enhance the nature of the high school to college transition for Black male students, enabling a more fluid understanding of psychosocial supports that works to support Black male students in both systems. Through in-depth interviewing, the social workers in the high school and community college settings were informed by the researcher of any disparities and processes that may be used foundationally to inform a PAR project that enhances clinical school social work practice with Black male students.

In this initial section, the I review the problem statement and address the importance of the need to focus on the psychosocial needs of Black male students who are transitioning from high school to college. I then explain the purpose statement, in which I review a rationale of the need for in-depth interviews of school social workers to

glean their perceptions to form the foundation of a transformative PAR project. I provide the geographic locale, along with a summation and rationale supporting preliminary research questions, and I explain relevant terms and concepts that appear throughout the writing of this report.

Problem Statement

Black male students represent the lowest college graduation rates of all groups of students (Schott Foundation, 2015). A PAR project that focused first on developing an in-depth understanding of the experiences of social workers who work with Black male students informed the development of this social-workers-as-stakeholders driven process. Through in-depth interviewing, an understanding of the social workers' perspectives and experiences of delivering psychosocial supports that are perceived by those social workers to enhance Black male student transition and persistence formed the basis of a stakeholder-driven iterative and transformative PAR project.

Approximately 11.9% of all associate degrees granted to male students in the United States in 2013 were awarded to Black male students, whereas 63.8% were awarded to White male students (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2014a). The need for effective psychosocial intervention is particularly urgent with the understanding that only 12% of low-income Black students who initially started in 2-year colleges later graduate from 4-year colleges (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2013). Although the graduation rate and client-based perspectives are important for framing the rationale for a focus on Black male students, an in-depth understanding of social worker perspectives on transitional services in the high school and community college systems drove the need for my inquiry. In Nassau County, New

York, the community served by the local community college, Black persons represent 18.3% of the total population living at or below the federal poverty line (American Community Survey [ACS], 2014). In 2014, the poverty line threshold for a family of four was 24,300 (US Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2016). In response to these figures, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, 2010) provided a stark statement of the need for educational equity that is informed by the development of common college outcome standards and the need for relevant psychosocial supports.

Although these data show a need for a focus on Black male student persistence, a recent study on integrating evidence-based practice (EBP) in schools highlights another emerging social work practice theme. Allen-Meares, Montgomery, and Kim (2013) found that although school social workers understand the need to focus on identifying at-risk students, little to no research-based evidence exists on the implementation of specific EBP-based school social work interventions for at-risk students in high school settings. Allen-Meares and Montgomery (2014) reaffirmed their findings on the lack of studies that focus on the implementation of EBP in school-based social work interventions, citing a meta-analysis by Franklin, Kim, and Tripodi (2009) on school social work interventions in the United States between 1980 and 2007.

Although the lack of studies on EBP in school social work interventions are evident in the meta-analysis conducted by Franklin et al. (2009), their research affirmed that the most effective social work clinical practice interventions in schools were those that focused on internalizing disorders such as anxiety, depression, and self-concept; these findings were reflected in their review of several research studies (e.g., Dupper,

1998; Franklin, Gerlach, & Chanmugam, 2008; Harris & Franklin, 2003). Because the social work practice challenge of this inquiry required an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of social workers in high school and community college settings, a focus on the known specific psychosocial supports, as outlined by Franklin et al. (2009), were major foci of the in-depth interview process and on the transformative experiences of a social-worker-as-stakeholder-driven PAR project. Such a focus allowed me to develop open-ended questions that provided a narrative explanation of individual social worker perspectives on their work with various populations, and, in particular, on their work with Black male students. By focusing on how social workers perceive their work in relation to the specified psychosocial interventions of internalizing disorders, the foundation for a PAR project that highlights how understanding the differences and similarities of practice within the high school and community college setting became the catalyst for social change.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

Through this PAR project, I developed an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of social workers who implement psychosocial supports in their work with Black male students as a foundation for the development of an iterative process. The process built on the social-workers-as-stakeholders experience to enhance the high school to college transition and persistence to graduation process as an ethically-informed means of social justice. Although the problem of Black male persistence to college graduation is a national issue, the PAR project's focus on this social-workers-as-stakeholders inquiry was based on the qualitative in-depth interview data that I collected from social workers

at local high schools in Nassau County, New York, and social workers from Nassau Community College—all of whom work with Black male students.

By starting with in-depth interviews of social workers in high school and college settings, I focused initially on how individual social worker perceptions informed a transformative process for social change in the form of a PAR project. By identifying and sharing the themes identified in the in-depth interviews of social workers, I aimed to answer the following question: How can the emerging themes identified through in-depth interviewing of social workers inform and enhance their clinical practice in relation to Black male students who are transitioning from high school to college? By presenting emerging themes from the in-depth interviews along with this question to the social workers-as-stakeholders, my work supported a transformational PAR project that informed and enhanced the school social work delivery of psychosocial supports for Black male students transitioning from high school to college. Through using the action research interacting spiral of stakeholder-driven processes (Stringer, 2014), my project culminated in the writing of a report that enhanced clinical school social work practice.

Several terms must be understood for this study, because these terms form the basis of much of this inquiry. African American or Caribbean American students may be most appropriately referred to as Black students. The NAACP refers to Black students in their report, *A Framework for Providing All Students an Opportunity to Learn through Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (NAACP, 2010), along with references to Hispanic, Latino, and Native American groups as examples of people of color in their report. Therefore, the term *Black male students* may be a most appropriate identifier for the population of focus. Two other terms I use frequently are

transition and *persistence*. *Transition* refers to both the identification and support of student postsecondary goals as well as those functions school social workers (and other school professionals) perform in support of student-centered goals that satisfy state and federal guidelines on transition planning. *Persistence* refers to the ability of a student to persist to graduation as well as those efforts to identify problems with persistence and those supports that aid in persistence to graduation. *Psychosocial support*, another term that I use consistently, refers to both the clinical development and understanding of support for Black male students from a social work in education perspective, and an understanding of psychosocial support identified as a need for students with pre-existing mental health issues.

This doctoral study was needed for a number of reasons. The research question for this study was: How can the emerging themes identified through in-depth interviewing of social workers inform and enhance their clinical practice in relation to Black male students who are transitioning from high school to college? This question, in various forms, has consistently been asked from several fronts across the community college campus. Although much theory-based discussion occurs regarding what might be done from an educational perspective, currently no formal research-based initiatives are being implemented to address this issue from a social work perspective at the community college. A social work-informed PAR project that aimed to develop and enhance a social work practice model for supporting persistence from the perspective of SET was strategically and critically necessary. This project enhanced and informed the social work contribution in secondary and higher education settings on transition planning and identified the development of a social-worker-as-stakeholder-driven PAR process that

resulted in a social work ethics-derived framework for persistence to graduation in the form of psychosocially-driven inclusionary tactics aimed at removing barriers to graduation as a form of social justice. This project aligned with the doctor of social work requirement at Walden University of developing a transformational project that enhances clinical social work knowledge and provides a positive change in support of social justice and self-determination—tenets of the code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2008).

Nature of the Doctoral Project

The design of the study aligned with the purpose statement and research question in the following ways: Social workers from Nassau County, New York, high schools and Nassau Community College were the primary stakeholders in this qualitative research-based PAR project. Initially, in-depth interviews of the social workers informed the direction of a social workers-as-stakeholders research-driven transformational change project. The in-depth interview-gleaned individual perceptions of social workers in these systems are the primary catalyst for a PAR project involving their collective perceptions of their work with Black male students, enhancing clinical school social work practice to support these students in their transition and persistence to graduation from college. By using the perceptions and experiences of social workers who participated in in-depth interviews as stakeholder participants in a PAR project, I answered the research question.

Social workers who participate in intra-county transition meetings for high schools in Nassau County, New York, participated in the in-depth interview and PAR project. Social workers who currently work at Nassau Community College, and who work with students in counseling capacities, participated in this study. Using the

informed consent protocols of Walden University, these social workers understood the purpose of this research project. Once the participants and necessary approvals were in place, I interviewed each social worker one-on-one, in an in-depth interview format. I recorded the interviews using audio tape recording technology, and then transcribed the interviews. I analyzed each transcript for themes and common patterns (i.e., grounded theory). I kept the tape recordings and resulting transcripts in a locked cabinet to protect the privacy of individual participants. I shared the resulting summary of themes and analysis of any relationship between themes, and social work practice, with all of the social-workers-as-stakeholder participants, providing a foundation for the transformative efforts of a PAR project.

Significance of the Study

Social workers in the local high schools and community college of Nassau County, New York, operate independently of one another in their work with Black male students. Although much research on the need for social workers to identify problems in the secondary and postsecondary educational systems remains an utmost priority, few researchers have examined the implementation of EBP in school social work in these systems (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014).

Through the iterative and transformative nature of a PAR project, social workers as stakeholders provided a dialogue and resulting direction for identifying EBP-based social work interventions that work in both systems to support the transition and persistence of Black male students toward graduation from college. By working together in a PAR project that is informed by the initial findings of in-depth interviews, social workers in these separate systems developed an understanding of a focus on EBP-based

psychosocial interventions that can work in both systems to support the transition and persistence of Black male students to college graduation. The social workers as primary stakeholders identified secondary stakeholders who were invited to participate in the iterative PAR process as a way to further enhance the delivery of a social work ethics-derived transformative process that informed and enhanced existing clinical school social work practice.

By focusing on the iterative processes of the action research interacting spiral, social-workers-as-stakeholders identified evidence-based psychosocial interventions that can be implemented in support of Black male students as a way to enhance their transition and persistence to college graduation. School-based interventions are primarily educational in nature. In my project, I integrated social worker-identified knowledge of EBP interventions in the resulting phases of participatory and transformative processes of a PAR project to enhance existing education-based interventions.

This PAR project is informed by the social-worker-as-stakeholder identification of a direction in support of social justice and self-determination, tenets of the NASW (2008) code of ethics. The need for identifying a fluid understanding of work between social workers in these separate systems is of paramount importance to Black male students, because only 12% of low-income Black students who start in 2-year colleges later graduate from 4-year colleges (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2013).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

SET posits that in a highly stratified country, such as the United States, people are excluded in relation to the level of power, wealth, and prestige they have acquired

(Wagner, 2015). Examples of such exclusion are evident in understanding societally entrenched oppression, inequality of opportunity, and impoverishment (Taket et al., 2010). Although the macrosystem view of SET posits the need for policy change that results in the removal of barriers to social exclusion, the microsystem view allows for a targeted look at the social-worker-as-stakeholder understanding of how their perceptions of psychosocial interventions can be enhanced in relation to their work with Black male students.

SET-informed open-ended questions informed the direction of the in-depth interview process, the initial phase of the PAR project. SET posits that institutions and organizations can, themselves, be vehicles of oppression and exclusion (Jordan, 1996). By looking at the experiences of social workers in high schools and the local community college, (i.e., institutional settings), this project provided an understanding of the ways in which their social work-derived, in-depth interview perspectives on psychosocial interventions with Black male students, effected a direction for positive transformation in the form of an improved understanding of clinical school social work interventions and practices.

The PAR-derived direction of a stakeholder-driven process can provide for the alleviation of any identified barriers as a way of rejecting social exclusion in favor of a social work-derived sense of empowerment as a form of social justice. Through the iterative processes of PAR, social workers as stakeholders embrace the SET-informed stance on social justice by directly targeting the alleviation of inequality (Loury, 2000). As members of an oppressed group, many Black male students come from low-income and impoverished backgrounds (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance,

2013). Not having sustained access to the resources that drive economic and social success is a barrier for these students. How social-workers-as-stakeholders perceive this understanding of the lives of Black male students in relation to SET informs the foundation for all PAR-related iterations of this project.

The initial focus on the perspectives of social workers provided an understanding of their work in relation to SET. SET provides a theoretical foundation by which the perspectives of school social workers on interventions targeting internalizing disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and self-concept (Franklin et al., 2009) can be used in the transformative iterations of a PAR project to effect positive change and social justice. The in-depth interviews formed the basis for a stakeholder driven PAR process. Because SET informs the nature of the questions asked of social workers in the in-depth interview process, the very nature of the initial qualitative inquiry provided a thematic overlay for the evolving PAR project. The removal of barriers to equality and access in the form of a PAR-enhanced psychosocial intervention aligns the theoretical positioning of SET with social work ethics, namely, those ethical tenets of social justice and self-determination as outlined in the NASW (2008) code of ethics.

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In the preliminary stages of the literature review process, I used the the Walden University databases, as well as the multi-university subscription-based databases available through the State University of New York library system. The use of search engines and databases that provide peer-reviewed content, such as the system databases listed in this writing, are essential to providing a research-based foundation of the justification for this research project. These databases provide necessary access to peer-

reviewed journals and access to books on various theoretical perspectives, including SET, that are necessary for supporting a researched justification. Although the preliminary focus of this literature review was on research published within the past 5 years, I considered all research reports relating to persistence and transition of vulnerable groups, and specifically Black male adolescents, as well as related research on psychosocial support published more than 5 years ago.

Socioeconomic Data

The justification for a PAR project that enhances clinical social work practice lies primarily with an understanding that Black students are particularly vulnerable to stress-induced difficulty in persisting through college to graduation (O'Connell et al., 2009). Research has consistently reinforced that Black and Hispanic students from low-income backgrounds need a comprehensive scaffolding of support, such as the support common in clinical social work, as a form of primary prevention for stress and depression, specifically, because these psychosocial indicators are known predictors of academic difficulty within this population, affecting its ability to persist through college to graduation (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2013; DuBois et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2010).

Black male students represent the lowest graduation rate when compared with other students (Schott Foundation, 2015). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2016), where the latest Nassau Community College demographics data are logged, 22.5% of the student body identified as Black in the fall of 2014. Of the students who identified as Black or African-American at Nassau Community College in the fall of 2012 (N = 515), only 15% had graduated by the fall of

2014 (NCES, 2014b). Although these data reveal that 15% had graduated by the fall of 2014 (NCES, 2014b), the data do not clarify percentages based on gender. However, when reviewing the educational attainment of all men and women, women between the ages of 25 and 29 years (39%) attained a bachelor degree at a higher rate than men (32%) (NCES, 2015).

A campus-wide committee of Nassau Community College reported that in 2014, 35% of all students who stopped attending the college did so because of emotional stress (Student Enrollment Management Committee, 2015). Compounding these issues for the local community, the Long Island region remains one of the most residentially segregated areas of the United States as evidenced by the 10% representation of white students in low-performance schools, where Black students make up 80% of the student body (Long Island Index, 2016). In another study of Black persons on Long Island, only 9% reported having access to high performing schools; and 1 in 3 (33%) reported housing discrimination (ERASE Racism, 2012).

For Black male students first exiting high school, the transition to young adulthood is known to be stressful, and, unchecked primary prevention can be predictive of lower school achievement (O'Connell et al., 2009). In addition, the percentage of people living at or below the federal poverty rate on Long Island continues to increase, representing 21% of the total population (Long Island Index, 2015). These realities have significant application in the professional lives of school-based social workers working with this client population and their ability to deliver efficacious transitional and support services. Such facts are also important as foundational material for the development of research questions that are geared to understanding the experiences of social workers in

an in-depth interview process. These facts, coupled with an understanding of SET, constitute the basis for this PAR project, and is informed by the socioeconomic facts of the lives of Black male students, and grounded in sound theoretical discourse.

Cultural Integrity and Social Exclusion Theory

Tierney (1999) posited in writing on cultural integrity that it is the responsibility of the educational institution, rather than the responsibility of the individual, to provide equal access to education. This position goes against the direction popularized by Tinto (1987) requiring minority students to assimilate into mainstream culture. Tinto further emphasized the need for minority students to disassociate from family and friends outside the college environment as a way to further ingratiate themselves to the college assimilation process. The position offered by Tierney (1999), in which responsibility for success is placed on the institution, can be realized if social workers can facilitate a focus on the ways in which individuals perceive their environment. How Black adolescent male students perceive their environment is a valuable perspective to the social-worker-as-stakeholder process of PAR. It focuses the direction of the transformational nature of the work on understanding how integrating cultural perspectives as cultural capital into their social work practice, rather than on pushing for institutional assimilation, can function as a means of rejecting institutionally entrenched oppression, as posited by Jordan (1996) in writing on SET.

For social workers in educational environments, integrating the perspectives of Black male students provides a means for assessing their own perceptions of their work with these students. Such an integration of cultural capital provides school social workers with a benchmark for clarifying their adherence to cultural integrity, in relation

to their ethically prescribed responsibility to the profession of social work (NASW, 2008). Aligned with this understanding of institutions as potential environments of oppression (Jordan, 1996), school social workers have an obligation to understand the psychosocial needs of Black male students by starting with reviewing their own cultural perceptions of their work with these students. By doing so, school social workers can understand how their own perceptions add or detract to the support of Black male students, through the lens of SET, as a response to institutionalized oppression (Hutchinson et al., 2011). Although the focus on difficult students with behavioral problems and removing them from schools has been a focus of much historical research (Bagley & Pritchard, 1998), the implementation of school social work clinical interventions has helped to ameliorate social difficulties, thereby allowing students to remain engaged in their studies and to remain on track for high school graduation (Tan et al., 2015). Although my research positively reinforces the importance of school social work interventions, the focus is on assimilation of skills that help the individual overcome deficits, rather than on their cultural capital, and their inherent self-worth.

Need for Psychosocial Intervention

The need for psychosocial intervention is of utmost importance, because only 12% of low-income Black students who initially start in 2-year colleges later graduate from 4-year colleges (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2013). Although gender figures were not readily available for this specific group of students, in general, Black men account for approximately one-third of all Black baccalaureate degrees (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). For late-term adolescents exiting high school, the transition to young adulthood is known to be psychologically stressful, and

unchecked primary prevention can be predictive of lower school achievement (O'Connell et al., 2009). For Black male students who are transitioning to young adulthood in a community college setting, not having a solid grasp of self-advocacy, self-efficacy, and coping strategies for managing stress affects retention and persistence to graduation (Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2014). In particular, students from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds and students of color experience difficulty maintaining persistence to graduation due to factors such as stress related to academic performance and social factors outside the school environment (Johnson et al., 2014). An understanding of the school social worker experiences of their work with Black male students provides an understanding of how these psychosocial issues are addressed within high school and college systems, and further emphasizes the importance of social work interventions (Mashimbye, 2000). Mashimbye (2000) further emphasized the need for social workers to focus on individual needs of students, working beyond an understanding of group dynamics to an understanding of student self-reported experiences.

Although Allen-Meares et al. (2013) found an understanding among social workers of the need to identify students at risk of psychosocial stress, they also found little to no evidence on the implementation of specific evidence-based school interventions for at-risk students. In a meta-analysis on the implementation of school-based interventions conducted on school social work research between 1980 and 2007, Allen-Meares and colleagues indicated a lack of evidence-based research on effective interventions. In similar research, Franklin et al. (2009) emphasized that treatment for internalizing disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and poor self-concept, were the most

successful of clinical school social work interventions among the few reports that cited effective interventions in schools. EBP targeting internalizing disorders are more effective because they tend to require less intensive mental health interventions than what is required for the treatment of externalizing disorders, including disorders associated with individual maladaptive behavioral responses to the local environment (Franklin, Harris, & Allen-Meares, 2013).

Exiting High School in Transition

Saenz and Combs (2015) reviewed the experiences of students of color who were transitioning from high school to college, finding, through their focus groups and interviews, that students were in need of a staged process that gradually and methodically moved from the high school setting to the college setting. Furthermore, Saenz and Combs (2015) found that students who felt supported in their transition process to college, and who perceived that they were taught an understanding of the value of education, reported a more positive acclimation to the college environment. Such an understanding of the need for a staged, gradual transition from the high school system to the college system is important to note in the development of questions that were asked of social workers, because this aided in gleaning an understanding of their perceptions and experiences of implementing psychosocial support for Black male students in transition between systems. Additional research reinforces themes of perceived transitional support, along with an understanding that Black students are less likely to earn a degree than their white counterparts (Cox, 2016). Cox (2016) further found, through in-depth interviewing of students, they were more likely to choose not to attend college because of economic factors diverting them to address other aspects of their lives,

or that such economic factors contributed to their dropping out of college. These observations further highlight the findings of other researchers, who found that students drop out from high school because of a lack of preparedness to persist to graduation (Balfanz, 2009) and are not prepared for an understanding of the importance of a college education due to a perceived lack of access to counselors (Owens, Simmons, Bryant, & Henfield, 2011).

Student Support on the College Campus

Most college campuses provide some type of social work/counseling services. Usually, such services are provided on a voluntary basis and form the foundation for what amounts to tertiary prevention—in that the student is already failing, suffering from stress, or experiencing some other mental health issue relating to extreme stress or coursework failure when they seek out counseling services. The intent of voluntary services is to help ameliorate symptoms that the student is already experiencing at the community college (LaBoone, 2006). The social work staff, as primary stakeholders in a PAR project, can act as intermediaries—functioning collectively to develop a fluid transition process, a primary intervention process, for Black male students exiting high school and going on to the community college (Goldkind, 2014). Such a focus on fluid transition can, effectively, function as a primary intervention if the service is directly provided, rather than passively accessed when psychosocial problems become so significant that the voluntarily traditional tertiary interventions typical of college campuses become their sole hope for the alleviation of psychosocial stress and continuance of persistence through college. This dilemma is further compounded with

the knowledge that many more students who attend the community college do so with pre-existing, undiagnosed psychological problems (Epstein, 2015).

Strategic Planning

Harper (2014) explains that although much of the research supporting the need for helping Black men succeed in college is well intentioned, it lacks an entrenched strategic plan that aligns with the larger institutional desire to improve the experiences of Black male students. Such research highlights the deficits, failures, and challenges of Black men, rather than how various counseling methodologies might be used to support persistence (Howard, 2013). Harper and Kuykendall (2012) proposed a list of standards that elicit the direct involvement of Black male students in the formulation of campus initiatives, focusing particular attention on personal and academic achievement rather than on social programming. Persistence to college graduation requires more than just an understanding and acceptance of graduation requirements; it requires the incorporation of understanding how Black men are successful, as a starting point in the development of campus initiatives (Johnson, 2015).

Strengths-Based Practice

Toldson (2008) emphasized that existing research proposes various deficit models that themselves act as barriers to the success of Black male students. For example, Toldson remarked on how standardized testing is used to define the problem of Black male failure in schools, and how this should be replaced by student-based inquiry that highlights the success of Black men in the local community. This focus further emphasizes the importance of earlier work by researchers who identified the need for a strengths-based approach to working with oppressed groups (Spencer, 2005). In

identifying the strengths of young Black men, researchers have emphasized the importance of incorporating family, self-concept, the values of the individual, and expectations of the teachers (Parham, Parham, Berry, & Asamen, 1989). Social workers are strategically imbued with the ability to explore these positive aspects of the lives of Black male students in their work, and to work on incorporating an understanding of the importance of these aspects of their lives as a means of strength in their work through the college experience. An understanding of the need for a strengths-based focus on strategic planning can provide needed focus on the development of initiatives that aid in the persistence of Black male students through college.

School Social Work Role Ambiguity

As part of the grand challenges initiative launched by the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW), the Academy called for papers on school social work practice that highlights, among other items, research on diminishing role ambiguity in the school setting (AASWSW, 2016). The NASW defined *school social work* as a form of counseling that provides for crisis intervention and prevention programming that helps young people overcome difficulties in their lives, and, as a result, gives them a better opportunity at succeeding in school (NASW, 2016). Richard and Sosa (2014) pointed out that although school social work has evolved significantly from a time when the primary function was attendance enforcement, there remains significant contemporary evidence of role ambiguity. Although official expectations of school social worker roles remain lacking in terms of clearly defined responsibilities, the ethical tenets outlined in the code of ethics of the NASW (2008) remain clear in terms of defining what a licensed social worker is obligated to facilitate. It is, therefore, logical to posit that an

exploration of the school social work role within the context of transition planning is essential to understanding the extent that role ambiguity plays in aiding or detracting from the facilitation of the provision of school social work in the high school and college settings, respectively.

Summary

In-depth interviews of social workers who work with Black male students in the local high schools, the summative transcript of those in-depth interviews, and iterative collaboration between and amongst social-workers-as-stakeholders at the local high schools and community college in Nassau County, New York, provided scaffolding for affecting a qualitative understanding of their experiences and perceptions. The methodology of this research project is informed by the theoretical tenets of SET; and grounded theory provides a basis for analyzing emerging themes for theory-generation (Holton, 2007). The summative transcript of the social-worker-as-stakeholder experiences and perceptions shall form the basis of an iterative and transformative change process that informs and enhances school social work practice. The change process shall be driven by the research question: How can the emerging themes identified through in-depth interviewing of social workers inform and enhance their clinical practice in relation to Black male students who are transitioning from high school to college?

As informed by the literature review, the identification of psychosocial techniques necessary to fluid treatment planning in transition planning within and between the local high schools and community college were identified (Goldkind, 2014; O'Connell et al., 2009), along with any specific instances or examples of role ambiguity that exist within and between the local high schools and community college (AASWSW, 2016). The need

for an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of social workers provided an understanding of needs expressed by the Black male students with whom they work in their respective settings (Owens et al., 2011), another key discrepancy outlined in the literature review. How the social workers can support the expressed needs of Black male students was addressed throughout the iterative PAR process, along with an understanding of how any identified needs can be integrated into institutional strategic planning (Harper, 2014). An overriding theme of the literature review also indicates the need to integrate strengths-based practice, along with an understanding of how any identified psychosocial treatment methods can be used to support persistence (Howard, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Spencer, 2005; Toldson, 2008).

The problem statement, research question, nature of the problem, and literature review all inform the foundational direction of Section 1. In Section 1, I introduced the problem, provided a rationale and justification for the research, and outlined deficiencies (areas in need of further exploration) in the literature review. In Section 2, I conceptualize the research project as a qualitative study, and I review the details of the formulation of the research design and methodology. The latter subsections of Section 2 are a summary in which I succinctly outline the entirety of this endeavor and lay the foundation for IRB consideration, which ultimately led to IRB approval.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

The objective of this PAR project was to facilitate and expand the clinical knowledge base for school social workers. Specifically, I focused on social work processes in relation to the transition of Black male students from high school to college, and what can be learned from an examination of these processes. The overall aim of this work was to implement a transformational change process that facilitated a more fluid understanding of the types and frequencies of psychosocial supports and methods used by social workers in these systems (the local high schools and community college systems), which were identified as essential to the transition of Black male students between educational systems. In the following sections, I explore the research question and problem statement with the aim of explaining the rationale for the resulting qualitative research design. I then explain the methodology that I implemented as part of the qualitative research design, how I recruited research participants for participation in the PAR project, and how I collected, collated, analyzed, and stored data. Finally, I delineate an understanding of the ethical procedures necessary for protecting the participants, the data collected, and the overall integrity of the research design.

Research Design

Through the development of a social-worker-as-stakeholder-driven process, I used this project to build on the experiences and individual perceptions of social workers to improve the high school to college transition process that, ultimately, enhanced the clinical school social work knowledge base. The overarching research question of this project was: How can the emerging themes identified through in-depth interviewing of social workers inform and enhance their clinical practice in relation to Black male

students who are transitioning from high school to college? With this research question focus, I explored how conceptualizing the differences and similarities of social work processes in these separate but related systems provided an enhanced understanding of those psychosocial supports and processes, leading to a more fluid transition for Black male students transitioning from high school to college.

The overall research design of this PAR project was qualitative. In-depth, one-on-one interviews of social workers, who work in the local high school systems and the local community college, occurred as an initial stage in this project. Following the in-depth, one-on-one interviews, those social workers continued in an iterative PAR process that resulted in a transformative change—a change that enhances existing clinical school social work knowledge and practice. Following the iterative stages of the action research interacting spiral (Stringer, 2014), the social-worker-as-stakeholder participants received a summative transcript of the results of the individual in-depth interviews. These stakeholder participants came together as a group to review the summative report that is based on the one-on-one in-depth interviews to determine the direction of the transformative change project. As is pivotal in a PAR project, the participants came to a consensus on a direction for the change project (Stringer, 2014). Although the transformative focus of this project was on enhancing the social work clinical practice knowledge on the transition of Black male students to college, the actual form of this PAR project was entirely driven by the group dynamics of the social-worker-as-stakeholder participants in all phases of the action research interacting spiral that followed the initial in-depth interview stage (Stringer, 2014). I transcribed each one-on-one interview and analyzed for common social worker perceptions and themes (i.e.,

grounded theory). The resulting transcription and synthesis of themes, in a summative report, was shared with the social workers as stakeholders, and I used it as a foundation for a "constant process of observation, reflection, and action" (i.e., interacting spiral process) (Stringer, 2014, p. 9) that will transform the nature of existing school-based social work practices for students transitioning from high school to college.

It is important to review the operational definitions that I used in my study. It is helpful to start with an understanding that this project is informed by the foundational tenets of SET, meaning the open-ended questions developed for the in-depth interviews are informed, in part, by a foundational understanding of SET and also by the pre-existing research literature. Social workers as stakeholders drive the focus of this research, because it is an understanding of their clinical psychosocial work and orientation to their work with Black male students that drove the transformational aspects of this PAR project. Transition or transition planning are those processes (i.e., the connections that exist between the local high schools and the community college) that will be examined, along with an understanding of the employment of psychosocial methods used by social workers in the high school and college systems. The social workers' perceptions of their clinical psychosocial work in transition planning (as this work relates to Black male students) occur in the in-depth interviews. The analysis of these perceptions and a resulting summative report was then used as a foundation for the transformational outgrowth that results as the stakeholders advance with their collectively derived iterations of the action research interacting spiral of the PAR project (Stringer, 2014), an entirely social-workers-as-stakeholder-driven process. I focused on understanding the purpose, intent, and actualization of support for the persistence of

Black male students within each system and how such an understanding can be used to enhance social work clinical practice within and between systems.

Methodology

Prospective Data

Social-worker-as-stakeholder participants from the local high schools were recruited through the intra-county transition meetings attended by members of high-school-based transition support teams, and via snowball sampling. Eight social workers were recruited from the ad hoc intra-county transition meetings and another eight from the community college for the in-depth interviews ($N = 16$). In addition to recruiting high school social workers from the ad hoc intra-county transition meetings, I implemented a snowball sampling methodology, giving social workers a scripted invitation they were asked to pass on to other social workers. The intra-county transition meetings are a voluntary ad-hoc organization made up of high school professionals, many of whom are social workers, who work in the local Nassau County schools. Their voluntary participation in the intra-county transition meetings consisted of networking amongst other similarly-minded professionals. All social workers solicited were Master's degree-level social work professionals with experience providing psychosocial interventions in high school settings, not specifically as representatives of their local schools or school districts. As such, the snowball sampling methodology was effectively used for recruiting participants from the local high schools and community college in Nassau County, New York. The criteria that they work as Master's degree-level social workers with experience providing psychosocial interventions in local Nassau County high schools sufficed. This distinction is important, along with the understanding that their

participation was entirely voluntary, confidential, and essential for gleaning a holistic understanding of social worker perceptions. Given that their participation was gleaned almost exclusively via snowball sampling methods outside of their official capacities within schools and school districts, it was not necessary to obtain permission from their employers – they were asked to divulge their opinions and perceptions as social workers, not as representatives of their respective employers.

The in-depth qualitative interviews provided data that elucidated areas of practice in these systems that are experientially and thematically similar, as well as those experiences and themes that provide evidence of role ambiguity. The social workers I interviewed elucidated the relationships that existed between psychosocial intervention and the social workers' perceptions of the Black male experience of intervention, the social workers' perceptions of the scope of their role as interventionists in the lives of Black male students, and the social workers' perceptions of:

1. The Black male student experience of receiving transitional educational services across and within the high school and college systems;
2. The scope of their role as service providers in the lives of Black male students; and,
3. The Black male students' experiencing institutional oppression within these systems.

My review of the transcribed interviews formed the basis for hypothesis generation, a central function of grounded theory research (Glaser, 1998). In grounded theory, emerging themes are conceptualized as codes that, when compared and contrasted between interviews, lead to the generation of hypotheses that may explain the

relationship between codes (Holton, 2007). These relationships should not be viewed as findings or conclusions, but, rather, should be viewed as an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses (Glaser, 1998). The in-depth interviews were transcribed, and the content analyzed for the common experiences and themes, as well as idiosyncratic characteristics, of the social workers. These experiences and themes were extrapolated, coded, and presented as a unified report to the study participants in the form of a two-page summary.

Participants

The participants were identified through a recruitment statement prepared and delivered orally and in writing at a monthly meeting of the intra-county high school transition group in Nassau County, New York, and via the snowball sampling method previously outlined. The social workers at the local community college were solicited directly for participation in the PAR project. Only those social workers who have, at minimum, earned a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree were solicited for participation. It is important to reiterate this project was developed with an understanding that social workers in the high school and college settings primarily function independent of one another. There are social workers in the high school settings that perform specialized transition work (i.e., social workers who function only on the transition of persons with documented disabilities to college), so it was important for me to actively recruit those social workers who interact with Black male students, and who have an understanding of their school protocol on transition planning. Eight social workers from each system (i.e., the high schools and community college) were recruited with the understanding that a sampling size representative of social workers who work with Black male students was necessary in order for this study to reach data saturation.

Data saturation was achieved when it became clear that the study could be replicated using the same protocols outlined in this research project (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The eight social workers bench mark (eight high school social workers and eight community college social workers) was viewed as an acceptable minimum number of participants. Understanding the experiences of social workers in the high school and community college systems, respectively, helped me to define how each group was oriented to their work with Black male students – particularly in terms of their role and function (i.e., the social worker's role and function) in transition from high school to college. How each social worker stakeholder is oriented to their work from the perspective of the NASW (2008) code of ethics was also explored in the individual in-depth interview process. The summative transcript of these experiences provided a focus for the iterative processes of a PAR project that did result in a transformational understanding of clinical school social work with Black male students. This project resulted in a more fluid and supportive transition process, enhanced by an orientation to the role of school social worker that is informed by the code of ethics of the NASW (2008), and through the lens of SET.

Instrumentation

An original 9-question, open-ended qualitative interview schedule developed to probe the perceptions of social workers who work in the high school and college settings, was used to collect data from study participants. Question development was informed by the literature review and predicated upon information required to answer the project's research question (Richards & Morse, 2013). Basic demographic information related to each study participant's age, gender, ethnicity, and employment status and history was

also collected. Following completion of the informed consent process, a face-to-face interview was arranged with each interviewee; the face-to-face qualitative interview took approximately 30-minutes. Prior to beginning the interview, the identity of the interviewee was reduced to a number that provided an anonymous reference in the transcript of the interview and summative report. A number in the one-hundred's (e.g., 101, 102, etc.) identified a high school social worker. A number in the two-hundred's (e.g., 201, 202, etc.) identified a college social worker.

I administered all of the interviews. Given the emergent design flexibility of the qualitative interviewing process, study participants did not have access to the interview schedule. Each individual interview was recorded on an audio tape. During the informed consent process, study participants were informed of the necessity to audio record their interview. Of the 16 study participants, none refused to be audio recorded. Therefore, there were no study participants who did not agree to be audio recorded. Had they refused to be recorded, they would have been excluded from the study. I then transcribed each audio tape. As the interviews were transcribed, I simultaneously analyzed for themes, in-keeping with the grounded theory method for observing emerging themes, referred to as codes (Holton, 2007). Each code was then cross-compared between interview subjects. It is through the observance of emerging codes and cross-comparison of codes between interviewees that emerging hypotheses were formed and described in narrative form (Holton, 2007). Through the grounded theory process of hypothesis formation, a theory that unifies a collective understanding of the analyzed codes emerged that reaffirmed the tenets of SET. Grounded theory provided an emerging, observational process that aligned with the overall purpose of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014).

As an outgrowth of a grounded theory cross-analysis of interviewee transcripts, a resulting summative report was developed and shared with the interviewees, the social workers-as-stakeholders in the iterative PAR process. What the social-workers-as-stakeholders gleaned from the summative report was then used as a foundation for the iterative PAR processes. Since it is known that social workers in high schools and college student services division work primarily independent of one another, an understanding of their experiences as social workers in these systems was a necessary starting point for a PAR project aimed at transforming and enhancing existing clinical school social work knowledge and practice. Role ambiguity, role similarities, and the individual experiences of these social-workers-as-stakeholders, was necessary as a starting point in this, a project that focused on the collective will of the stakeholder group, an essential and consistently repetitive step in an iterative PAR project. Since the methodological intent of a PAR project is driven by the will of the stakeholders involved in that process and project, the in-depth interviews and resulting summative report provided a focus that was used by the participants to affect a direction, a mutual understanding, and a rationale for furthering the iterative steps necessary to drive the iterative processes of my PAR project.

Data Analysis

For each of the in-depth interviews, I produced a transcript from the audio recordings. Then, I analyzed each individual transcript for the experiences and themes of the individual social workers. Qualitative data was coded on a saturation grid that outlined all major themes and subthemes that emerged as a result of the in-depth interviews. The development of a saturation grid was one way for me to track how the

social workers gauged the importance of each theme and subtheme (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I then listed all themes and subthemes, and coded the participants' contributions on the saturation grid. As a way to further elucidate any patterned differences between the responses provided by social workers from high schools and from the community college, I developed two separate saturation grids (i.e., one for the high school participants' and one for the community college participants). Further, differences and points for clarification were achieved through member checking, and by my follow up with the social-worker-as-stakeholder participants to verify the content of each transcript (Stringer, 2014).

I gave particular attention to those experiences and themes that emerged in relation to their individual orientation to SET, the process of transition planning, persistence of Black male students, and psychosocial methods currently used to support Black male students in their transition from high school to college. The emerging experiences and themes I identified provided an understanding for the direction of a PAR project that enhanced existing clinical school social worker practice in relation to social work role expectation, social work role ambiguity, and the ways in which such an enhanced understanding aids in the development of a more fluid and supportive transition of Black male students from high school to college – all of which are supported by the tenets of the NASW (2008) code of ethics.

The scope of this research applied to the experiences of the social workers and systems involved in the assessment, development, analysis, and results of my PAR project. Therefore, the qualitative results that relate to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of my research do inform the importance of it.

Credibility relates to whether or not the research is deemed believable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since I recruited the participants from a group of professionals whose primary function is that of transition planning, the credibility of this project is sound. Poor external validity mandates that results be interpreted and reported with caution. While the results may not be generalizable, through purposeful sampling and the collection of rich in-depth descriptions of school-based social work experiences with Black male students, other clinicians will be able to transfer the results of this study to their own school-based practice.

Transferability is a qualitative research methodological concept, akin to generalizability in quantitative research, which allows consumers of the research to decide if the information they are reading can be transferred to their own professional or practical context (Jensen, 2008; Stringer, 2014). Transferability is affected by the ability of the social workers to provide reliable and valid information, as well as the ability of the lead researcher to provide a summative report that accurately evidences the transformative results of the project.

Dependability is concerned with the ability of external sources to take the methods used for this project with the intent of duplicating the methodology in another research project in a similar system (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is not concerned with the ability of future researchers to replicate exact results, but for the researchers to be able to use the same methods to glean results that are relevant to that separate research process.

Confirmability of my research project results was realized through a data audit. I facilitated the data audit throughout the various stages of the PAR project with the social

workers-as-stakeholder participants. Confirmability was realized through the data audit as a reflection of the perspective of the participants, not my perspective as the researcher (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007).

I encouraged the participants to question the process, question the interpretation of the summative report, and to provide a synthesis of the resulting research that aligns with the participatory nature of the PAR project. The iterative nature of a PAR project supports confirmability through the stakeholder-driven process of the action research interacting spiral (Stringer, 2014). Through their consistent questioning of results, opinions, and processes (essential components of any properly executed PAR project), the stakeholders provided a consistent data audit that ultimately supports the confirmability of my research project. A data audit can be further strengthened by the identification of an external source, an external evaluator who has no vested interest in the project, who reviews the research process and deems it valid (Schwandt et al., 2007).

Ethical Procedures

As part of the recruitment process, I informed all study participants of the intentions, goals, procedures, risks, and benefits of the research study. Participation in this study was voluntary; while study participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty, none chose to do so. There was no to minimal expected harm to study participants; school-based social workers, as well as students transitioning to college from high school, benefited from this research. Study participants received no incentives or compensation for participation in this project. All information is private and confidential. Each study participant was assigned a study participant code. All data collected from study participants was identified exclusively by study participant

code; no personal identifying information was linked to the data. All informed consent forms, audio tapes, and individual transcripts are locked in a file cabinet; electronic data files are kept in a password-secured personal computer. Access to the data is limited to the Walden faculty mentor and myself. Per federal guidelines (DHHS, 2006), 3 years following completion of the study, all consent forms, audio tapes, and interview transcripts will be shredded and destroyed to ensure that no information can be extracted or reconstructed. Approval for the protection of human subjects was acquired from the Institutional Review Board at Walden University (approval code 04-19-17-0471095).

Summary

My research project focused initially on how the perceptions and experiences of social workers in high schools and the community college systems of Nassau County, New York, provided the foundation for a PAR project that led to transformational change in the quality of transitional school-based social work practices. The initial phase of data collection and analysis, informed by a qualitative in-depth interview process with individual social workers from each system, was the beginning point for a social workers-as-stakeholder driven PAR project. The results of an action research interacting spiral-informed process of diagnosis (informed by a summative report of the in-depth individual interviews), planning, taking action, and evaluation, form the essential components of my research project. The change that results from this iterative process will continue to inform and enhance existing clinical school social work practice in relation to transition planning for Black male students and their persistence to graduation from college. I placed particular emphasis on ensuring the intellectual rigor of this project by consistently focusing on the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

of this project. The reiterative nature of the action research interacting spiral, in which the stakeholders drive the process, ensured that the intellectual rigor of my research project was supported. All IRB requirements were satisfied prior to the commencement of this research with human subjects. Following the preliminary, and resulting iterations of the PAR interacting spiral, I produced a final report at the conclusion of the stakeholder-driven process and shared it with all parties involved in the development, implementation, and conclusion of this project in the form of a two-page summary.

Section 3: Analysis of the Findings

The purpose of this research project was to glean an understanding of social worker perceptions of their clinical work with Black male students in transition from high school to college, and how these perceptions inform social worker observations of societally entrenched oppression, inequality of opportunity, and impoverishment. Gleaning an understanding of these perceptions may lead to enhancement of school social work practice, thereby influencing the effectiveness of current clinical social work practice with Black male students who wish to persist to community college from high school. The research question for this project was: How can the emerging themes identified through in-depth interviewing of social workers inform and enhance their clinical practice in relation to Black male students who are transitioning from high school to college?

Through the use of a qualitative in-depth interview process, high-school-based social workers, and community-college-based social workers provided professional expertise that aided in identifying key aspects of psychosocial treatment planning relevant to the needs of Black male students in transition from high school to college graduation. I collected the participants using snowball sampling methodology. I asked social workers I knew well in the community college and at a local high school to participate in the in-depth interview process. Through their responses and willingness to pass on the scripted interview invitation, I used a snowball sampling methodology to recruit a total of 16 subjects for in-depth interviewing (eight high school social workers and eight community college social workers). I then recorded responses to a scripted, semi-structured in-depth interview of each participant, consisting of nine in-depth

questions and probes on a digital recorder and later transcribed for analysis. I then used the coded themes that emerged from this analysis in developing an organized understanding of common themes. Various themes were shared among the participants.

The following section reviews the data analysis techniques, process for validating the findings, and themes relevant to social work practice.

Data Analysis Techniques

There were 16 social work professionals from Nassau County, New York, who participated in this research project. Eight of them were from local high schools, and another eight were from the local community college. Each group of eight was identified through separate numbering. I identified high school social workers with a number in the 100s (e.g., 101, 102). I identified community college social workers with a number in the 200s (e.g., 201, 202). I recorded all in-depth interviews electronically during a 6-week period between the beginning of May 2017 and the end of the second week in June 2017, and then I transcribed them. Once I transcribed the interviews, I analyzed them for themes and I recorded the themes manually on a hand-written saturation grid (Fusch & Ness, 2015). As I analyzed the interview transcripts, common themes between and among the participants emerged. Beyond the important clinical commentary of the social work participants, I also discovered additional information regarding their experiences in their respective locations.

Validation Process

Throughout the doctoral project process, I used a research journal. The purpose of this research journal was to provide a means for delineating my thoughts and beliefs from those of the in-depth interview subjects (Stringer, 2014). Rather than immediately writing out thoughts or opinions about what had occurred, I made the effort to differentiate my thoughts from the specific comments and explanations of the social workers who I interviewed. I coded qualitative data on hand written saturation grids that outlined all major themes and subthemes emerging from the in-depth interviews. The development of the saturation grid was one way for me to track how the social workers gauged the importance of each theme and subtheme (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I listed and coded all themes and subthemes, indicating the participants' contributions on the grid. As a way of further elucidating any patterned differences between the responses provided by social workers from high schools and from the community college, I prepared two separate hand-written saturation grids (i.e., one for the high school participants and one for the community college participants). To further enhance the validation and legitimation process, I contacted each of the participants to clarify their statements as recorded and transcribed on the saturation grid in support of various themes and subthemes. This form of validation is referred to as member checking (Stringer, 2014). My in-depth interview process itself diverged from a typical interview in key ways. Unlike a typical interview involving a mutual exchange of dialogue and responses, I asked in-depth questions, allowed the interviewee to answer, and then asked further questions for clarification (i.e., probing) before ultimately concluding the interview by

asking each social worker interviewee if they had any further comments on the process that could add to what they had already contributed to the interview.

In order to establish legitimacy with any qualitative research findings, the work must have credibility, the quality of believing the work to be legitimate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The member checking, checking in with in-depth interviewers when using various quotes to emphasize points they were making, was one way I addressed the credibility of the research findings (Stringer, 2014). To this end, transferability, the ability of the content of the research findings to be viewed as applicable in other similar clinical settings can be found in the confirmed quotes from research participants and in the willingness of readers of this research to work with the findings, subsequently confirmed through member checking (Jensen, 2008; Stringer, 2014). Transferability was further affected by my providing a summary of the research findings that accurately evidenced the transformative results of this project. Dependability, another qualitative research method for validating this research, was concerned with the ability of external sources to take the methods used in my research project, with the intent of duplicating the methodology in another research project in a similar system (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability of my research results was realized through a data audit of the hand-written saturation grids. My data audit was conducted continuously throughout the analysis of the interview transcripts via member checking (Stringer, 2014). The data audit assured the findings were a reflection of the research participants, not my own thoughts and opinions (Schwandt et al., 2007).

In conducting this study, I initially found it difficult to recruit high school social workers for the interviews. I discovered this difficulty had to do with the request for

interviews coming at the end of the school year, a time when many school social workers are engaged with the work of processing students for graduation and transition from high school. Also, even though I assured potential participants that the scripted interview was confidential, some interviewees were initially pensive and concerned about their individual comments getting back to their respective administrations. In the end, I assured those who chose to participate in this research project of the confidential nature of their contributions. Also, while a more formalized triangulation methodology involving the use of multiple methods or data sources was not used in this project (Creswell, 2014), my member-checking and confirmation of individual quotes from the participants and their transcribed interviews served as a sufficient method for legitimizing the findings of my research.

Findings

My research project provides an understanding of what social workers perceive to be the clinical social work needs of Black male students in order for them to receive effective transitional support services, as well as an understanding of the realities of their site-based positions in relation to what they believe should occur (i.e., community based social work outreach), and how observed deficiencies in terms of cultural knowledge should be remedied in the school environment. Several common themes were recognized by both high school social workers and social workers in the community college settings. Those common themes include: Non-integration of existing evidence based practice, clinical practice dilemmas related to institutional constraints and limitations, clinical practice dilemmas related to site-based vs. community-based social work, and socioeconomic stressors.

Demographics

I recruited sixteen social workers (eight from local high schools in Nassau County, New York, and eight social workers from the local community college in Nassau County, New York) via snowball sampling to participate in the in-depth interview process. I started the snowball sampling process by interviewing one social worker at the college and another at a local high school, both of whom had been recruited via pre-existing professional relationships. At the conclusion of those interviews, each social worker agreed to pass the scripted invitation to participate on to other social workers in their respective environments. It was in this way, the snowball sampling method for recruiting participants was achieved. For the purposes of categorizing responses, the high school social workers were identified by a number in the 100s (e.g., 101, 102), while the community college social workers were identified with a number in the 200s (e.g., 201, 202). The social workers ranged in age from 42 to 70, and self-identified as Black, White, Hispanic, or Asian. In terms of years in the field, they ranged in years of experience from 7 to 35 years as social workers in their respective work environments, with an average of 20.7 years experience. As a part of the scripted invitation, all recruited social worker participants identified as having an MSW-level education or higher (see Table 1).

Table 1

Social Work Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Age (years)	Gender	Ethnicity	Years working as a social worker
101	65	F	Hispanic	23
102	55	F	White	7
103	46	F	Hispanic	14
104	47	M	Black	20
105	44	F	Hispanic	7
106	66	F	White	30
107	57	F	White	30
108	42	F	Hispanic	11
201	50	F	White	16
202	54	F	White	14
203	64	F	Black	29
204	68	F	White	35
205	44	F	Black	18
206	69	F	Asian	30
207	70	F	White	35
208	47	F	White	12

High school-based study participants. Participant 101 is a 65-year-old female who identified herself as Hispanic. Participant 101 works for a specialized public high school in Nassau County, New York for high school students identified with emotional difficulties. Participant 101has 23 years of experience as a school social worker with students, including Black male students in the high school setting. She believes that all students should have access to 1-1 counseling each day, and that social workers should work at making their students feel comfortable during all aspects of the counseling interaction. The means to making students feel comfortable is couched within her understanding of the importance of cultural backgrounds. The work of participant 101 primarily revolves around treatment planning and ongoing 1-1 counseling.

Participant 102 is a 55-year-old White female who has been working as a school social worker for 7 years. Participant 102 admits that she has an unusual school social work role, in that she spends a lot of time visiting students and families out in the local community and less time in the public high school where she also sees students. She differentiated that quality of interactions are most effectively enabled through face-to-face interaction with students and their families, as opposed to telephone conversations or work with families in the high school setting. She stressed the value of role modeling in social work with students, and that it is through role modeling that social workers can begin to assist students in gaining a sense of self and that this process should involve the family in their home environment as much as possible.

Participant 103 is a 46-year-old Hispanic female who works with students in a primarily Black public high school district as a school social worker. She explained that many of the students in her district are transient, come from immigrant families, and are

often raised by members of their extended family members because their parents are often in another country. She is one of two social workers in her school. While much of her work is focused in the direction of tertiary interventions, she recognizes the need for a shift in focus that incorporates a community based social work orientation to working with Black male students and their families, a shift that involves the development of primary intervention programming that is both individually and culturally relatable to the student.

Participant 104 is a 47-year-old Black male school social worker who has been working in a primarily Black public high school district for 20 years. He believes that the best mindset for working with the importance of college is one in which that importance is infused and sustained from an early age. He believes that social workers should focus on those behavioral methods that help students become better advocates for themselves, and that help them identify the skill set they need to be successful in high school and college. Participant 104 is the only social worker with a terminal degree in social work. More than anything, he emphasized the importance of instilling an understanding of the importance of education from a very early age.

Participant 105, a Hispanic female, age 44, has been working as a school social worker for 7 years in public high school district. She focuses heavily on the importance of the home environment, and knowing what is going on at home with each student. Beyond the home environment, she places a tremendous value on getting to know the community the students come from, and emphasizes the social worker should strive to develop ongoing deep relationships with each of their students. Lastly, she spoke quite

extensively about the importance of restorative justice, particularly in terms of punishment being replaced by a learning opportunity for each student.

Participant 106 is a White female school social worker, age 66, with 30 years of work experience at her public high school district. She believes all students, regardless of ethnicity or cultural differences, experiences the same identity struggles – there is no differentiation between races. She also emphasized the need to focus on what each student needs to know in terms of the institutions expectations of them. She explains the social work role as one in which the worker must focus on expectations inherent in each school environment and how the student needs to develop an understanding of those expectations.

Participant 107 is a 57-year-old White female school social worker who has been working in a public high school district for 30 years. She explained that all students, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background, should be viewed equally. She described the value of the social work relationship as one in which the social worker is able to develop a strong mentoring relationship with the student. She believes that all students should have consistent access to someone who can mentor them and that she works to that end in all of her relationships with students in the school. She described psychosocial development as a process that enables a development of sense of self, and an understanding of what one wants in life.

Participant 108 is a 42-year-old Hispanic female school social worker who has been in her current public high school district for 11 years. In her work, participant 108 stressed the importance of psychosocial treatment planning as always involving the parents. She emphasized the importance of going out and seeing students in their home

environments, but acknowledged that in a site-based job with institutionally-based restrictions on that role, that it is difficult to get out to see students in their home environments. She believes that a strong social work connection for students can, in some ways, substitute for what the students may not be getting at home.

Community college-based study participants. Participant 201, a 50-year-old White female social worker at the local community college, has served in her role as a counselor for 16 years. She sees many students who come to her for issues that have much to do with family dynamics such as substance abuse issues. She understands how students experience the college, both through her years of experience as a counselor, and in her role on the student disciplinary committee. She believes that all initial contact with students should begin with an assessment of strengths and that the identified areas should be viewed from the perspective of transferability to other areas of a person's life.

Participant 202 is a 54-year-old White female social worker who has been with the community college for 14 years. Her role in the community college primarily revolves around providing personal counseling to students who self-identify a need for tertiary intervention. She provides one on one counseling and academic advice to students. Like many social workers, she believes strongly in the importance of strengths-based practice, and works to understand the strengths of students she works with.

Participant 203 is a Black female social worker, age 64, who has been working at the community college in a counseling and teaching capacity for 29 years. She works with students one on one to develop academic plans in her role as both a counselor and a professor. In her advising capacity, she sees her role as one in which the development of self-identity is central to her counseling methodology. She believes in the incorporation

and development of a diverse faculty that mirrors the student body. Participant 203 states that a major problem at the school is that there are too many barriers to student success that must be attended to.

Participant 204 is a 68-year-old White female social worker who has been at the community college for 35 years. In her capacity at the college, she provides academic advisement and personal counseling in her dual role which also involves teaching as a professor. In her role as a social worker, she believes that all students should be praised and validated on a regular basis. While she also stresses the importance of knowing the rules of the college and how to navigate them, she believes that students should also be mentored, and she sees herself as providing that role to those students who do come to see her. She believes the role of the social worker in this environment is one in which the primary function must be about helping the student develop a sense of belonging.

Participant 205 is a 44-year-old Black female social worker who has been with the community college for 18 years. In her capacity with the college, she assists with management and provides counseling to students. She believes that her role with students should be to provide them with academic and emotional support, and that students do not have enough access to this at the college. While she works in a management and counseling capacity with students, she sees many of their problems as being rooted in the segregation she sees in the neighborhoods outside the boundaries of the college. Like many of the other social workers, she believes in strengths-based practice and incorporates this understanding in all of her work with students.

Participant 206 is 69-year-old Asian female social worker who has been with the community college for 30 years. In her role as an administrator and as a counselor, she

works primarily with students who seek her out for government benefit assistance and academic counseling. In her counseling role, she identifies herself as a mentor to the students who come to see her. As a hallmark of her work with students, she believes in actively going out into the community to speak with students beyond the campus boundaries, as a way to get to know them better and to develop stronger working relationships with them.

Participant 207 is a 70-year-old White female social worker who has been with the college for 35 years in her capacity as both an advisor to students and as a professor. In her role as an advisor, she incorporates much of her knowledge of social work. Through her understanding of social work, she develops what she refers to as role modeling for students who seek her out for counseling. She further develops this understanding of role modeling by talking about scaffolding and the building of individualized supports for each of the students she sees.

Participant 208, a 47-year-old White female social worker, has been with the college for 12 years. In her capacity as a social worker/counselor she is constantly aware of the lack of adequate supports for students on campus. As such, she works beyond her role as an advisor to develop mentoring relationships with the students who come to see her. Along with her strong commitment to the development of mentoring relationships, she sees the need to develop programming and works tirelessly in this direction in her role as an advisor to support both the mentoring needs of the individual students she sees as well as work in the direction of a more formalized mentoring program for students.

Common Themes across Interviews

One-on-one, in-depth interviews were conducted with social workers from high schools and the local community college in Nassau County, New York, using a 9-item qualitative interview schedule (see Appendix A). There were eight high school social workers and eight community college social workers who participated in the one-on-one in-depth interviews. As a result of the analysis of the transcribed interviews, several themes emerged across all interviewees: Non-integration of existing evidence based practice, clinical practice dilemmas related to institutional constraints and limitations, clinical practice dilemmas related to site-based vs. community-based social work, and socioeconomic stressors. The non-integration of existing EBP was a key theme that stemmed from the social workers not having the resources or support needed to implement known EBP.

Theme 1: Non-Integration of Existing Evidence Based Practice

A common occurrence across all interviews was a consistent reference to a known evidence based practice, specifically, mentoring, mentoring programs, and the components of mentoring programs that each social worker believed could make a positive difference in the lives of Black male youth. While only one social worker spoke of sporadic development and integration of mentoring programs at her school, none of them identified any connection to existing efforts to develop consistent mentoring programs in their respective environments. Participant 101 discussed the ways in which mentoring could help Black male youth thusly:

> You know, these young men, they need people around them they can relate to. They need mentors who are trained by clinicians, and who can show them what

> they need to know to get by. Social workers can work on that if they were allowed to, since we are clinicians. That is not happening in my school. In our clinical work, we focus only the problems, never on developing solutions that can counteract the development of problems later on. A mentor, or, better yet, a mentoring program developed by social work clinicians to target the needs of Black male youth could do that.

Participant 103 explained her connection to mentoring in this way:

> The establishment of a strong relationship requires that we have men, in this case, Black men, who can help show these young Black youth what they need to know. Students think the social workers are all about problems in their lives. Social workers could use their clinical knowledge of mentoring to develop mentoring programs, and by actively seeking out Black men who can work with these youth from the local community. Now, I've done mentoring programs, but the implementation of this kind of thing is sporadic and changes from year to year. These young Black men need consistency, they need a mentor who will be with them throughout their years in school, including college.

Participant 107 revealed her connection to mentoring by saying:

> Many guys stray from the path because they don't have anyone to relate to, anyone who is a positive role model to them anyway. While us social workers emphasize the importance of our clinical connection to our students in school social work, mentors who are recruited from the local community by social workers, and who are trained to focus on the positive aspects of their lives, could make a lasting positive influence on these guys. This isn't going to happen unless

> we, us social workers, actually go out there into the community to start drumming up people who can commit to working with us, working with the students, in ways that matter. Mentoring matters. Having someone these guys can relate to, oh, it matters.

Participant 108 did not specifically refer to mentors, but she spoke at length of the need to recruit role models from the local community:

> In our clinical work need to understand where they're coming from. They need to use our clinical skills to recruit role models who do understand them. Social workers can get an education themselves, an education outside their comfort zones, getting out there, outside these walls to get at what really matters to these kids. Identifying role models in the community who can come help these kids is the way to do it. Role models they're familiar with, you know, not me, I'm just someone they come to talk to about depression and [expletive]. I need to get real with them, and the way I can do that is by bringing in people I know can help them out with the stuff they don't wanna talk to me about.

Participant 201 spoke of mentoring a bit differently in her reflection:

> You know, Black men need Black men to model. I'm a white woman. While I know there's a lot I do know as a clinician, they look at me and I know they say to themselves, "what the heck can she help me with?" A mentoring program developed by social workers that integrates Black males, say, Black faculty from this campus for example, could go a far way in a short period of time. There wouldn't be this, "what the heck does she know," stuff to wade through, you know?

Participant 202 spoke of the need for a mentor to shadow:

> These young men, they come in here and there's this obvious need to connect to someone. A mentor could make that happen, immediately. The research screams this. There are too many women working here. We need more men. We need more Black men who can fulfill this function, who can shadow and show them the way. We need to have people in here that these young Black men can relate to. They look at me like I'm a foreign person. That's a barrier. I, we, can use our clinical skills to train people to do this. We can do something about this. We can shift how we do things by working in the direction of developing supports that do work for them.

Participant 203 spoke of life plans and mentoring:

> So, there's this idea I have of Black men coming in here, working with the youth to develop their long-term plans. That way it isn't me guiding this, it's someone they can immediately relate to who's saying, "I've been there. I understand. Let me help you move in a positive direction." Social workers could work from a clinical perspective on bringing these mentors in, work on showing the mentors the ropes, and then just letting them do what comes naturally by interacting in a normal way with them. They know normal. I know what needs to happen in mentoring to make it work. Put the two together and we've got something that's real.

Participant 204 took a different approach to mentoring:

> A summer bridge program that integrates peer mentors could do the job. We could train the peer mentors on what to do. We could train them on what needs to

> happen. They can build on their own experiences in college or in high school to develop a working mentoring relationship with these Black kids, their peers. We know the research says this works. And we could ensure that it works by integrating good research data and follow-up research.

Participant 205 spoke of the experiences of Black youth and how a mentor could relate to that:

> I'm telling you, these young Black men have nothing but misunderstanding that they have to deal with. I get so angry when I think about what we could be doing, by using our clinical skills to mentors, by training other staff with what we know about developing relationships. We could be doing this and we aren't doing it. A mentor, a mentor they can relate to who has experienced what they have experienced is what these kids need. They need a mentoring program that addresses the needs of first-generation Black male students, integrating Black male role models would be ideal. I do my best to mentor the Black men I do see, but it's not enough. I know they can relate to me to a great extent because I've gone through it too.

Participant 207 spoke of role models in mentoring:

> We are losing big chunks of the population to gangs and drugs. Without the integration of a well-developed mentoring program, these students will continue to get lost. Social workers know what needs to happen. We understand the psychosocial needs of our clients, of these students, and we know it because we are clinicians. That knowledge can go in to developing a great program! The recruitment and integration of Black adult role models into any mentoring

> program for young Black males is essential to their success. They need to undergo training, training we could develop, that helps them focus on the more mundane aspects of getting through high school or college, and that helps them by immediately having someone to relate to.

Participant 208 related the need for mentoring to the outside community:

> We need a mentoring program that integrates what we social workers have learned through our clinical gaze about the outside community, plain and simple. We need to get out there and refind (sic) out parts of the puzzle would look like. We can do this. We are social workers. Bringing in Black role models from the community outside the campus would bring us in the direction of developing a supportive mentoring program that works – works because it involves real people these young Black men might know. They don't know me, but I still use what I know about putting together resources to make it work for everyone.

Mentoring programming is an EBP that a majority of social workers spoke about. Such programming is a consistent theme that a majority of interviewees spoke about when talking about social work practice and what they believe social workers could do to improve their professional service to young Black men.

The second common theme that a majority of social workers spoke about had to do with the constraints and limitations they experienced as professionals in the institutions they worked in. When asked about professional constraints in their work, they had a lot to say about the static nature of their roles in institutions.

Theme 2: Clinical Practice Dilemmas Related to Institutional Constraints and Limitations

During my in-depth interviews, social workers were asked about professional constraints and limitations to their work with Black male students. The social workers indicated difficulties related to a hyper-focus on tertiary intervention: out of necessity due to the burgeoning numbers of students and by administrations expectant of their ability to solely address problems associated with tertiary intervention. Tertiary interventions are those interventions meant to address crisis situations such as when a client presents as clinically depressed or exhibiting the signs and symptoms of an anxiety disorder. Constraints and limitations related to the social workers observations of other faculty and staff were evident in their commentary on the lack of cultural awareness – both as an observation of what social workers did say and what they did not say about their perceptions regarding staff treatment of Black male students and other students of color. Participant 103 discussed her relationship with her institution in this way:

> At my school, there are over 2,100 students and only 2 social workers. We're not told it's "tertiary intervention," but we know that's what expected of us. We work with clinical problems all day. With the emphasis being on fixing problems that have already spiraled out of control there's no time for anything else. Again, there are two of us. Any time I talk with my boss about working on fixing the problems before they develop, he tells me to look at what we're dealing with. I sometimes feel it's a losing battle. It is so important to focus on the mindset of the professionals who work in these systems, many of them have personal biases that get in the way of their work with these kids.

Participant 104 put the problems with the institution this way:

> Look, we have these tremendous caseloads with kids that fall through the cracks and not get the services they need. There are only a small handful of us, and some districts have only one social worker. One social worker! There just aren't enough of us to be able to get done what needs to get done. We talk with our administrators about what social work is about, and they see us as having this fixed role.

Participant 105 talked about other staff members:

> I know what I need to do. I know I'm here to work with the students who come my way, but I get so frustrated with the staff sometimes. Some of them do not understand the students' behaviors are sometimes just ways that they're asking for help. I had one teacher actually call the police on a kid who was just acting out in the classroom. That's my life here, day in and day out. I don't have the time or the release to do anything other than work on what is put in front of me.

Participant 106 placed the burden of difficulty on sheer numbers:

> I'm one person and I have all the kids in my school assigned to me. I can't keep up. Everyone has problems. What? Tertiary intervention is all there is time for. I see one student after another, after another. And then I realize there are just too many of them for me to see. This is what I'm expected to do, day in and day out. Don't get me wrong, I love my job, but, yeah, I want to do more, but how can I? I look at you and I know where you wanna go with this. You're thinking we should offer more. I'm barely keeping up with the kids they send me. I've spoken with my principal about this many times. I used to be very vocal about it.

> Now I just come to work and do what I know they want from me. I want to do more, but what can I do?

Participant 107 had this to say about the difficulty in developing relationships with students because of the numbers:

> There simply are not enough social workers to develop relationships with students, even though there is value to the development of relationships with all students, it just isn't possible in a school with hundreds of students and only one or two social workers. We can talk and talk with our administrators and they'll nod their heads and I know they want to help, but they are also juggling with many responsibilities. Unfortunately, the focus of psychosocializing (sic) intervention is just on the problems.

Participant 201 looked at the problem of static roles in institutions, relating this issue to her own role:

> I started here 16 years ago, and, while there was a period of time when I actually had time to visit classes, to talk about wellness and what one should do in order to prevent burnout in school, I just don't have the time to step out of my office anymore. Everyone on this campus understands that if a student wants counseling, they come here. Unfortunately, students don't come in anticipation of problems developing. They come when they're falling apart, and I end up doing what I can just to help them through the problems they're experiencing in the moment.

Participant 203 looked at the matter of professional constraints and limitations from her own perspective as a member of the staff who has tried to develop a program that ultimately failed due to lack of participation from other staff:

> I don't know if you remember this, but you were a participant in an initiative I started a, oh, yes, you do remember? Oh, ok, so you know what I tried to do with getting the faculty, staff, and administration onboard to address staff diversity and the issues facing our young African American youth and, I'm sorry, I know you mentioned Black youth, and I get it, but I'm African American so that's the verbiage I use on me. The program started out strong, but we all came to realize the very people who needed to participate weren't coming to the monthly meetings. It's like nobody wants to do anything around here unless they're doing it for their promotion. This is real life, it's not a promotion. So many people just don't get that talking about the real issues that affect our students are things that are hard to talk about. Racism and segregation are big issues on Long Island. Everybody knows it, and yet nobody wants to do anything about it on this campus. You look around and you see the faculty. I don't see hardly any people of color aside from you and me and a few others. Sometimes I feel that nobody gives a (expletive) about the diverse student body, but everyone is concerned about their professional advancement.

Participant 204 went straight to the classroom environment with her commentary on professional constraints and limitations:

> I'm going to say it, we have faculty members on this campus who are racist, who are culturally ignorant, who never had exposure to young Black men or other

> people of color because Long Island is extremely segregated. There are faculty members who grew up in a bubble of whiteness. They're literally afraid of their students. They don't understand them and they make a lot of assumptions about them. I know who they are. We all know who those faculty members are. And the students know, too. They have their ways of finding out who to avoid here. And it's sad, it's really sad because the classroom is supposed to be the safest space. Instead, these young men find that it can be a hostile environment to them.

Participant 205 continued with commentary on racism and cultural ignorance as a constraint and limitation:

> There's fear here. Fear of Black men. I cannot tell you how many times I've spoken with faculty who've told me they're afraid for their lives. Afraid for their lives? And then when I ask them to tell me why, I want to shake them when I hear what comes out their mouths. One faculty member, and I want so badly to tell you who she is because you know her and she's well liked amongst us all, actually said to me that she's sometimes afraid of the young Black men because of the way they dress. I couldn't help myself when I asked her if she was out of her mind. It's stuff like that, that's still going on here and it makes me insane.

Participant 207 worded the professional constraints and limitations by describing an atmosphere of detachment that exists on campus:

> The faculty and staff, I won't name names, but they're known to us all, I think. They are just not in tune with the students. They are white. The students are people of color. I know we're talking about young Black men here, but I believe there are faculty and staff who are… Yeah, I said it, not in tune with the students.

> It is almost as if they come here and they just blast out their lecture and leave. This is a community college. Where is the sense of community in that?

Participant 208 approached the problems she has experienced with professional constraints and limitations from the perspective of her observations of body language amongst the faculty and staff:

> I wasn't born yesterday. I'm not a communications major, but I know by the way someone is looking at me, by the way someone is using their voice, whether they are having a positive or negative reaction to me. We all know what that looks like. We all know what negative body language looks like. I've watched many faculty members raise their voices, squint their eyes, purse their lips, I don't know, it's hard to describe, but you know when somebody is looking at you and you're made to feel like dog (expletive). Sometimes they don't even have to use actual language. There's something about the look of the look in their eyes, makes you think lasers would shoot out at you if they could. You know? That's how I feel about some of the faculty here, and even some of the staff. If I feel that, the students have to experience that too. And I know they do, they tell me.

It is clear from reviewing what the interviewees had to say, that there is a tremendous amount of pressure to focus only on tertiary interventions, only on those psychosocial needs that students present to social workers in the high school and college settings. There is also indication of cultural insensitivities that exist in the observations put forth by the social workers who identified with this theme of institutional constraints and limitations.

Theme 3: Clinical Practice Dilemmas Related to Site-Based Versus Community-Based Social Work

This, the third common theme identified the friction that exists between the static positions the social workers are hired to fulfill, namely to perform a specific stand-alone function within the institution, and how that function does not match their own expectations for what they believe needs to happen in order to improve the provision of social work practice, namely, to initiate a more community based form of social work with the students in their respective environments. This position stands in marked contrast to the status quo, to work only within the specifically delineated and defined roles of an institutionally based social worker. Participant 102 approached this position most clearly, given that she was the only social worker interviewed, whose role clearly included direct community outreach. She explained it thusly:

> Yeah, I love what I do. I love it because I know it's important to be out there in the community, seeing the actual environment these students live in. Being out there, meeting with parents, meeting with extended family members, meeting with members of the local community outside the school who actually knows the students who go to this high school. Yeah, I get to know who these students really are because I'm in their space. When they come to the high school it's not really their space, it's our space. That changes the dynamic. I look at my colleagues and I see them because I go to other schools. I see that some of them have no clue about things that are going on in the communities out there. This is a major problem with current school social work. They haven't gotten to the point where most of our colleagues know they have to go out into the outer

> community. They have to breath the air these students' breath, see their homes. This is how I, we, come to understand what we need to do in order to help them in the high school.

Participant 103 explained her belief in the need for community outreach by describing the things she does know about the students and their families, and how what she does not know drives her to state that school-based social workers need to get out into the community:

> So many of our students come from immigrant families. They're not even being raised by their parents! How can we not be more engaged with the community, knowing that? How can we stay here, stand here in our roles at school and do nothing but receive the students when they come to us, or make a telephone call here and there. The students are not living with their parents! I believe we have a social responsibility to these kids, to this society, to be able to go out there and check in on them. You know? To be able to say to them, "yeah, I know what's really going on because I came and visited with you. I get you, kid, and I'm here for you." That's not something you can really get as a social worker by talking at a student who can't talk back because of a language barrier, or because they're just afraid. I was trying to work with a young woman from Jamaica, trying to get her to talk to me, and I realized in that moment that I could know so much more about her just by visiting with her family – actually going out and speaking with them in their home. We're not allowed to do that from the perspective of our work as school-based social workers.

Participant 104 started off by speaking about his experiences as a parent, being more involved with his community, getting his community to be aware of the things that needed to be talked about with regard to students of color. He then connected this to his role as a social worker in an environment where community outreach was not something the social workers in this district were allowed to do:

> Look, man, I know what needs to be done, ok. I know it because I've lived it with my own kid. I've gone to the community meetings and I've voiced what needed to be said about the lack of diversity in the teaching faculty, or how we have Black applicants for jobs from UPenn (University of Pennsylvania), and Princeton University, and Cornell (University), and, and, the principal is telling me there are other people who are more qualified for the teaching positions. More qualified? I just have to laugh because I see parallels here in my work at this school. I should be out there in the community, getting to know the parents, getting to know the streets, getting to know what it's really like for these kids to live in this community. I don't live in this community. Instead, I'm here all day. Don't get me wrong, I'm here to do good things. I'm here to listen to these kids, but there's only so much I can learn from them without actually doing an assessment of their home environment. There is no better way to do an assessment of the home environment, a community-based assessment, than by actually going to the student's home and assessing it from there.

Participant 105 took a look at the social work practice dilemma by speaking about the family:

> It's really this simple: you cannot know the student without really knowing the family. If is not possible to get the family in here, then I need to go out there. I need to assess the family in their own space. Yes, I know there are those who say we should work with what the student brings to us, but that only gets me so far. If helping these kids have a better chance at succeeding in life is our goal, then we need to understand what they're home lives are like. We can't really know that fully, without a home-based assessment. Instead, I'm here, doing the best I can with what sometimes limited information the student is willing or able to give to me. This isn't good enough. We need to be able to do more.

Participant 107 cited the complexities of the modern family as pivotal to the need for a shift from site-based school social work to community based social work:

> Families are more complex now. I mean, families have always been complex, but there are more single parent families, more students living with extended family members or even with grandparents. Sometimes I get confused because these dynamics are so complex. If we were out there in the community, checking out these families, we would actually have a better sense of who our students are. They are an extension of their family, in certain ways, and we, I believe, have an obligation, as social workers, to seek out that understanding, an understanding of where they come from.

Participant 108 spoke about a number of issues simultaneously, with two sentences standing out about how her current static role does not get at what is really needed in the modern era of school social work:

> Parents should always be considered when forming an intervention. We need to get out there on the field and visit these families as a way to truly understand where they are coming from.

Participant 201 approached the need for school-based social workers to develop partnerships with other schools and other programs, including other colleges, as a way to further assist students:

> We need to get out there and develop working relationships with social workers outside this school, networking can't be accomplished solely by making telephone calls or attending an occasional meeting. Social workers whose primary jobs revolve around a desk need to get up and get out into the community. So, yeah, they do need to develop professional relationships outside their defined roles, just as much as they need to go to these student's homes, getting to know them from that perspective, so important.

Participant 202 spoke briefly about how individualized treatment planning can be further enhanced by a change in how information external to the individual student interaction can be gleaned more effectively than present methods:

> Individualized knowledge of the local community can enhance the school social work intervention. This can be accomplished most effectively by social workers who are willing to go beyond their present-day duties in favor of a willingness to step outside the campus into the local community. Of course, we don't do this. This, I believe is a central problem to assessing what is actually going on with a student. Again, there's so much reliance on self-reporting and not enough about how the family and the other systems, there we go, have a direct influence on the

> student. We can't know those systems as social workers unless we are willing to engage with those systems outside the college or school environment. We know this as community-based needs assessment. It can't be done unless we're out there in the community doing it.

Participant 204 spoke of the need to do outreach that goes beyond word of mouth or speaking to other colleagues. The outreach as she described it, requires the social worker to go off campus:

> In terms of outreach, we cannot effectively do this without being willing to go out into that place outside of the campus. Place? Yeah, I mean the local community. I'm thinking of cultural knowledge as I work through my thoughts on this, yeah, I think it's important for school social workers to be able to realize their work as a form of cultural learning. I certainly don't know everything about every cultural tradition I experience with students at this school. Going out there in the community would certainly give us further insight into cultural considerations such as the role of each member of the family, that we may not have even considered in our individual work with students.

Participant 205 targets a level of ignorance that she perceives influences social workers and staff alike, across campus, and that one of the ways to counteract ignorance about other cultures is to go out into communities that are unfamiliar to the social worker:

> Yeah, I mean it's essential for us, especially for people who grew up in a white bubble community, to be able to go out there into those communities they're not familiar with. That's right, they need to be able to get educated about the cultures represented on this campus. The education isn't just going to appear out of thin

> air. We can't always expect that a cultural experience is going to happen on campus. Culture happens where people are livin', and it doesn't take a stretch of the imagination to know that the livin' is out there. Listen, I work with and know a lot of white social workers who don't know these communities. Yes, I'm talking about them! They need to get out there and educate themselves about the neighborhoods these young Black men are coming from. That kind of knowing is not going to happen from a desk.

Participant 206 expressed what she stated was a radical thought for her, a crossing of boundaries that brings the school social worker outside their institutional experience into a community based experience:

> I wouldn't want this to get me into trouble, but I think that actively engaging with student requires willingness to engage with them outside of the campus. We social workers should be willing to go out with students, follow them into their local communities, in an attempt, an attempted, to get to know them side-by-side. I don't know, is that like ethnographics (sic)? It's different, but I think it could have the effect of building a better image, that the social worker actually wants to go out with them, walk with them in the community, walking all the way home with them if possible. Being willing to interact with a student like that, whether talking about a Black student or otherwise, really, I believe, is a way of getting them to know I care about them beyond this campus.

Participant 207 saw the need to address societal observations of students of color by way of social workers going out into the community as a means of assessing whether certain things were happening in the community that affect young Black males:

> How else are we going to know, I mean really know, if there are gangs out there in that community? How can we know that there is a drug problem out there in the community? How can we possibly know any of this without taking some tentative steps in that direction? We can't just take the word of someone else, or what we see in the news. That's not how social work rolls! We roll to our own ability to assess what is going on. I mean, yes, something can be said of our assessment of what someone is telling us – but so much more can be determined by our going out into the community and observing problems such as gangs and drug problems. Attempting to use our skills to go out into the community for such an assessment could enhance our ability to fulfill institutionally-based roles.

Participant 208 addressed the need for community based social work in school social work thusly:

> We always seem to talk about support networks as a part of our talks about what we do as social workers. Like, "what does that person's support network look like?" If we do not actually follow up that statement with actions intended to determine what that support network looks like, essentially going out into that person's home environment to find an answer, then we're just giving lip service to our profession. True, it can be expected of us to get this information from the client. But if our clients are minors, adolescents, then we have an obligation, I believe, to go out there and get that information by other means, means beyond our interview of the student, the client.

In reviewing these comments, it is clear these social workers believe a change in orientation to social work needs to occur. A shift to a more community-based form of

social work is in order because it is in this way that the social worker will be able to develop a holistic understanding of what the students' needs are, a community-based needs assessment.

Theme 4: Socioeconomic Stressors

The fourth and final common theme amongst a majority of social workers were their perceptions about what holds students back from being a part of the school or community. The essential feature of this theme is one that relates directly to socioeconomic factors. In many of the interviews, one stressor in particular, transportation, appeared prominently. Participant 101 addressed the issue of socioeconomic status thusly:

> This school is located in a wealthy school district, ok, so you have kids who come here wearing outfits each day that costs hundreds of dollars. But then since this is a specialized high school, we have students from other districts, poorer districts, who wear the same clothes every day and that difference between the haves and have nots is something you can feel in the air here. I've got students who cannot even afford lunch. That coming from another place is a barrier I think, because they feel like they're outsiders here.

Participant 103 commented on the perception of image and how that image can drive students to get involved in activities that lean in the direction of crime in order to maintain it:

> So, when they are not doing well in school, see, so what are they going to focus on? They are going to focus on that image, that image of looking good, having nice clothing. How can I say this . . . They can sometimes get involved in

> activities that adults wouldn't approve of in order to get what they need. It leads them down a path that some can't find their way back from. They can't afford this. They can't afford that. Eventually something's gotta give and then they get lost. Not being able to afford things is a barrier to them, until they turn that barrier into something else.

Participant 105 spoke generically about how the lack of finances affects their whole experience in school:

> And then there's the relationships they have with the other students. They can't afford to go out to lunch. They can't afford to go out to the movies. They can't afford to buy their friend a birthday present. The list goes on and on. Not having money to do things is a barrier.

Participant 106 approached finances indirectly as an environmental barrier with her talk about housing:

> Many of the students come from families that are very poor, transient. They have real difficulties finding adequate housing here on Long Island. I've heard of 4 or 5 families living crammed together in a single-family home. And they do this because it is what they can afford. Everything is expensive out here. But people come. And they're willing to put up with the lower quality of life for a chance to make something out of this. It's hard for us to imagine 15 people living in a two-bedroom house.

Participant 107 spoke of socioeconomics differently:

> Many of the Black students I see come from economically disadvantaged households. There are many single parent families. Just getting food in their

> belly is a barrier. When you think about it, if those basic economic needs aren't being met, the entirety of those experiences become a barrier to getting to school and staying in school.

Participant 201 spoke strongly about the economics of the home environment and how that, ultimately, affects the ability of the student to get to school:

> A lot of these families are single-parent families. College is something that they're on their own with. Just scraping together the $2.75 for a one-way fare is a hardship for many of them. That adds up quick. And if you don't have a job or a parent who can afford to double that each day you come to school, this becomes impossible.

Participant 203 contrasted the transportation issue with her other observations about what social workers should focus on:

> Transportation and poverty are a barrier, plain and simple. These kids are not going to come over here if they can't afford to be here. So, it doesn't matter what programming we have available to them to help them get through this if they can't get here.

Participant 204 combined transportation issues to economic and academic deficiencies all as environmental stressors:

> He can't get here every day because he doesn't always have the fare for the bus. When he does get here, the classroom is another barrier with all the rules. You know, the classroom management rules that professors talk about in the classroom, and the actual academics itself are a barrier. If you know you have weak academic skills, then that classroom represents a barrier to you. You're

> gonna think twice about coming here, coming into an environment that you think of as hostile, especially when you're having trouble putting together the funds for the bus fare.

Participant 205 spoke of the barriers as an outgrowth of poverty and how she tries to work with the young Black men to move them in the direction of getting the support they need:

> Poverty. It's something that many of my Black men face here on Long Island. When you can't afford to take the bus and you can't afford to feed yourself, that is going to affect your ability to focus on being in school. It becomes a barrier to movement in the direction of success. When you are not supported at home, when you come from an impoverished community, when you're not supported in your school environment, this leads to an internalizing of oppression.

Participant 206 works mostly with veterans, some of whom are Black. She expressed the issue of access and transportation thusly:

> These men are veterans of foreign wars, many of them. If I had to distill it into an essential understanding of what they go through, I'd have to call it pride. They have access to benefits I can help them with, but some of them are too ashamed to ask for this help. They come here and they talk to me. I tell them that I can help them access these benefits. Sometimes I feel like I'm a looped recording. I keep repeating that there are funds we can access together to help them with transportation issues and other essential needs. Still, there are those who refuse the help. They fall through the cracks.

White Social Workers and Social Workers of Color on Oppression

While this was not a major thematic opinion shared by a majority of social workers, there were definite contrasts between what a number of White social workers had to say about oppression, and what social workers of color had to say about oppression. Participant 103, a Hispanic social worker, approached the issue of oppression when talking about the biases of professional staff:

> It is so important to focus on the mindset of the professionals who work in these schools, many of whom have biases that get in the way of their work with these kids.

Participant 104, a Black male social worker, had a much more pronounced opinion of the staff he worked with:

> There are staff here who struggle with their own internalized racism, and they do so because they grew up in segregated communities. They didn't grow up with these kids in this neighborhood. They did what they needed to go in school, then they applied for jobs here and now they're here and they're struggling. More cultural sensitivity training is needed, and it's needed because the Black students are suffering. I know they're suffering because they come and ask me why teacher so-and-so talks to me like that? Why does teacher so-and-so look at me like that?

Participant 105 looked at oppression indirectly by talking about the perceptions of staff and how what she knows about them does have an effect on students:

> I've had staff members come up to me to ask about "what is that student's problem with me," and when I probe this question, what I find is that the staff

> member has a perception of the Black student that isn't based in reality. I feel that the best way to address this is to require all staff to receive ongoing cultural sensitivity and diversity training. They come here, some of them, and they don't really get close to the students. It's like it's just a job. Sometimes I can't figure it out, and other times I know it has to do with their perceptions of the students. What I think they don't realize is that their behavior contributes to the oppression the students feel, especially when the staff behavior makes the students feel as though they don't belong in school.

Participant 106, a White social worker, spoke about the issue of oppression as, essentially, a non-issue with this comment:

> I don't know what you're getting, no, identity struggles? Oh, there is no separation between White, Black, Hispanic – they're all the same, but they all experience problems related to the development of their identity and a sense of responsibility, of knowing what is right and wrong. I work in a school that has a majority minority population. Most of the students here are Hispanic, followed by Black students, followed by all others. They are all the same. I've worked here for 30 years and I just don't see them experiencing any oppression.

Participant 107, another White social worker, spoke of oppression in this way:

> All students should be viewed equally. We try very hard to work in the direction of focusing on individual needs. I've worked here a long time, and I've never witnessed any signs of oppression from any of the Black or Hispanic students who attend this school.

Participant 108, a Hispanic social worker, spoke of oppression by referring to what the other staff lacked:

> There are a lot of us, us staff, who just don't get the Black students. I mean, I live in the local community, I know what many of the issues are, and I've experienced oppression myself as a minority. I don't know of any other way to say this other than to state what I believe is the truth: some of my White colleagues don't get Black students or Hispanic students because they don't go out into our neighborhoods. They come to work and they go back home to whatever you call it, a bubble house, where they don't have to deal with us. When you know that's how other staff are, then you have to know there are reasons connecting to that, that are going to explain how they don't see the oppression.

Participant 201, a White social worker, spoke of oppression by framing it as something reportable:

> Well, when you ask me this question, I have to be honest with you. In all of my years here, I've never had a Black student, or a Hispanic student, or an Asian student, or even a White student tell me that they felt oppressed. So, I don't get that question, unless, unless we can look at culture as a barrier like oppression. Yes, there are definitely times when I know my own ignorance about a particular culture makes it difficult for me to understand what they're going through, what they're experiencing.

Participant 202, a White social worker, spoke of oppression by answering the question thusly:

> No, I've never observed oppression amongst Black students here.

Participant 203, a Black social worker, spoke at length about her experiences of oppression and how she knows Black male students experience oppression:

> You know, sometimes oppression can be experienced subtly, like one can experience racism. You might not even realize you're being excluded until you look back on the situation and say to yourself, "hey, I was treated differently then, wasn't I?" I feel like I need to constantly be "on," in that I am all about inclusiveness. I talk about the importance of inclusiveness with my students. I talk about it in staff meetings. I talk about it in my lectures when I teach. Black males do experience oppression. They experience it when they know they are being excluded. I know they sense that from some of the faculty they have to work with, here, at the college. It saddens and angers me at the same time. So, I just keep on talking about the need for inclusiveness, and I think about those colleagues who aren't so inclusive, who don't understand these young Black men.

Participant 204, a White social worker, focused on the faculty and how their behavior towards students needs to change:

> Faculty, geez, yes, faculty need more training on how to work with diverse groups of students. I don't hold that against them, but they need to be more open to helping students out. Coming here can't be just about the subject, we are in a community college, so I think we need to be much more understanding of difference and of being open to what our students' needs are – even if that doesn't directly align with the subject matter of the course that's being taught. When students feel that their needs are not being met, that, that is a form of oppression.

Participant 205, a Black social worker, believes that the problem of internalizing the racism and oppression is something that social workers can focus on doing something about in the college environment:

> Yes, these young Black men are oppressed, well, some of them are. And they bring it with them from their neighborhoods where they experienced it in relation to other people. They come here and they get some of the same ridiculousness they got back home. We are smart people! We have been trained to do what is right by these students. We can continue to show compassion. We can continue to not only work on helping them develop a healthier self-perception, but to also speak with the faculty about how just being kind, and being open to listening to students, is a good starting point in making things better here for our students, and for the Black male student.

Participant 206, an Asian social worker, expressed her views on oppression in this way:

> Of course, oppression exists, but I don't want to talk about it. Such things are hurtful to all of us. What I try to do each day is to come to work with a positive attitude, and to wear that attitude on my face. When I'm thinking about it like that, it's like a constantly in my life. It rubs off on my students and the others around me.

Participant 208, a Hispanic social worker, focused on her faculty observations and the changes she believes need to happen:

> Of course, I have always believed that we social workers can be the change agents with faculty. Through seminars and talks, we can introduce the social dimension of what our students experience in life. In that way, the faculty can be led to understand those

responsibilities we have to students that go beyond the classroom. Yeah, so, we can help faculty understand how their body language, their facial expression, and tone of voice, for example, can convey negative perceptions to their students. It's important to be aware of that, otherwise they, the faculty, become a part of the oppression.

Important Points

In reviewing the findings of this study, I believe it is important to note how the social workers viewed themselves as potential vehicles of change by way of developing training programs for mentoring young Black adolescents. With this understanding, the social workers I interviewed saw the need for culturally relevant community recruitment as a way to tailor mentoring programs to the needs of Black male students. They described the recruitment and program development, variously, as essential to incorporate Black men for mentorship training and implementation. Social workers described socioeconomic factors in the lives of young Black men as particularly problematic to their access, reflecting on such realities as transportation and finances as barriers to accessing and delivering social work intervention. Social workers spoke about their respective institutions and roles as site-based school social workers or counselors as not being in alignment with the needs of young Black men – citing a majority opinion of the need to shift the paradigm from site-based social work to one that incorporates a more community-based social work model of outreach and assessment. Finally, social workers spoke definitively and specifically about the relationships between school staff and young Black men as particularly troublesome when factoring in racial disparities.

Effect on Clinical Social Work Practice

The findings of this research have specific and practical application in the areas of improving clinical social work practice for school site-based social workers. Specifically, treatment planning that incorporates community-derived, culturally-specific mentoring training and programming was expressed by a majority of the interviewees as essential to improving existing tertiary interventions. This aligns with a group-derived understanding of the need for both preventative/primary and tertiary intervention models to coexist equally in school social work environments. This finding has implications for school administrations, with the understanding that existing protocols for school social workers to focus on tertiary intervention alone, cannot be the sole point of access to clinical social work practice in these settings if supporting the psychosocial needs of Black male adolescent students is to be realized, developed, implemented, and assessed in accordance with any mission that purports to enhance the persistence of Black male adolescents from high school through college through clinical social work practice methodology.

Unexpected Findings

The last non-majority opinion conveys a perception, a perception that was not held by a majority of the social workers who were interviewed. It conveyed a difference of opinion and perception that existed between White social workers and social workers of color, namely, Black and Hispanic social workers. The findings of this opinion, relating to racial disparity and cultural knowledge deficiency between and amongst staff in a high school and college setting, proved to be particularly troubling. It must be understood that several of the social workers of color (i.e., Hispanic and Black social

workers) voiced particularly harsh criticisms of their White colleagues. This is expressed in their observations about other faculty and staff members who they perceived to be less understanding of Black students and of what they perceived to be the mission of their respective institutions, specifically, to serve the expressed needs of the community. This observation stands out as particularly relevant to this research because the majority of White social workers interviewed for this research did not state anything that would lead me to believe that institutionalized oppression or the need for cultural sensitivity training were needed in their respective school environments. When asked about oppression, specifically, the majority of White social workers stated they either saw no evidence of that in their respective school environments, or students had not reported experiencing oppression to them. Forty-three percent of the Black and Hispanic social workers gave specific examples of their observations of racism, community segregation, and the need for cultural sensitivity in their observations of faculty and staff in their respective school environments (103, 105, 203, 204, 205, 207, and 208). Two of the White social workers (204 and 207) shared statements that were aligned with what the Black and Hispanic social workers had to say. The relevant takeaway point here is that a significant difference in observational knowledge and experience does exist between and amongst Black and Hispanic social workers, in particular, that contrasts sharply with a majority of the White social workers who were interviewed for this research.

Summary

The research question for this inquiry gleaned an understanding of the perceptions of high school-based social workers and community college-based social workers as a way to improve upon existing clinical social work-based interventions in the high schools

and local community college in Nassau County, New York. Tertiary interventions were presented as the singular, universal methodology for working with Black male students (in fact, all students) in these environments. This inquiry revealed several themes: Non-integration of existing evidence based practice, clinical practice dilemmas related to institutional constraints and limitations, clinical practice dilemmas related to site-based versus community-based social work, socioeconomic stressors, and while not a majority theme, the conflicting perspective relating to White social workers and social workers of color on oppression. The results of this inquiry have implications for clinical social work practice, as well as observations of social and institutional problems that, if addressed, could enhance the ability of clinical social workers to more effectively engage with Black adolescent males in transition from high school to college. The next section includes an overview of the social workers who participated in this research and potential solutions to the findings of this research in relation to social work practice.

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

In this project, I aimed to develop an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of social workers who implement psychosocial supports in their work with Black male students. I addressed concerns regarding existing site-based clinical social work interventions in relation to enhancing the high school to college transition and persistence as an ethically-informed means of social justice. The themes that I identified through this inquiry were as follows: (a) nonintegration of existing EBP; (b) clinical practice dilemmas related to institutional constraints and limitations; (c) clinical practice dilemmas related to site-based versus community-based social work; (d) socioeconomic stressors; and (e), although not a majority theme, the conflicting perspective relating to White social workers and social workers of color on oppression.

I conducted the research in Nassau County, New York, which involved the recruitment of school social workers and social workers who work at the local community college. A common occurrence across all interviews was a consistent reference to a known evidence based practice, specifically mentoring, mentoring programs, and the components of mentoring programs that each social worker believed could make a positive difference in the lives of Black male youth. Although only one social worker spoke of sporadic development and integration of mentoring programs at her school, none of them identified any connection to existing efforts to develop consistent mentoring programs in their respective environments.

Social workers were asked about professional constraints and limitations to their work with Black male students. The social workers indicated difficulties related to a hyper focus on tertiary intervention: out of necessity due to the burgeoning numbers of

students and by administrations expectant of their ability to solely address problems associated with tertiary intervention. Constraints and limitations related to the social workers observations of other faculty and staff were evident in their commentary on the lack of cultural awareness—both as an observation of what social workers did say about their perceptions regarding staff treatment of Black male students and other students of color.

Another common theme that I identified was the friction between the static positions the social workers are hired to fulfill, namely to perform a specific stand-alone function within the institution, and how that function does not match their own expectations for what they believe needs to happen to improve the provision of social work practice, namely, to initiate a more community-based form of social work with the students in their respective environments. This position stands in marked contrast to the status quo, to work only within the specifically delineated and defined roles of the site-based social worker.

Last, social workers many opinions about factors that hold back students from being a part of the school or community. The essential feature of this theme relates directly to socioeconomic factors. The social workers opined about how financial constraints of students and their families affected everything from individual body image, to the ability to buy clothes to fit in, to a lack of consistent funds being linked to students not being able to get themselves to school (as in the case of college students) or to not have a positive effect on their nutrition because they are not able to afford to purchase lunch.

In the following section, I address the application for professional ethics in social work practice. This will include what I learned from this study as well as how what I learned can be applied to clinical social work practice. I will discuss solutions to identified dilemmas, as well as possible ways for implementing positive social change.

Application for Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

The social workers and I, as stakeholders, came to understand what can be implemented for positive changes to occur in relation to clinical social work practice. Black male adolescent students who are transitioning from high school to college formed the foundational basis for analyzing and discussing what could be implemented to make positive change for these students. For example, the major thematic finding of this research is that social workers believe mentoring programs, a non integrated EBP, needed to be developed, and that social workers should lead this charge because they understand the essential components of successful mentoring programs. A majority of the social workers admitted knowing that mentoring is a proven evidence based practice. In doing so, they also acknowledged experiencing tremendous difficulty in getting such programs developed and implemented. They voiced that this is, in part, due to constraints relating to the traditional static, site-based nature of their work; and an inability to produce a community-based, community derived assessment of mentoring programming. They also expressed that this is due, in part, to a lack of willingness on the part of their respective administrations to support such programming development. I discuss how school social work is linked primarily to tertiary intervention in the literature review (see Dupper, 1998; Franklin et al., 2008; Harris & Franklin, 2003).

The development of a social work-inspired mentoring program and movement in the direction of identifying and working toward the removal of constraints and remediating limitations, support positive social change in the form of social justice and self-determination – two tenets of the NASW (2008) code of ethics. This, coupled with the understanding that implementing mentoring programs, a known EBP (DuBois et al., 2002), is movement in the direction of supporting the thematic underpinnings of this social work inquiry, namely, by social workers rejecting institutionally entrenched oppression (Jordan, 1996) in favor of community based programming that Black male adolescent students can identify with (Goldkind, 2014; Harper, 2014; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). Such movement is also aligned with the NASW (2008) code of ethics in that the practice of social work, at its core, is fundamentally geared in the direction of empowering people who are disadvantaged and oppressed, points highlighted as essential to the ethical practice of social work in the preamble to the code of ethics. I identified problems with accessing school and college due to socioeconomic stressors a finding that was also supported by previous research (ERASE Racism, 2012; Long Island Index, 2016; Schott Foundation, 2015). These findings, when looked at cumulatively, inform a social work process that can be realized if the identified changes to intervention protocols in both the high school and college setting can be affected.

One of the more interesting findings of my research that contrasted with existing research had to do with the finding that social workers need to move in the direction of developing primary intervention programs that seek to complement and enhance existing tertiary clinical social work interventions in these respective environments, along with a movement away from the traditionally static site-based form of school social work.

Given the high prevalence of tertiary intervention needs as evidenced in the previous research (Owens et al., 2011), social workers must give credence to the development of programming that can work to counteract movement to social problems that warrant tertiary intervention, hence, the need for primary intervention development that is inclusive of a community-based social work mode of assessment and practice.

In applying what has been learned from this research, there are two areas that can be worked on in relation to what social workers can do to enhance the clinical social work field of practice. Clinical practice dilemmas related to institutional constraints and limitations, along with clinical practice dilemmas related to site-based versus community-based social work, are two areas that social workers can work in the direction of enhancing clinical social work practice. In the first instance, the social workers can use the results of my research to develop a clinical social work-based rationale for constructing and implementing mentoring programs. These mentoring programs can be developed to incorporate the essential community-based needs assessment, recruiting Black male adults from the local community who may be suitable for inclusion in mentoring program development. While a definitive plan of implementing such a project was not discussed, each of the social worker stakeholder participants stated they belonged to formal social work advocacy groups where the findings of this research could be introduced, in support of this perspective on developing mentoring programs. In the second instance, a concerted effort to educate institutional administrators and community boards that control schools on the need for integrating a community-based social work approach can be realized with a concerted effort on the part of the social workers in these institutions. The rationale for community-based social work interventions supporting the

development of mentoring programs can be realized if the importance of community involvement is expressed and supported both by their observations and by the reality of a need to know the community that is affected by the development of programming meant to enhance existing tertiary interventions with mentoring programs as a primary intervention. Skeptical administrations and school boards could be convinced through a combination of exposure to existing research on mentoring as EBP and in developing a research proposal to track and measure the efficacy of mentoring programs they agree to support.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

The findings from my study can have a positive effect on the clinical social work practice of school social workers who work with Black male adolescent students who are in the process of transitioning from high school to college. By implementing an intervention that serves as a primary intervention, a scaffolding of support that follows each student throughout their years in high school and college, can, ultimately form a lasting solution that enhances work in the clinical social work setting of high schools and the local community college. By tracking through research, the efficacy of any changes in the role of social workers or in the development and implementation of mentoring programs, such a move can have a lasting and dynamic effect on the lives of the young Black men for whom such a program is developed.

From the perspective of the researcher, it is essential to note that I will plan in the direction of developing mentoring programs for Black male students in my respective work environment, the community college, with the intent of incorporating a community-based needs assessment, along with recruitment of Black male mentors from the local

community who are willing to invest the time and effort to develop a long-term mentoring program for Black male youths. Such a position aligns with the tenets of the NASW, specifically, in terms of the foundation set forth by this research project in support of social justice and the self-determination of Black male adolescents (NASW, 2008).

In alignment with my professional orientation, social workers must work in the direction of collaborating with other social workers, other mental health professionals, and the staff and administrations of their respective institutions to affect changes that align with their observations of the need for more community-based social work outreach. Social workers in these settings can come to an understanding of the cultural training needs of the faculty and staff, as well as the needs of their students' in their respective institutions through their observations that stem from community-based outreach and community-based needs assessment. An emerging conflict between what a majority of White social workers had to say about the lack of any evidence of oppression, juxtaposed with very strong opinions by Black and Hispanic social workers about their experiences and observations of oppression, serve as a strong indicator of the need for cultural sensitivity training as a way of ensuring that all parties are aware of the existence of conflicting perceptions and how and why such perceptions should be discussed and understood.

By way of knowing the communities served by their respective institutions, via the introduction of community-based outreach, institutions will be better able to provide a foundational understanding of their student population. This information could be made available to the faculty and staff of each institution in the form of seminars and lectures

outlining a social-work derived understanding of the cultures represented in the local communities and the needs of students who come from various neighborhoods and town served by the local institutions.

When implemented, these changes in social work orientation to the community and institutions they serve will have a positive effect on the Black male students served. Knowing that a mentoring program can sustain the needs of young men throughout their educational endeavors in high school and college, can only serve to enhance their well-being and serve as an example of social justice and self-determination, tenets of the code of ethics of the NASW (2008). By having an understanding of the various components needed for a successful mentoring program: training of mentors, outreach to the local community for recruiting of mentors, and long-term planning and assessment to ensure viability of such programming, social workers will be strategically positioned to make a positive contribution to the body of clinical social work practice knowledge, and, by incorporating a more community-based approach to school social work, will find themselves supporting present and future initiatives that align with a community-based needs assessment derived program and approach that can only serve to enhance the experiences of Black adolescent males as they transition through high school, on to college and beyond.

Implications for Social Change

When implemented, these research findings and recommendations will have a positive effect that aligns with the NASW stance on social justice and of working in the direction of self-determination (NASW, 2008). Black students have the lowest persistence level to and through college graduation. By providing a change agent in the

form of trained mentors who will follow these young men over a period of years, the implications for change align well with what is understood from the perspective of SET. From that theoretical perspective, it is known that people are excluded in relation to the level of power, wealth, and prestige they have acquired (Wagner, 2015). With this essential understanding, which supports the development of programs that bolster inclusion and the removal of barriers to inclusion, Black male adolescents will be positioned to benefit from a relationship that is intended to support their personal and educational endeavors, in direct alignment with the tenets of the NASW (2008) code of ethics. Social workers are strategically imbued with the training and ability to effect policy change within their respective organizations that can effectively target the barriers identified through this research, another tenet of SET.

By working both with their respective institutions to develop and implement supportive mentoring programs, and by advocating for a change in the way site-based school social work functions (through the incorporation of a community-based social work component), social workers can effectively make changes that align with the essential elements of change outlined in SET. By advocating for change within these institutions, social workers are advocating for change on a macro level that can have the effect of fundamental change, should their recommendations be accepted by the administrations of their respective institutions. On a macro-level, the potential effectiveness can be understood in terms of work within institutions, and beyond, in terms of social work outreach and advocacy to the local and regional level. By initiating a change-agent approach to their work at the macro-level, social workers can effectively change the effectiveness of interventions at the micro or client to social worker level.

These changes effectively and holistically can have an immediate and lasting influence on work with Black male students in these settings. Taking a highly critical stance on the organizations and institutions within which these social workers function, can make a lasting positive change that aligns the outcomes of this research project directly with an understanding of the need for transformational social change.

Limitations of Study

It is understood that the findings of this research cannot be reliably transferred to other populations due, in large part, to the sample size of the research population. Only sixteen social workers participated in this study (eight high school social workers and eight community college social workers). Interpretation and application of these findings should be viewed only within the context of the local high school and community college environment in which the research was conducted (i.e., Nassau County, New York). While the recollections and accounts of the Black and Hispanic social workers interviewed for this research provide a window into their work environments that warrants further inquiry, a majority of the White social workers did not, by and large, speak in detail about any issues relating to race, racism, segregation, or cultural sensitivity. Additional inquiry in the form of a structured, anonymous survey to all school-based social workers in Nassau County may provide an insight that further elucidates a racial disparity that is otherwise primarily understood from the perspective of the Black and Hispanic social workers who participated in this inquiry. These research findings can inspire and enhance the working knowledge of social workers and professionals from related disciplines who work in school and community college based settings (e.g., psychologists, vocational rehabilitation counselors, mental health

counselors, academic advisors, and the school and college administrators). The identified difficulties of clinical social work with Black male adolescent students are not unique to this population, and, so, the research findings may also inspire and enhance the methods currently used with assisting other oppressed and underrepresented groups, for example, students who are Hispanic or who come from a Native American background.

Conclusion

Changing the circumstances of Black adolescent males transitioning from high school to college is essential, and requires the involvement of many stakeholders who have a deep-seated commitment to transformational social change. Clinical social workers are strategically and professionally imbued with the ability to make changes within their respective institutions that can change the lives of these young men for the better. By consistently reviewing, enhancing, and implementing research-based knowledge supporting the development of tailored mentoring programming for Black male adolescents, clinical social workers can both support a transformational social cause that serves to uplift and support self-determination and social justice, while remaining aligned with the need for professional growth and change well into the twenty-first century.

With this research, and with the determination that comes with a professional conviction inherent in the code of ethics of the NASW (2008), social workers can provide ongoing support to one another, to their professional groups, and to other organizations in the form of lectures and seminars that can only serve to transmit what is known and what remains to be learned about the effective and transformational change inherent in clinical social work-informed mentoring programming.

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Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Schedule

High School – College Transition among Black Males:

An Action Research Project

Qualitative Interview

High School – College Transition among Black Males:

An Action Research Project

Time of Interview: Begin: _____ End: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Name of Study Participant: _____

Study Participant Code: _____

Study Participant Code: __ __ __ __ **Date of Interview: __ __/__ __/__ __**

Demographics

The purpose of this interview is to explore the perspectives of school-based social workers working with Black male students who are transitioning from high school to a community college. The interview/questionnaire will take 30 minutes and your answers will be audio recorded and be used for research purposes.

The following questions are general information about you.

1. What is your date of birth? __ __/__ __/__ __ __ __
   M M D D Y Y Y Y

2. What is your gender?

   a. Male (1)

   b. Female (2)

   c. Transgender (3)

3. Which race or ethnicity do you identify with _____

4. How long have you been working as a school social worker?

   ____ years ____ months

5. What is your primary occupation or job title? _____

6. In what setting do you primarily work?

   a. High school _____ (1)

   b. Community College _____ (2)

Qualitative Questions

The following questions are related to your professional experiences working with Black male students. If you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, let me know and we will move on to the next question. Please speak clearly. Your responses to these questions will be recorded for transcription at a later date. Just to remind you, all information will be kept strictly confidential.

Do you give your consent to be audio-taped for the sole purpose of research? Yes or No.

TURN ON DIGITAL RECORDER.

IDENTIFY STUDY PARTICIPANT BY ID NUMBER AND BEGIN ASKING QUESTIONS.

1. What psychosocial problems do you see in working with Black male students in your setting?

2. Are there any particular aspects of psychosocial treatment planning for Black male students that you believe would be most helpful in their transition from high school to college?

    PROBE: What are those supports you believe would be most helpful in their transition from high school to college?

    PROBE: If you could make any changes in current psychosocial treatment planning for Black male students in high school setting, what might those changes look like?

3. Are there any psychosocial interventions that Black male students receive in high school that they should receive once they transition to college?

    PROBE: What types of psychosocial interventions should be available in the college setting?

    PROBE: If you could make any changes in current psychosocial treatment planning for Black male students in the community college setting, what might those changes look like?

4. Are there any unique professional constraints or limitations you could identify as barriers to working with Black male students in transition from high school to college?

   PROBE: How do these professional constraints or limitations affect your work with Black male students?

5. Are there any unique environmental stressors you could identify as barriers to working with Black male students transitioning from high school to college?

   PROBE: How do these environmental stressors affect your work with Black male students?

6. In your opinion, to what extent should the individual strengths of Black male students be taken into consideration when formulating clinical interventions?

   PROBE: If identified, how do you incorporate a strengths perspective into your work with Black male students?

7. In your opinion, do Black male students experience institutionalized oppression?

   PROBE: How does this affect your work with Black male students?

8. In your opinion, are there any specific roles or duties that all school social workers should perform or provide to students on a day-to-day basis?

   PROBE: What specific roles or duties should all school social workers perform or provide to students on a day-to-day basis?

   PROBE: Is there anything about your role as a school social worker that you find ambiguous, not clearly defined?

9. That concludes the interview. Is there anything we may not have covered that you would like to add regarding your work with Black male students transitioning from high school to college?

Thank you so much for your participation!

Interviewer Comments