

DISSERTATION

FACTORS IMPACTING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS
SEEKING ADVANCED SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Submitted by:

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER
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IMPACTING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS SEEKING ADVANCED SOCIAL
WORK EDUCATION BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

FACTORS IMPACTING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS SEEKING ADVANCED SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

This study identified key factors that potentially impact students seeking advanced social work degrees (MSW, Ph.D.). Two Council on Social Work Education accredited baccalaureate social work programs, one in Colorado and the other in Louisiana were active participants in this study. This study involved (1) identifying environmental/structural factors that may retard and/or support BSW graduates in their pursuit of a graduate degree in social work and (2) identifying the cultural/values orientations that may also serve as supports or impediments to graduate degree aspirations of BSW graduates.

The study surveyed BSW graduates from two schools during the fall/winter of 2004. The study specifically focused on recent graduates from the May 1999 to May 2002 graduating classes, in order to gain insight on the perceptions of the most recent program graduates allowing for sufficient time to apply, attend, and/or complete graduate school.

The responses of the participants were analyzed for statistically significant differences along the two Independent variables of ethnicity and gender, and on whether participants had attended graduate school or not. The study found that no statistically significant differences existed between the genders (male and female). However, with regard to ethnicity, the study found that African

Americans differ significantly from Caucasians regarding it being worth straining personal relationships to pursue the MSW degree. Other statistically significant findings were in relation to whether BSW graduates attended graduate school or not. The study found that BSW students who attended graduate school differed significantly from those who did not with regard to feeling academically prepared, the ability to delay gratification, straining personal relationships, and regarding cultural considerations as impacting their decision to attend graduate school.

African American students in this study were more likely to disagree that faculty diversity, number of minority faculty, and program relevance in working with vulnerable populations were key considerations impacting their graduate school intentions. In addition, as compared to Caucasian BSW students, African American BSW graduates in this study significantly felt graduate school would strain personal relationships, alienate them from family while attending, and would mean abandoning key roles in their families.

In summary, respondents in this study have shown that both environmental/structural considerations and cultural/values orientations are important to consider when addressing graduate degree intentions of BSW students considering seeking advanced social work education/degrees.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my deceased grandparents, Mrs. Rosa L. Scott, Jessie L. Scott, Sr., and Martha Carter, all of whom touched my life in a special way. To my deceased mentor and great friend, Raymond Bazemore, many thanks for your vision and wisdom while you were here with us. You saw my potential long before I ever knew what my life could be – thank you!

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Factors Impacting African American Students Seeking Advanced Social Work Education

In the past ten, years the literature chronicling the participation of racial and ethnic “outgroups” in education has grown. The term “outgroup” is used to describe a “subgroup who possess a disproportionate share of social malaise,...whose members are subject to class-based prejudice,...whose members have often been subjected to racial prejudice,...and those who have been kept out of the economic and social mainstream by virtue of the specialized roles ascribed to them...” (Jansson, 2001, p. 22). The hope, at the onset of desegregation, was that members of such outgroups would have increased opportunities for postsecondary education resulting from new inclusive laws.

While recent trends in higher education show increases in the number of full-time minority undergraduate students attending 4-year degree granting institutions, the disparity in graduation rates between Caucasian student and certain outgroups, particularly African American students, remains significantly disproportionate (NCES, 2003). Recent figures from the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) detail these disparities between White and Black students’ educational achievement. By race, 16.6 percent of the White population holds a bachelor’s degree, compared to 9.6 percent of the Black population. As compared to the White population, 43 percent more African Americans do not meet the most basic eligibility requirement for graduate schools—completion of a bachelor’s degree.

There exists significant literature documenting the problems regarding the recruitment and retention of minority participation at graduate levels (Bowie & Hancock, 2000 and Lewis, Ginsberg, & Davies, 2004). This literature suggests that many factors appear to systematically affect the admission and retention of African American graduate students. This becomes evident when looking at degree recipients from master's and professional or doctoral degree programs. The Census Bureau's (2000) data indicates that almost twice as many White persons (9.4 percent) complete advanced degrees compared African Americans (4.8 percent). Thus, the African American population falls behind another six to seven percent between eligibility for graduate education (based on undergraduate degree completion) and graduate degree completion.

Additionally, according to a recent report by the American Council on Education (Harvey, 2002), the undergraduate graduation rate for African Americans at Division I educational institutions remained at 38 percent in 1999 and 2000, but this number had declined two percentage points since 1995. The realities of certain trends become even more pronounced when gender is factored into the equation. African American women continue to graduate from college at a much greater pace than their African American male counterparts, 42 percent and 31 percent respectively.

However, from 1995 to 2000 African American women experienced the only decrease (1 percentage point) in college graduation rates among all women in the country's major ethnic groups; and African American men experienced a four percentage point decline during this same time span. "While the higher

education literature is filled with studies on African American students in general, it is sparse when examining the African American male experiences” (Jackson, 2003, p. 45).

Minority Participation in Social Work

Bowie and Hancock (2000) indicate that lack of African American participation in graduate education is not unique to one discipline or profession. What, then, is the issue of advanced degree attainment for minorities in social work? Minority student participation in social work has been on the rebound from declining enrollments. However, there still exists a great need for increased minority representation among BSW level practitioners, especially as ethnic and racial group members requiring services continues to grow (Raber, Tebb, & Berg-Weger, 1998). For some time, the profession has sought to increase the number of minority BSW students through various recruitment and retention efforts. However, many of these recruitment efforts have been ineffective, poorly focused, and grossly inconsistent (Berger, 1989). A more recent study showed increased effectiveness from recruitment strategies focused on helping to retain students of color in general, but at the same time recognize that recruitment programs tend to be underutilized by minority students enrolled in social work education (Clark, Garza, & Hipple, 2000).

Problem Statement

African Americans continue to be overrepresented among U.S. society’s most impoverished and marginalized members. Data reporting poverty rates, income ratios, infant mortality, imprisonment, violent crime offenses, and

HIV/AIDS infections provide evidence of the disproportionately high rate at which African Americans find themselves faced with these and other social problems (Scott & Shears, 2004). Indeed, African Americans lack the economic, educational, political, and social position to adequately influence U.S. society in order to achieve social justice and enhance the contributions of African Americans to the betterment of society.

Failure to address social justice issues and associated social problems are challenges many minority groups face, particularly the African American, and has had a negative impact on the society's welfare, i.e., achieving "the state of collective well-being of a community or society" (Baker, 1995). Therefore, the social problems confronting minority groups have a profound impact on our welfare at multiple levels (e.g., local, state, and national).

One place this impact is evident can be found in the high incidence of social problems encountered by African Americans' disproportionately higher need for human services in the U.S., as well as the corresponding lower number of African American social workers, specifically African American male social workers, who are prepared at advanced levels to provide these services.

Preliminary data on *Licensed Social Workers in the United States, 2004 A Statistical Profile*, conducted by the Center for Workforce Studies, School of Public Health, University at Albany, for the National Association of Social Workers, reports that "Virtually all social workers (99%) see at least some non-Hispanic White clients, and most see some Black/African American clients (85% and 77%, respectively)" (NASW, 2005, p. 39). In addition, the study reported that

social workers who serve clients in public social service agencies see caseloads with significantly higher Black, Hispanic, and Native American clients. For those social workers practicing in the private sector, the reverse is true. Private sector social workers see significantly more White non-Hispanic clients in these private practice settings.

Conceptual Underpinning for this Study

The premise of this study is that the higher incidence of social problems (e.g., poverty, access to health care, and rate of incarceration) among many minority group members is rooted in multiple environmental/ structural factors in U.S. society. In addition, policy and program decisions are made in large part void of any significant minority group participation, particularly the voices of African Americans and in particular the voices of African American males. Although some movement toward eliminating race and ethnicity as a primary contributing factor to differences among population groups has been made, change is gradual, and too often uninformed by the persons most impacted. By increasing the number of African Americans in positions of influence in human services, it is more likely that programs will be designed and delivered in more relevant and helpful forms to African Americans.

Thus, to address the social problems faced by African Americans in general, new frameworks for attracting African Americans to careers in social work must be developed. When creating such frameworks, two particular perspectives that are critical but have seldom carried much weight until recently, are the influence of cultural and environmental/structural factors that impede the

movement of African Americans into positions of significant influence and power for shaping and delivering social programs.

It is possible to conceptualize environmental/structural factors and cultural factors as two key lenses for focusing on African Americans seeking advanced social work education. The dual conception of environment/structure and culture reflects the position that the factors that influence the decisions of African Americans are derived from both extrinsic factors and intrinsic factors when making career choices in social work. These dual lenses (environment/structure and cultural factors) are nested in Morales and Sheafor's (2004) "Ecological Systems Model," which includes three other lenses (e.g., individual, family, and historical factors) (p. 232). What is important here, as many behaviorists would assert, is that human behavior in large part is determined by environmental factors. Shriver (2004) adds that human development stems from "... the interaction of multiple factors, some of which come from within us and some of which come from the social environment" (p.122).

Limb and Organista (2003), in looking at motivations for entering a graduate social work program based on race/ethnicity, found that the motivations of students of color differed significantly from their Caucasian counterparts on all but one measure; stated as, "Through social work I will be able to make an important contribution to individuals and society." The measures where significant difference occurred between African American and Caucasian BSW students included statements regarding occupational versatility of the degree, a desire to increase my potential, a desire to enhance my potential for serving

economically disadvantaged populations, the MSW degree offers the greatest opportunity for self-expression and personal growth, and desire to prepare myself for private practice," all of which comprise internal and external motivators.

Recognizing this duality of influence, this study will examine those external and internal factors that possibly limit African American social workers from attaining the aforementioned advanced and influential professional positions for shaping social policies and approaches to human service delivery. Thus, the fundamental question to be asked is: What are the external and internal factors affecting the graduate degree participation of African Americans in social work? In addition, to what extent do family structure, parental education, and socioeconomic status influence graduate degree seeking intentions variables?

Prerequisite to the acquisition of advanced social work education and professional credentials in social work is achievement in an institution of higher education. In the United States, higher education is founded upon the beliefs, values and traditions of the dominant (Caucasian) culture. Therefore, this powerful and most influential institution was conceived and designed based upon Caucasian cultural values and beliefs, and still today continues to be maintained and dominated by this cultural perspective. Consequently, when addressing the incidence of outgroup (African American) participation and success within higher education, very necessary attention must be given to environmental/structural factors that are imbedded in the philosophies, policies, and procedures that characterize higher education.

External (Environmental/Structural) Factors

The first lens for this analysis, therefore, is framed with regard to the context of environmental/structural factors (external factors) that potentially have impact on the incidence of African Americans becoming credentialed in social work at graduate levels. Several of these potentially influential factors include universities' selection criteria, culturally biased ability indicators and opportunity differentials, and policies and legislation lacking ethnic-sensitivity that artificially limit access to advanced education for African American applicants.

A central focus of this study then, will be on the environmental/structural factors within higher education and the perceived influence of such external factors on African American students' graduate degree intentions in social work. Defined operationally, the aforementioned key concepts (racially-based ability, opportunity differentials, and selective criteria) have been employed:

- (1) racially-based ability (e.g., minimum aptitude test scores, entrance requirements, other required indices of academic readiness),
- (2) opportunity differentials (e.g., the availability of tangible resources to secure test preparation and application fees, peer support, group support units, peer and faculty mentoring), and
- (3) policies and legislation (e.g., national funding resources/governmental aid, affirmative action strategies and policies, funding of public colleges and universities, and support for need-based financial aid).

Internal (Cultural) Factors

The second lens for this analysis is framed with regard to the contextual influences of cultural factors. Raber, et. al. (1998) assert that “When educators ask themselves why government programs do not address the needs of many minority groups, they often forget that culture molds programs and policies.” This assertion is far-reaching and telling of the nature and influence of culture.

Gordon (1978) describes culture as the particular way of life and within it [culture] are the prescriptions for behavior, norms of conduct, beliefs, values, and skills.

In essence, culture is the totality of life patterns passed down from generations and includes formal and informal social structures, language, religious ideals, habits of thinking, and artistic expression (Hodge, Struckman, & Trost, 1975).

Therefore, cultural characteristics stemming from group identity, more often than not, influence aspirations, needs for kinship and social relationships, abilities to delay certain desires, and gender based roles and responsibilities.

In this, and other ways, the concept of culture has often been overlooked or dismissed as it relates to outgroups in the United States. Notwithstanding a history of outgroup subjugation and culture-bashing, there is a culturally diverse reality in America. Better understanding of the intertwined and internalized nature of culture is important to increase participation of many outgroup members in the mainstream American culture, while appreciating and maintaining their own cultural heritage and identity. Perhaps resulting from the past cultural superiority perspective established by enslavement (e.g., strategies to acculturate, racial segregation, exploitation, and the oppression of racial

outgroups), the possibilities for cultural contributions made by such outgroups have gone unnoticed, or at best, have been significantly diminished. However, this need not continue, given the increasing ethnic diversity in America.

Nevertheless, forward movement is being made, however incremental, with regard to accounting for cultural factors. Yet, the necessity for greater cultural sensitivity in increasing opportunities for outgroups – particularly for African Americans – remains in great need. One cannot overlook the ever-present influence of culture and cultural scripts as influential factors within an outgroup member's career selection processes. These factors potentially weigh heavily on the members of the African American community; and in particular African American males during their early childhood and adolescent years of development.

The second lens, then, is framed in the context of identifying the cultural scripts potentially impacting the incidence of African Americans in social work acquiring credentials at more advanced levels. Cultural script is a contemporary theoretical concept that recognizes the influence of culture (values, customs, beliefs, and norms of behavior), but views it in the context of sociopolitical histories and social structure (Helms, 1994). In essence, the concept of cultural scripts embodies the interplay between cultural factors and race and ethnicity, and is telling of the dimensions of dominance and power. This concept exposes to more light the potential impact a dominant cultural group may have on a "subsidiary" cultural group, complete with demands and role expectations made by the more powerful group. Several cultural considerations that may affect

success in acquiring an advanced degree and should be addressed in this study include the following:

- (1) aspiration for advanced degrees (e.g., cultural scripts prescribed as to the economic and status value of advanced degree attainment),
- (2) cultural isolation (e.g., cultural scripts prescribed by breaking valued relationships and family/community ties, and abandoning key roles within the family unit),
- (3) economic rewards (e.g., cultural perceptions of the monetary and social uplift benefits of advanced degree attainment),
- (4) gender differences (e.g., cultural prescriptions based on gender roles, being a “man” and working in the human services, or working with men in human services), and
- (5) tolerance for delayed gratification (e.g., cultural scripts as prescribed by one’s ability to temporarily suspend economic rewards, social status, and the expectations of family for advanced degree attainment).

Significance of the Study

Answers to the questions posed for this study will allow the social work profession to examine existing policies and procedures in higher education in order to diminish the current disparity that exists in the number of African Americans seeking, and thus holding, advanced social work degrees and potentially enhancing the subsequent positioning of African Americans to impact policies and procedures. Social work roles at the two professional levels of BSW and MSW differ in the type of work and the ability to influence both policy and

practice. For the BSW professional, as described by the School of Social Work at Colorado State University (2005), these roles include advocate, broker, community change agent, counselor, mediator, and researcher. However, the roles, as they are described, for the MSW include administrator/manager, clinician, community expert, counselor, evaluator, and supervisor. By moving to the MSW roles, social workers increase their opportunities to influence social policies and programs.

Furthermore, answers to these questions can be used to inform recruitment and retention strategies, as well as resource allocation to culturally appropriate programs, in order to increase graduation rates for African American students. In addition, if the outcome of reformed policies results in a stronger pool of advanced social workers, these answers will help social service agency administrators respond more effectively when seeking to increase the numbers of African American staff members, and ultimately clients will be better served by experiencing more culturally-sensitive human service programs.

Application of Findings

As administrators of colleges and universities seek to enhance opportunities for African American students and other minorities, success rates of graduates from different types of institutions (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCUs] and Predominantly White Institutions [PWIs]), in graduate-level education become important. Nevertheless, problems still exist for African Americans at HBCUs and PWIs that go far beyond academic readiness and if

retention and recruitment are priorities, the administrators need to understand these influential challenges.

The ethnic make-up of a college or university to some degree influences the transition and matriculation process to graduate education, whether attending HBCU or PWI institutions. The positive correlation between student success and supportive environments has been well documented at HBCUs (Flowers & Pascarella, 1999). However, the challenges African Americans face at PWIs present a host of different extraneous and intervening variables such as problems of cultural adjustment, isolation, alienation, and racism that potentially undermine the academic experience of African American students (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999; and Lewis, Ginsberg, & Davies, 2004).

Bowie and Hancock (2000) perhaps best describe the need for such a study being conducted when stating "The relationships between work satisfaction, income, work-setting, and career aspirations must be better understood from the perspective of the African-American/Black, college-educated social workers" (p. 445). Further, Limb and Organista (2003) suggest that "More research is needed comparing the career motivations of students of color and White counterparts, as well as comparisons of different students of color groups" (p. 94). By focusing recruitment strategies and efforts in this way, the attraction to the profession of social work is then more in line with culturally relevant values, and becomes mutually beneficial to university and agency administrators, as well as to the students.

Research Questions

To better understand the possible relationship and interconnectedness between environmental/structural factors and cultural/values orientation factors impacting African American students seeking advanced social work education, the following questions were investigated.

Research Questions:

1. **Is there a difference between African Americans and Caucasians in terms of whether students attend graduate school or not?**
2. **Is there a difference between males and females in terms of whether students attend graduate school or not?**
3. **How are the three environmental/structural considerations for attending graduate school different for African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?**
 - 3a. How do diversity considerations for attending graduate school differ for African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?
 - 3b. How does feeling prepared to attend graduate school differ for African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?
 - 3c. How do perceived impacts of entrance requirements on attending graduate school differ as associated with African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian?
4. **How are the three environmental/structural considerations for attending graduate school different for male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?**
 - 4a. How are diversity considerations for attending graduate school different for male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?
 - 4b. How does feeling prepared to attend graduate school differ for male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?
 - 4c. How do perceptions of entrance requirements for attending graduate school differ for male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?
5. **What differences in the five cultural values are there between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?**

5a. What differences in communal values are there between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?

5b. What difference in delay of gratification is there between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?

5c. What difference in cultural considerations is there between African American BSW Students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?

5d. What differences in perceptions of straining personal relationships are there between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?

5e. What difference in perceptions of professional opportunities is there between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?

6. What difference in the five cultural values are there between male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?

6a. What differences in communal values are there between male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?

6b. What differences in delay of gratification are there between male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?

6c. What differences in cultural considerations are there between male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?

6d. What differences in perceptions of professional opportunities are there between male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?

6e. What differences in perceptions of straining personal relationships are there between male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?

7. Is there a relationship between the three environmental/structural considerations and whether BSW students attend graduate school or not?

7a. Is there a relationship between diversity considerations and whether BSW students attend graduate school or not?

7b. Is there a relationship between feeling prepared and whether BSW students attend graduate school or not?

7c. Is there a relationship between perceptions of entrance requirements and whether BSW students attend graduate school or not?

8. Is there a relationship between the five cultural values and whether students attend graduate school or not?

8a. Is there a relationship between communal values and whether students attend graduate school or not?

8b. Is there a relationship between delay of gratification and whether students attend graduate school or not?

8c. Is there a relationship between cultural considerations and whether students attend graduate school or not?

8d. Is there a relationship between perceptions of professional opportunities and whether students attend graduate school or not?

8e. Is there a relationship between perceptions of straining personal relationships and whether students attend graduate school or not?

9. **What is the best correlation of ethnicity, gender, environment/structural and cultural factor that predicts whether students attend graduate school or not?**

Definitions of Terms

The terms used to describe student perceptions and graduate degree aspirations are not intended to be complex or confusing. However, for clarity, these and other key terms reflective of the ecological systems model are defined below.

Aspiration- Students' desire or ambition for advancement, honor for self, or a particularly desirable thing (e.g., graduate degree attainment).

Culture- Student's ideas, customs, skills, values, beliefs etc., which have been transferred, communicated (directly or indirectly), or passed on through social interactions.

Cultural Scripts- Generally ascribed demands and/or role expectations either self-imposed or superimposed upon a subsidiary cultural group by a dominant cultural group.

Environmental/Structural Factors- All the conditions, circumstances, and influences surrounding and affecting students' access to higher education, e.g., tuition costs, financial aid, and academic readiness.

Family- Student's social support network consisting of both biological relatives and fictive kin relationships comprised of nuclear family and extended family interactions.

Historical Factors- Those conditions, and influences that have impacted current conditions, patterns, or practices in a given setting to advance or impair students seeking advanced social work education.

Individual Characteristics- Students' biological, psychological, and emotional systems that impact decision-making with regard to seeking advanced social work education.

Career Perception- Students' understanding, knowledge, insight, and/or intuition concerning what would be gained through participation in graduate education.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived influence that environmental/structural and cultural factors have on African American students seeking degrees in advanced social work education. The review of the related literature identifies key factors that influence students' decisions to seek advanced credentials in the field of social work. In order to better understand the context of the issues presented, this literature review focused on the historical trends of African American participation in graduate education; and specifically participation in graduate social work education. Second, the review of the related literature focused on environmental/structural factors in relation to students seeking advanced social work education. Third, literature will be reviewed addressing the influence of cultural factors and students' pursuit of advanced social work credential was examined. Finally, gender role expectations in relation to their impact on students seeking graduate degrees in social work is reported.

Historical Trends of African American Participation in Higher Education

Within the last 30 years, more and more attention has been directed toward African American participation in higher education. Recent data produced by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, (NCES), (2003), presents telling information on the status of women and minorities. Specifically, data on the underrepresentation of African American faculty/staff and administrators in higher education is also presented. Despite the attention to increasing the presence of African Americans in higher education

over the past three decades, African Americans continue to lag behind in positions as faculty and administrators, as well as in attending and graduating from colleges and universities across America.

First, looking at the big picture, minority faculty in the U.S. comprised 14 percent of the total faculty population in 1999 (NCES, 2003). Minorities (outgroup members) that same year, the report added, were about 15 percent of executive, managerial, and administrative staff. African American faculty however, were said to have been paid lower salaries, were less likely to have advanced degrees, attain tenure, or become full professors. Carter and O'Brien (1993) found similar experiences among African American faculty and concluded that such factors as lack of support and failure to attain tenure have negative impact on retention and recruitment efforts.

The NCES data also revealed some variance in the participation in higher education between African American males and females. Long has been the history of minority participation in education, but the participation of African American males in the educational pipeline has been limited. Jackson (2003) asserts, "the number of African-American male students currently in schools forms the pool of possible undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and academic administrators," such as it is with all groups. However, for African American males, the educational pipeline seems to have many more leaks when compared with their Caucasian counterparts. African American males are less likely to enroll in higher education, complete a bachelor's or master's degree, or a first professional or doctoral degree than their Caucasian counterparts. It is clear

that although their completion rates are improving, African American males nevertheless lag significantly behind their Caucasian counterparts at every point along this pipeline.

Trends of African American Participation in Social Work Education

Regarding social work and the participation of African Americans, a trend of slightly higher, but consistently disproportionate, involvement exists. Much like the whole of education, social work has its recruitment and retention challenges concerning African Americans. Social work, a profession whose core mission concerns caring, curing, and changing the society, has itself struggled to diversify among its more advanced credentialed professionals. Historical trend data for social work in the U.S. paints a picture of slightly improving African American participation, but still disproportionate representation at the BSW, MSW and DSW levels of professional social work.

To illustrate these trends in African American participation, data taken from the Council on Social Work Education (2004), *Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States* from 1970 to 2001 were used. These data show that for these 31 years there was an increase in the number of BSW graduates, the numbers growing from 8,132 to 10,009. The percentage of African American (Black) BSW graduates was 16.4 percent in 1979 and increased slightly to 17.8 percent in 2001.

For all MSW graduates, CSWE (2004) reports indicate that, the total numbers have been on the rebound following a down turn during the 1980s when MSW graduate numbers hovered around 8,053 in 1984 to 9,509 in 1989. Since

1991, MSW graduate numbers (10,949) have been on the rise and in year 2001 were just over 13,500, which was down from the previous year's peak of just over 15,000 MSW graduates. Following this 10 year trend, the percent of African American MSW graduates has also increased – up from 8.9 percent in 1991, to 14.2 percent in 2001.

Posting much smaller numbers – as would be expected – DSW/Ph. D. graduate numbers during this time (1979-2001) were rife with peaks and valleys. DSW graduates in 1979 numbered 174 students according to CSWE (2004) data and in 2001 had increased to 254 graduates. In these same years (1979 – 2001) African American graduates constituted 10.9 percent and 11.0 percent respectively. Table 2.1 illustrates these and other graduate trend data.

Table 2.1

BSW, MSW, and DSW Program Graduates 1979-2001

Year	# BSW Graduates	% BSW Minority	% BSW Black	# MSW Graduates	% MSW Minority	% MSW Black	# DSW Graduates	% DSW Minority	% DSW Black
1979	8,132	28.0	16.4	10,080	15.9	9.3	174	16.6	10.9
1980	7,971	26.3	15.2	9,850	15.9	9.4	213	20.7	11.7
1981	8,342	27.4	15.7	9,750	15.9	8.9	226	22.2	15.5
1982	7,802	24.0	15.2	8,556	14.1	7.9	284	17.4	8.5
1983	6,870	25.1	16.5	9,034	14.5	8.1	227	14.9	11.4
1984	6,392	26.9	15.1	8,053	13.9	8.3	245	21.5	15.5
1985	6,347	24.7	15.0	8,798	14.6	7.7	181	17.9	10.8
1986	5,714	22.7	14.3	8,134	14.4	7.8	297	17.5	8.7
1987	7,209	21.2	13.1	8,811	13.9	7.3	195	18.8	13.3
1988	6,916	22.2	13.0	9,891	18.5	8.0	332	19.6	9.3
1989	7,230	22.4	14.3	9,509	15.5	8.0	189	18.8	10.1
1990	7,250	24.1	15.2	10,063	15.9	9.1	247	25.5	17.0
1991	8,778	22.8	13.4	10,949	16.7	8.9	245	15.1	8.2
1992	9,510	23.1	13.9	11,582	17.1	9.2	243	19.3	14.4
1993	10,288	23.4	13.9	12,583	17.6	9.6	229	16.6	10.9
1994	10,511	23.0	13.2	12,856	19.2	11.5	294	15.0	9.2
1995	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
1996	12,356	26.9	15.6	14,484	21.7	13.9	258	16.3	9.3
1997	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
1998	11,435	29.2	16.4	13,660	21.9	11.7	266	13.5	5.6
1999	12,798	30.3	17.5	15,061	24.2	13.3	267	20.6	13.5
2000	11,773	29.6	17.8	15,016	26.0	13.8	229	19.2	10.5
2001	10,009	31.8	17.8	13,524	26.7	14.2	254	19.7	11.0

** Indicates missing data

Source: Council on Social Work Education (1979-2004). *Statistics on social work education in the United States*. Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education.

Though encouraging, the slight increases shown in the historical trend data of African American participation in graduate social work programs is not sufficient cause for excitement in the profession. Rather, these data generate a call for greater commitment and new determination toward future success in furthering the cause of African American participation in advanced social work education.

Factors Influencing African American Participation in Graduate Social Work Education

The social work profession has long been dedicated to society's most oppressed and poor (Baggett, 1994; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Williams, 1990). However, the social work profession, recognizing the growing diversity in America, has consistently desired to increase the diversity among its worker pool (Chunn, Duston, & Ross-Sheriff, 1983; Council on Social Work Education, 1984; Jackson, 1966). In theory, the profession's hope is that by increasing the numbers of outgroup social workers with graduate and/or professional degrees, the profession's long-time commitment to diversity, equality, and social justice might be sustained. To accomplish this task, social work began strategizing as to how to attract greater numbers of outgroup members into MSW and doctoral programs (Berger, 1989). Theorists and researchers identify a myriad of possibilities that may serve as impediments, as well as suggesting support strategies to address the recruitment and retention of African American students in graduate social work education. Though the magnitude of possibilities presented by those considered authorities in this area can seem overwhelming,

their assertions can be reduced to three distinct classifications – environmental/structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors.

Environmental/Structural Factors

As is the nature of the social work profession, the person-in-environment perspective must be considered when addressing the social and behavioral phenomenon of African Americans in higher education. Environmental/structural factors can have a profound positive or negative impact on individuals', as well as outgroups', social functioning (Morales & Sheafor, 2004). Morales and Sheafor further assert, "...many of the problems of affected oppressed groups, such as special populations, are caused by the economic and social structure of U.S. society" (p. 233). They also recognize that such environmental/structural factors as those found in the political, educational and other social institutions serve as seemingly insurmountable barriers to adequate social participation and inclusion of many outgroup members. William Ryan (1971), in his book *Blaming the Victim*, provides, in part, the rationale for the consideration of environmental/structural factors in the ecological systems model. By suggesting that the greater society often blames the true victim (outgroup members) for their plight by failing to recognize the environmental/structural factors that perpetuate the exclusion and oppression of outgroup participation in the mainstream discourse, Ryan brings attention to the role and responsibilities of those in power who make and maintain governing legislation and institutional policies.

The impact of environmental/structural factors continues to play a significantly influential role regarding how accessible higher education is to already marginalized outgroups in America. Valentine (2004) identifies several environmental/structural factors as potentially having a great negative impact on access and opportunity for minorities and outgroup members. These factors, she asserts, constitute a retrenchment toward a time when higher education failed to be inclusive of significant population groups (e.g., veterans, women, members of minority groups, individuals from low-income and working-class families, immigrants, children who are the first generation college students, and children from farms and ranches). Such environmental/structural factors include financial support, diminishing public funding of public colleges and universities, rising tuition and decreased need-based financial assistance, and the negative impact of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) on potential applicants to higher education.

Financial support for higher education has decreased in the past several years. As state and local legislators are under increased pressure to balance state budgets, higher education has taken the brunt of the cuts, along with social support programs for single mothers, children, and the elderly. Specifically regarding higher education cuts (Pratt, 2003), the National Governors Association estimated nearly a \$50 billion dollar reduction in higher education spending. In fiscal year 1998, Mortenson (2000) estimated that state and local expenditures for higher education had decreased nearly \$21 billion since fiscal 1979, and the more recent decreases exacerbate that problem.

Most concerning is that college and university administrators, in attempts to offset these cuts in state funding support, have resolved to increase tuition costs, while the federal government simultaneously seeks to leave need-based financial aid (Pell-grants program) unchanged; and internally supported loans and grants administered by colleges and universities are being downsized (Dervarics, 2003). Martenson (2000) estimates that between 1982 and 1999, need-based student aid decreased 9.5 percent, and the buying power of Pell-grants has been reduced nearly 50 percent over the past 20 years.

Lastly, the restrictive legislation of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs further limits access to higher education for many of its participants. TANF limits participants' ability to substitute higher education as work, and undermines attempts by states that chose to increase access to education for these participants (Adair, 2001). For instance, in 1995, 648,763 students in the U.S. received Aid to Families with Dependent Children benefits while attending school full-time. By 1999, this number had decreased to less than 340,000 students or stated differently, had been reduced by approximately 47.6 percent (Greenbery, Strown, & Plimpton, 1999).

Turning toward social work and African Americans specifically, others researching African Americans and graduate social work education report career choice, availability of financial aid, financial support, racism and acceptance, socioeconomic and environmental influences as key factors influencing graduate degree seeking intentions (Bowie & Hancock, 2000; Tinto, 1987; Jones & Watson, 1990). Pelavin and Kane (1990) attribute the lack of participation of

minority students to more environmental/structural factors (e.g., legislation and institutional factors), rather than intrapersonal characteristics.

Clearly, considerations of environmental/structural factors and their impact on students' participation in higher education are merited. What is not as clear is the perceived impact of such factors by social work graduate students in general, nor of African American social work graduate students in particular.

Interpersonal Factors

Belcastro and Koeske (1996) identified a relationship between job satisfaction and intention to seek graduate education especially in relation to factors that may pull or push applicants and students toward graduate education. They cite "career commitment derived from accumulated experiences as pulling students to advanced training, whereas those students seen as holding unrewarding dead-end jobs as those being pushed into advanced training programs in the field of social work" (p. 325).

Le-Doux (1996) also considers "push and pull" factors in career patterns of African Americans and Hispanic social work doctorates and ABDs. In this study, the researcher identified pull factors that attract individuals to a particular profession – in this case social work. The factors included were "location of educational programs, educational and employment opportunities, and professional ideologies," while (push) factors are those factors that "drive individuals away from selecting (or staying with) a career choice and include structural discrimination (e.g., biased admissions requirements, insufficient financial aid, and lack of content on ethnic/racial minorities)" (p. 250).

As addressed in data presented earlier, not only are the issues of outgroup recruitment, retention, and graduation rates important, it is incumbent upon the social work profession, whose responsibility it is to “change society” and thus create societal conditions that enhance social functioning, to competently consider all factors regarding outgroup participation in higher education in general. Strategies to increase minority recruitment by fields outside social work have included “preparatory programs for incoming students, community assistance in identifying potential candidates, and industries to address the problem of underrepresentation” (Bowie & Hancock, 2000).

Whichever the case, to better understand the perceived impact that environmental/structural factors, as well as many others, have on students in social work, particular attention must be given to furthering the profession’s diversity agenda.

Intrapersonal Factors

The literature regarding African American participation in higher education surfaces yet another consideration for understanding participation in advanced degree program trends. Important as they may be, environmental/structural and interpersonal factors are estimated to be only two-thirds of the broadly grouped considerations found among the literature on this subject. Nevertheless, the explanations for the underachievement and underrepresentation of African Americans in higher education go beyond just environmental/structural factors and those attributed to interpersonal influences. The set of skills, abilities, and experiences brought to bear by the individual greatly influences individual

outcomes, as well. Thus, intrapersonal factors are most worthy of consideration and exploration, in the context of African American participation in higher education.

In an examination of the literature, explanations surfaced both biological and psychological factors, regarding reasons that low African American participation in higher education exists. For example, some traditionalists have rationalized lower academic achievement, and thus lower participation of African American students, to be a genetic predisposition. Despite evidence to the contrary, the idea of genetically and/or racially-based ability differentials continue to exist.

The social work literature on the subject of recruitment strategies identifies a number of efforts designed to address more intrapersonal characteristics at both the BSW and MSW levels (Clark, Garza, & Hipple, 2003; Raber, Tebb, & Berg-Weger, 1998). Evidently, there is considerable variance among researchers as to how best to address the participation issues of outgroup members, particularly African Americans.

To begin, Morales and Sheafor (2004) in their *ecosystems model* highlight several factors for consideration at the individual level. They assert, "the focus is on the biopsychological endowment each person poses, including personality strengths, level of psychosocial development, cognition, perception, problem-solving skills, emotional temperament, habit formation, and communication and language skills" (p. 231). Though not exhaustive, the list of factors they provide is an adequate description of the multifaceted and complex nature of the

individual. This foundation encapsulates most, if not all, of the assertions made in the literature regarding intrapersonal factors.

Psychological factors and conditions are also held up for consideration when addressing African American participation in higher education. An individual's personality strengths, cognition, levels of psychological development, and problem-solving skills may all be determinants in the success or failure in graduate programs, not to mention students' perceptions of acceptance and inclusion in the culture of higher education (Jenks & Phillips, 1998). Other factors include low motivation, underdeveloped cognitive skills, and poor communication skills as additional individual characteristics considered to contribute to the limited participation of African Americans.

Jones (2001) presents five factors as key considerations in recruiting, retaining and graduating African American students. Two of these factors include the need to perceive the social and academic climate as inclusive and affirming, and the need to commit to short-term and long-term objectives. The remaining three factors encompass such considerations as ability to adjust to meet the challenges of a new environment, need to receive adequate financial assistance, and finally the need for opportunity.

Cultural and Cultural Scripts as Factors

The influence of cultural and cultural script factors on African American participation in higher education in the United States is also a key consideration found in the literature. Several assertions have been made as to the influence of

cultural factors and the contemporary notions of cultural scripts as influential determinants of African American participation.

Historical and Contemporary Conceptions of Culture

First, it is important to note that the concept of culture, both historical and contemporary, has varied greatly among anthropologists, sociologists, and social science researchers alike. At the center of this debate is the appropriate focus and inherent limitations of any attempt at defining the concept of culture. In essence, the debate from culturalists' perspective is based on the perception that culture is at the apex of social science, and is the central determinant in behavioral patterns. To the contrary, structuralists postulate that social structure is the primary focus (e.g., kinship, extended family and fictive kinship), and therefore determines patterns of interpersonal interactions and thought (Levi-Strauss, 1963).

Edward Taylor (1924) defined culture in the classical context as knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and other habits and capabilities of mankind. This holistic concept of culture includes religion and language, as well as kinship structures. From this perspective, the study of culture includes the study of different types of society. The resulting diversities among various societies also produced clear varieties in cultural patterns. This theory fueled the argument that culture, not nature, is the primary factor governing human behavior.

The conceptions of culture created a distinctive identity and served to socialize group members for increased homogeneity and identification of

outsiders. Therefore, culture in this conception differentiated individuals by providing a basis for recognition and inclusion of group members, and identification of outgroup members designated for external discrimination (Singer, 1968). Culture, then, can be viewed in a two-fold way. On the one hand, culture can be viewed as a product of social action and behavior, and on the other, as a process that guides future action and behavior.

Consequently, culture follows a relatively consistent pattern (Pattern Theory) and manifests itself in dress and diet, and in sociopolitical ideologies, economics, and religious life (Singer, 1968). Through understanding culture, insight may be gained regarding patterns and persistence in different cultural factors, both dominant and subsidiary, and of the incremental nature of change within more stable (institutionalized) cultural values and beliefs.

In the contemporary literature regarding culture, the concept tends to be used in sociological research in at least a couple ways: (1) as a “code of conduct embedded in or constitutive of social life”, and (2) as a “symbolic product of group activity” (Peterson 1990, p. 498). Hall and Neitz (1993) offer five analytic frames that focus on certain aspects of culture. These include: (1) institutional structures; (2) cultural histories; (3) cultural production and distribution; (4) cultural objects, patterns, and collective meanings; and (5) cultural and behavioral constructs.

The first, institutional structures, gives attention to culture and its linkages with social institutions and the issues of individual and group identity development and moral conduct. The second frame, examines cultural history

and the impact of past cultural practices on the present. This is offered to give attention to the significance of rituals, effects of rationalization on social processes, and cultural consumption for analysis. Third, the frame Hall and Neitz (1993) present addresses the production and distribution of culture with attention to stratification and power. Research in this area examines the cultural strata and socioeconomic differences, gender and ethnic cultural differences, and the resulting effect on inequality. The fourth analytic frame examines audience effects. This frame looks closely at cultural objects and precise patterns of collective meaning and interpretive ideology gained by those consuming such objects. Finally, the fifth analytic frame presented refers to how [actors] in different mainstream and subsidiary culture settings use culture to guide behavior and establish social identity.

The preceding accounts of the historical and contemporary conceptions of culture set the foundation for understanding the multifaceted nature and complexity of culture. The evolution of the concept of culture and its more contemporary conceptions provides the basis for greater exploration into its application in contemporary theories of human action.

Cultural Factors and African American Participation

Cultural considerations in recent years have become more and more relevant in the analysis and explanations of social phenomenon. Contemporary authors and researchers increasingly suggest the importance of cultural factors, and the necessity for considering their potential influence in better understanding individual and group behavior regarding outgroup participation in higher

education. In this section, the focus is on African American culture and its value on education and educational achievement, as well as cultural scripts associated with economic rewards, isolation, and inclination toward delayed gratification.

African American Values and Traditional Principles

Some scholars, comparing African Americans' cultural values to those of Whites, have described African Americans as having a pathological culture, or a culture of poverty (Lewis, 1967; D'Souza, 1995). Still, little creditable evidence exists that validates any assertion that African Americans' cultural values, beliefs, and norms of behavior explain the existence and perpetuation of the educational achievement gap, or the lack of participation of African Americans in graduate education.

Negative conceptions of African Americans' have generally been based on poor economic, health, and community conditions, which in turn were viewed as culturally relative consequences. Realistically, such arbitrary linkage of negative social phenomenon to cultural values fails to acknowledge or address the adaptability and vitality of the African American culture. Kerenga (1993) proposes that African American culture is truly an African culture adapted to survive in America. That is, African American culture should be viewed as being adaptive-vital, given the traumas of slavery, institutional racism, and oppression experienced throughout its history in America. Such a perspective gives this culture's ability to adapt and in many instances thrive within an environment/structure which was neither conceived nor designed to affirm or

strengthen African American cultural values, beliefs, or norms, but has continued to be a vital contributor to the survival of the African American community.

Kerenga (2003) offers seven principles (or Nguryo Saba) that represent African culture. These seven principles reflect the “first fruit” of harvest festivals that were celebrated throughout the continent of Africa. They include: (1) unity; (2) self-determination; (3) collective work and responsibility; (4) collective economics; (5) purpose; (6) creativity; and (7) faith (p. 195).

These seven principles, when held up to components of White cultural values and beliefs or mainstream American cultural values, create an interesting diversity of values, beliefs, and ideologies. Figure 2.1 identifies the values of these three groups for additional clarity and synthesis. By this synthesis, clearly mainstream American social values are more in line with the components of White cultural values and beliefs. African American cultural values seem off the mark and away from those of the mainstream White culture.

Figure 2.1

Cultural Comparisons of Dominant Values in African American, and White Cultures

African American Culture	White Culture
Unity	Individualism
Self-Determination	Competition
Collective Work & Responsibility	Delayed Gratification
Cooperative Economics	Action Orientation
Purpose	Majority rules
Creativity	Status & Power
Faith	Nuclear Family

Sources: Van Wormer, K. (1997). *Social welfare: A world view*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall (pp. 23-27). Karenga, M. (2002). *Introduction to Black studies*. Los Angeles: The University of Sankore Press (pp. 194-195)

Understanding such cultural differentiation in values may provide some explanation for the resistance on the part of African Americans to adopt wholeheartedly the culture and values of a culture that was so brutally oppressive and exclusive in the not too distant past. Thus the clash of these different cultural values and beliefs may have, in part, provided the impetus for Africans adapting and changing in America for their sheer survival (Scott & Shears, 2004).

African American Culture and Valuing Education

Among some sociological researchers, the concept of culture in the contemporary literature is viewed as both a code of conduct embedded in or constitutive of social life, and as a symbolic product of group activity (Peterson,

1990) opens up cultural areas for exploration. Cultural explanations of the disparity that exists between African Americans and other ethnic groups in educational achievement do exist. Some of these explanations have taken on a more negative cultural connotation than others and have minimized the cultural contributions of different groups.

Does this disparity indicate a devaluing of education and educational achievement by the African American culture, or is it indicative of a disconnect between cultural values and beliefs of this group and the American educational institution? The literature points out that African Americans have historically, and still today, hold a strong appreciation for education and educational achievement, and the resultant opportunity for advancement. Perhaps in more recent times reflective of the connection between education and economic prosperity, "...obtaining equal educational opportunities has been a historical focal point of the African American community" (Scott & Shears, 2004, p. 558). In search of increased access and opportunity, the African American community made tremendous strides toward this objective through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, specific to increased educational access and opportunity, the historic *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954 (declaring "separate but equal" unconstitutional) was for the African American community a sizable victory and offered a ray of hope.

Moreover, Logan (1990) asserts that African American families, past and present, consider educational achievement as the central means most likely to

ensure economic security. An assertion that is further evidenced by the nearly 75% of Black persons, age 25 and over attaining at least a high school diploma.

Lum (2003) is careful to remind us that differences exist between groups, as well as within groups, including the African American population. Such differences are manifested among differing cultural values, skin tone/color (very fair skinned to very dark skinned), and differences in ancestral heritage. Furthermore, within group cultural differences may vary greatly depending on an individual's degree to which assimilation and/or acculturation into mainstream has occurred, how immersed in African American culture one may be, and if one has a bicultural typology. Understanding that among these typologies exists cultural variations and degrees of acceptance and inclusion into, and thus possibly exclusion from, the mainstream cultural norm (Bell & Evens, 1981).

African American Culture and Social Work Graduate Education

Though a sizable body of literature exists that documents the problem of minority student recruitment and retention, the literature is sparse regarding the influence of cultural factors currently being expressed as valuable considerations. Equally sparse is the literature regarding the implications of cultural factors and African American participation in higher education, and specifically social work graduate education. Moreover, there is little evidence indicating that recruitment strategies have kept pace with the evolving knowledge regarding culturally competent strategies.

As the color of America changes, so does its cultural and ethnic make-up. With this in mind, so will the need for increased innovation in program

development and research require change. To do this work, minority student recruitment into graduate schools of social work will have to increase. Likewise, resource allocation and collaborative recruitment and retention strategies will also need to become more culturally relevant. Outgroup members are still a vitally underutilized resource for innovation and insight with regard to the development, administration, provision, and evaluation of social service programs.

If social work's appeal is to grow among minority undergraduates seeking advanced degrees, particularly among African American students, change is critical. "We believe that the most successful [retention and recruitment] strategies will be those that are tailored to the values and behavioral norms [culture] of specific minority groups," (Mullen et al., 1993, p. xviii).

Mullen et al. (1993), in their research on recruitment and retention of African Americans in social work graduate education, offer several culturally relevant considerations, among others. Past researchers have found social and cultural alienation to threaten minority retention (Tierney, 1991; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Tinto, 1987). Mullen et al. also recognize that many graduates identify cultural insensitivity to minorities, racial stereotyping, and lack of or respect for cultural differences to be a problem in social work education. Moreover, a lack of cultural sensitivity was expressed in the absence of program relevance to the needs of minority clients and the availability of minority faculty to serve as mentors, role models, and advisors to students.

The positive implications of cultural considerations in strategic planning with regard to recruitment and retention are relatively sparse in the literature. However, McAfee (2000) in her work with American Indian students in the natural and physical sciences (engineering and mathematics) introduces the culturally relevant phenomenon of “stepping out.” Stepping out, she describes, is a phenomenon descriptive of the college-going pattern of many Native American peoples in these disciplines. She also introduces the metaphor “stepping stone” referring to the forward progress toward graduation made by these students. Both [stepping out and stepping stone] are “applicable to other underrepresented ethnic groups in colleges and universities across the country,” she asserts (p. 8).

Such culturally aware and sensitive efforts may possibly serve as next steps in increasing recruitment and retention, as well as tracking and reporting a more accurate account of completion rates of minorities in graduate education, to include African Americans in social work. Lack of attention to structural discrimination (e.g., biased admissions requirements, insufficient financial aid, and lack of content on ethnic racial minorities) provides a partial explanation of the phenomena that push minority students away (Le-Doux, 1996), but lack of cultural fit may explain other reasons specific minority groups are pushed away.

African Americans and Cultural/Values Orientations as Factors

Increasingly more attention in the social sciences is given to the context of culture, racial and ethnic identity development, precipitating historical events, and the social environment (Steele, 2000; Davis, 1997; Helms, 1994). Here, is

introduced the contemporary notion of cultural scripts as influential factors of African American participation in higher education.

First, in this theoretical conceptual frame, cultural scripts are considered to encompass generally ascribed demands or role expectations self-imposed or superimposed upon a subsidiary cultural group by themselves, by a dominant cultural group or both. Behavior, therefore, can be viewed in at least two social psychological contexts – sociologically or psychologically. Sociologically, descriptions encompass “behavior and psychological processes of individuals who occupy positions in social structures, organizations, and groups.” Psychological views encompass “an attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others” (Stephan & Stephan, 1990 p. 5).

Cultural scripts then, may be assigned from within one’s self (self-imposed) or from without (superimposed). As with gender scripts (ascribed roles and expectations based on gender), cultural scripts also assign certain roles and expectations to persons based on cultural and racial/ethnic identity. Certainly, behavior is influenced by the environment, but can also be influenced by other aspects of the larger society (Davis, 1997). Because culture is defined as customs, skills, values, and beliefs which have been transferred, communicated (directly or indirectly), or passed on through social interactions, it is difficult to ascertain which of an individual’s behaviors are culturally ascribed or socially ascribed.

Nevertheless, it is clear that one's behavioral tenets are as much a product of the opportunity structure, as they are of individual values and beliefs (Trent, 1994). Moreover, as we consider education and educational achievement or deprivation across culture and racial/ethnic lines, race/ethnicity at first glance seem to be predictive of educational success. However, delving deeper, African American children whose parents are college educated still score lower on average than their Caucasian counterparts with parents who have less education (Davis, 1994).

The cultural script here may possibly be internalized beliefs about academic excellence and achievement being an attribute of Caucasians, but not that of African Americans. Such an internal perception of one's academic ability and prowess may provide the rationale for some African Americans' departure from a conventional life-course trajectory that includes academic excellence and educational pursuits that include graduate school. In fact, socioeconomic, structural, and opportunity constraints can be predictive of behavioral patterns.

In countries outside the United States (e.g., Japan, Israel, Great Britain, and New Zealand) there does not exist a history of proportionately equal reward for outgroup members based on equal work, but Ogbu (1978) discovered that these cultures believe that educational attainment increases the possibility of positive life opportunities. Historically, outgroup members in these countries received less than equal compensation in spite of equivalence in skill, education, and training. Consequently, in nearly every case the outgroup members have become disillusioned and view notions that hard work and educational success

are the primary means of getting ahead with disbelief. This ascribed attribute, therefore, contributes significantly to their academic struggles and lower educational attainment (Farley & Allen, 1987).

Within the U.S. there can be clear parallels drawn between these countries' treatment of outgroups, as well as these between minority and dominant group theories explaining the phenomenon. For example, caste stratification policies and practices in countries outside the U.S. parallel racial, cultural, and ethnic segregation and discrimination policies and practices within U.S. history, and still today. Interestingly, themes of minority group participation in education in other countries recognize caste stratification policies and practices as contributing to the achievement gap between outgroup members and the dominant group. In the United States, minority group theories suggest racial, cultural, and ethnic discrimination and segregation policies and practices as factors contributing to the achievement disparity.

By contrast, dominant group theories for the U.S. and some countries outside the U.S. attribute disparities in educational achievement and success to bio-psychosocial factors, culture, and family structures of outgroup members (Farley & Allen, 1987). Much of the dilemma among contemporary and past writers stem from the individualistic, interpersonal, and psychological processes, which influence behavior (House, 1981; Wilson, 1987/1990; Gates, 1994). While some believed until the mid-1960s that African Americans shared cultural values of positive community identity and clear norms and sanctions of behavior (Wilson, 1987/1990), others believed African Americans never shared values and

community in this way. Rather, these writers postulate that African Americans shared most of all a similar condition of existence (Gates, 1994).

With this in mind, and given the implications of cultural script factors such as degree aspirations, cultural isolation, economic rewards, and tolerance for delayed gratification, there is strong need for increased clarity regarding cultural scripts and advanced degree attainment among African Americans. This need is particularly evident in social work education and among social workers because of the caring, curing, and changing nature of the profession. Additionally, the most widely accepted definition of social work reminds us of the profession's objective to help individuals, groups communities, and [large institutions] enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning, and for creating societal conditions favorable to this goal.

Gender, African Americans, and Social Work Graduate Education

Lastly, with the aforementioned biological, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cultural factors having been presented, now the implications of gender and gender role expectations are explored. Just as with cultural scripts, gender scripts are deeply imbedded in U.S. culture and have implications for many aspects of society. From these gender scripts arise certain role assignments and expectations that impact nearly every level of human interaction. The implication that gender role expectations in society promote certain behavior is unquestionable and possibly telling of the disparity between men and women in the human service and social work disciplines. Notwithstanding biological and psychological differences, gender differences, too, have strong implications with

regard to family and work in the context of the larger society. In this review of the related literature, gender in U.S. society is addressed, and especially gender expectations in social work.

The roles of men and women in society have gone relatively unchanged throughout recent history, with only a few exceptions. Since the Women's Rights Movement, progress toward more shared roles and expectations has been made. Once a strong patriarchal society dominated by men at nearly every turn, more women are moving into influential and powerful positions. This is not to say that society is becoming more matriarchal in structure and design, or that the society as a whole is being more egalitarian. In fact, reality is that only in certain microcosms in society have women been allowed to share and perform certain roles as readily as men. That is to say that in spite of the movement, the perception of the woman and her role in society has remained relatively unchanged.

American culture has been viewed traditionally, and still today, as a patriarchy. Certainly great strides have been made in ownership of property, voting rights, and consequences for mistreatment of women by their partners made more severe. But, little change has been made in other areas with regard to income differentials and responsibility for child care and child rearing, as well as consistent subordination and objectification of women in sports, business, medicine, and engineering disciplines.

Women have seemingly thrived in those professions, disciplines, and fields of study that are more closely aligned with their gender scripts and role

expectations. This is not to say that women have not thrived when they move outside these gender scripts. Much to the contrary, prominent female personages as Hillary Rodham Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, and Martha Stewart embody both the possibilities, triumphs, and the struggles of women in America.

Nevertheless, the current reality is that men continue to cluster in administrative, management, and supervisory positions, and in certain disciplinary areas in far greater numbers than do women. Likewise, men generally have higher income than do women, even when there is little difference in educational attainment or training. Such realities continue to perpetuate and reinforce gender scripts and gender role expectations within society. For example, particularly in human services professions, women dominate as frontline staff, intake workers, and home visitors, while men occupy the majority of administration and managerial roles.

Gender Expectations and Social Work

For the social work profession, the contributions of both women and men are well-documented in the literature. Nonetheless, the profession has traditionally, and still today, been viewed as “women’s work” (Pease & Camilleri, 2001). Although men are well-represented in particular social work practice areas, and in management roles, women make up the majority of the social work workforce. The human services, representing occupational fields such as nursing, teaching, social work, psychology, occupational therapy, human development, health sciences, and a host of other disciplines and occupations, serve as intellectual stimulation and the basis for social progression for men and

women. The human services, however, comprise part of the society's mission of care, which includes teaching social and community norms and behavior, nurturing growth and development, and healing social ills and conditions. This section deals with the possible interactions between gender and caring, men in social work, and particularly the possible implications for African American males seeking advanced social work education.

Gender-biased perceptions of social workers are not easily dismissed. The gendered nature of social work embodies certain characteristics that tend to be more closely associated with feminine role expectations. For example, perceptions of caring professions and caring roles (Hugman, 1991) embrace notions of love, nurturance, affection, self-sacrifice, and intimacy. For some, these characteristics may be viewed as feminine character traits and stereotypically concerns females would find endearing (Pease & Camilleri, 2001). In this profession where wages are low and prestige minimal, many continue the work in spite of such a lack of appreciation call their work a 'labor of love'. Such a conception reinforces the feminine qualities that so often are perceived in this caring work. "...In everyday discourse there is a sense in which most women 'nurse' and 'social work' others" (Pease & Camilleri, p. 27).

Thus in a patriarchal society robust with stereotypical male role expectations, the pursuit of such a caring professional trajectory as teacher, nurse, or for that matter, social worker, requires certain strengths, abilities, and capabilities. Arguably, caring is not a for-women only character trait, but the socialization of young boys and girls undeniably ties gender to particular ascribed

norms of gender specific behavior that carry over into adulthood and thus, career aspirations and choice.

Interestingly, caring is said to have distinct meanings which might explain some of the attraction, as well the reluctance on the part of some to embrace professions of caring such as social work. Given that the mission of social work as mentioned previously, i.e., caring, curing, and changing, some theorize that caring has multiple meanings. Two of these meanings are embodied in the construct “caring about” and “caring for” individuals and community (Unggerson, 1983; Finch & Groves, 1983; and Graham, 1983). This theoretical conception of ‘care’ seems to objectify caring in one way (caring about), while recognizing its concrete nature (caring for) in another. Thus, men may be more comfortable embracing a ‘caring about’ conception, which is constructed with themes of power and control that are central to the work and roles they perform.

The conception of gender in the helping professions, particularly social work, nursing, and teaching, may possibly need to be retooled to be more inclusive and accepting of gender diversity and the necessity for having male role models, mentors, and teachers in these disciplines at multiple levels (e.g., frontline, staff, and administration). In so doing, we potentially increase the visibility of these individuals, their various responsibilities, and the perception/attitude about working in these helping professions.

In conclusion, the literature presents a number of environmental/structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors and characteristics as contributors to the participation trends of African Americans in higher education. Though these

characteristics are not all-inclusive, they do represent a significant set of supporting variables related to recruiting, retaining and graduating African Americans.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the methodology of this study. The purposes of this research were two-fold. First, this study sought to investigate the perceived degree to which environmental/structural factors impact students' decisions to seek advanced social work education. Second, to investigate differences that may exist between African American and Caucasian participants, and to identify variations between genders among students seeking advanced social work education. Survey research was the methodology selected for this study because such designs can provide a numerical depiction of some microcosm (sample) of the larger population by a process of data collection through asking questions (Fowler, 1988). From this data collection process, it was anticipated that data would be generated that could in turn be used to generalize about some characteristics, attitudes, or norms of behavior for the larger theoretical population. Subsequent sections of this chapter include a description of the specific research methodology for this study that includes the population, sample, sampling design, variables, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Design

Gliner and Morgan (2000) assert that "the theoretical population for a research study includes all of the participants of theoretical interest to the researcher and to which he or she would like to generalize" (p. 40). For this study in particular, the theoretical population comprises Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) graduates formally enrolled in Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)

accredited programs. Gliner and Morgan describe an accessible population as the group of participants readily accessible to the researcher via a number of portals (e.g., telephone directories, membership rosters, alumni rosters, etc.). The accessible population for this study consists of BSW student graduates from two CSWE accredited programs, one program in the south and one program in the mountain region of the United States. In addition, one program has a predominately Caucasian enrollment and the other predominantly African American.

To provide a relevant and contemporary description of the population, only BSW students from selected years participated in this study. Participants had to have received their BSW degrees within the timeframe starting from 1999 thru spring 2002. The rationale for this framing was to allow for sufficient time for consideration of the MSW, and the possibility of completing the MSW. Most MSW students can complete their program requirements within two years on average in the case of full-time attendees. The exceptions to this two year frame include students attending part-time (longer duration), and those participating in programs with an advanced standing option (usually completed in one year). Whichever being the case, the selected timeframe provided sufficient opportunity for students completing the BSW to both consider and at least start the MSW degree.

Population Description

The accessible population and selected sample consisted of 340 BSW graduates from Colorado and Louisiana, and each was mailed a copy of the

survey instrument (Appendix A) that was used in this study. Participants returned 80 surveys (i.e., 24.0% response rate) for data analysis. Table 3.1 shows the frequency distribution by gender of participants. According to Table 3.1, out of the 80 participants, 72 (90.0%) were female and 8 (10.0%) were male.

Table 3.1

Descriptive Statistics by Gender of Participants

Gender	<u>N</u>	Percent
Female	72	90.0
Male	8	10.0
Total	80	100.0

It is noteworthy to mention the sample is representative of both the national BSW population, as well as the junior – senior enrollment for each school specifically with regard to gender. Nationally, the Council on Social Work Education (2001) statistics by gender reveals 87.6% female and 11.7% male population data.

Table 3.2 shows the frequency distribution of participants by ethnicity. The survey instrument asked that participants self-identify their ethnicity based on the following categories: African Americans, Hispanic/Latino American (non-White), White American, and other. There were 21 African American participants (26.3%), 6 Hispanic/Latino American (non-White) participants (7.6%), and 53 White Americans (66.2%).

Table 3.2

Descriptive Statistics by Ethnicity of Participants

Gender	<u>N</u>	Percent
African American	21	26.3
Hispanic/Latino American	6	7.5
White American	53	66.2
Total	80	100

The national data for BSW graduates of CSWE accredited programs in 2001 further indicates the representativeness of this sample. These national data indicate 66.2% of the graduates were Caucasian, which is equal to the 66.2% in the sample. Due to the selection of a HBCU as one of the two participating schools, the African American graduates are slightly overrepresented among the ethnic minority students; i.e., 26.3% compared to 17.8% nationally (CSWE, 2001).

In Table 3.3, the frequency distribution of participants' degree attainment is shown. Since the initial selection criterion was restricted to persons having completed a BSW from an accredited baccalaureate program, all 80 participants (100%) met this criterion. However, two other distinctions can be made based on information regarding participants' education level. First, 7 participants (8.8%) were currently attending graduate school at the time the study was conducted. Additionally, 35 participants (43.8%) had already completed the MSW degree. The remaining 38 participants (47.5%) responded "no" to the "completed graduate degree" question totaling 80 participants. A subsequent grouping

variable was established to combine those 7 students currently attending graduate school with those students who had completed graduate school because the purpose of this study was to examine students' decision to seek a higher level of education. Thus, those attending were combined with those who have graduated.

Table 3.3

Descriptive Statistics by Education Level

Education	<u>N</u>	Percent
Bachelors Degree (BSW)	80	100.0
Currently Attending Grad.	7	8.8
Graduate Degree (MSW)	35	43.8
No Graduate School	38	47.5

As a result of the low participation by African American and Caucasian males, analysis of those group differences had to be abandoned.

Sampling Frame

On the two variables for which there is national data on the characteristics of BSW graduates, the respondents in this sample appear to be a representative microcosm of the larger population. Although the sample size is small (N = 80) and the response rate is low (24.0%), it would be reasonable to cautiously generalize from these results.

The accessible population for this study consists of approximately 340 former graduates from two accredited social work programs. Mailing lists for the selected programs were generated from program records and alumni data on

graduates. Because 340 was a manageable number, the whole accessible population was sampled. Permission allowing access and use of these data was granted by both program administrators, i.e., Dr. Demetria McJulian, Chair of the Department of Social Work at Southern University, Baton Rouge and Dr. Deborah Valentine, Director of the School of Social Work at Colorado State University, Fort Collins.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used for this study (see Appendix A) was developed by the author based on existing quantitative and qualitative study results from the social work and other literature. The substantive questions were guided by Ajzen's (2002) theory as described in Figure 3.1. First, (behavioral beliefs) beliefs about the most likely outcomes of the behavior and the evaluations of these outcomes are addressed. Second, (normative beliefs) beliefs about the normative expectations of others and the motivation to comply with these expectations are also included for consideration. And third, (control beliefs) beliefs about the presence of factors that may serve to promote or serve to hinder performance of the behavior and the perceived power of these factors. The aggregates of the aforementioned beliefs, attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, in concert, lead to the formation of a behavioral intention. Therefore, the theory asserts, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norms, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger the likelihood will be to perform the behavior in question. In this study, the particular issue is the lack of participation of African Americans in

graduate social work education. The behavior, attending or graduating from graduate level study in social work, was investigated through the construction of a questionnaire/survey instrument that was developed and guided by, in part, the three key conceptions presented in Ajzen's theory of planned behavior.

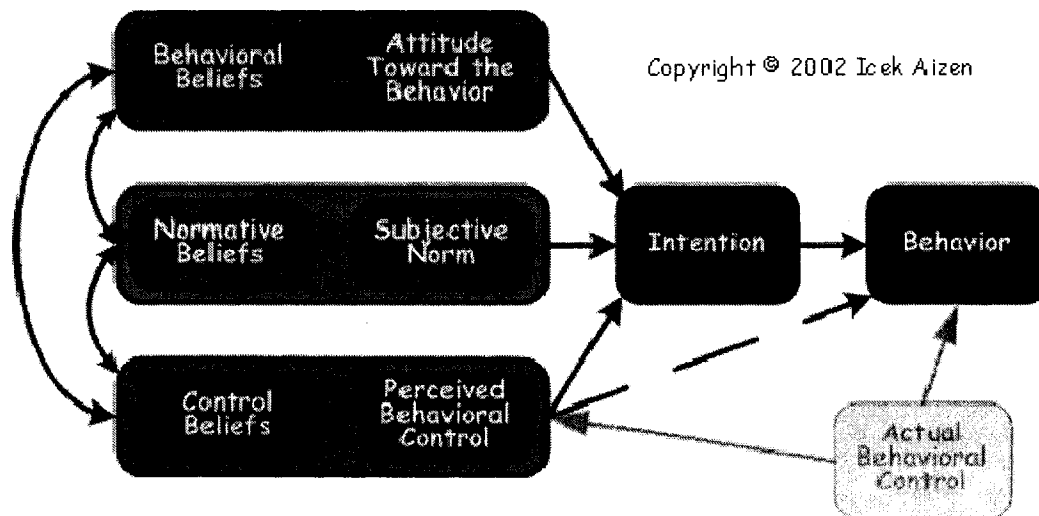


Figure 3.1 Icek Ajzen's (2000) Theory of planned behavior (TpB).

Reliability and Validity

Applying a new instrument brings about some questions of instrument reliability and validity. It was necessary, then, prior to distributing the survey instrument, to address its reliability and validity. The preliminary participant survey was reviewed for content validity by a group of social work students, practitioners, faculty, and other researchers. After all appropriate changes and refinements to the instrument were made, the two primary constructs more clearly emerged; that is: (1) environmental/structural considerations (i.e., program diversity, perceptions of feeling prepared, and perceptions of entrance requirements); and (2) cultural values/orientations (i.e., communal values

orientation, delay of gratification, cultural considerations, perceptions of professional opportunities, and perceptions of strain on personal relationships).

For the aforementioned constructions, with the exception of perception of preparation, perception of entrance requirements, and communal values orientation (for which no alpha was possible because they were based on one item each), Cronbach's alphas were performed to determine internal consistency. The analysis yielded the following: program diversity (survey questions 11, 12, 13) $\alpha = .71$; delay of gratification (24, 43) $\alpha = .75$; cultural considerations (27, 33) $\alpha = .73$; perceived strain on personal relationships (23, 25, 26) $\alpha = .83$; and perceptions of increased opportunities (39, 40, 41) $\alpha = .72$.

The Cronbach's alpha as described in Gliner and Morgan (2000) is a measure of internal consistency, and is the measure most often used to establish inter-item reliability in social science research. An alpha above .80 ($\alpha = .80$) is considered high, greater than .70 medium, and .60 small/minimally acceptable. In the case of the constructs used in this study, the resulting Cronbach's alpha scores all exceed the .70 threshold and thus the instrument has acceptable construct validity.

Figure 3.2 provides a visual framework of the study's primary conceptions and constructs, which includes the independent, intervening, and outcome variables. As well, the figure lists the specific sub-constructs for the primary constructs of environmental/structural considerations, and cultural values orientation. Further, the diagram lists the survey instrument question(s) that correspond with each intervening construct and the sub-constructs (see

Appendix A). Lastly, the figure identifies the research questions represented by the pathways considered in relation to the independent variables (ethnicity and gender), the intervening variables (environmental/ structural considerations and cultural values orientation), and the outcome variable.

Graphical Sketch of Study

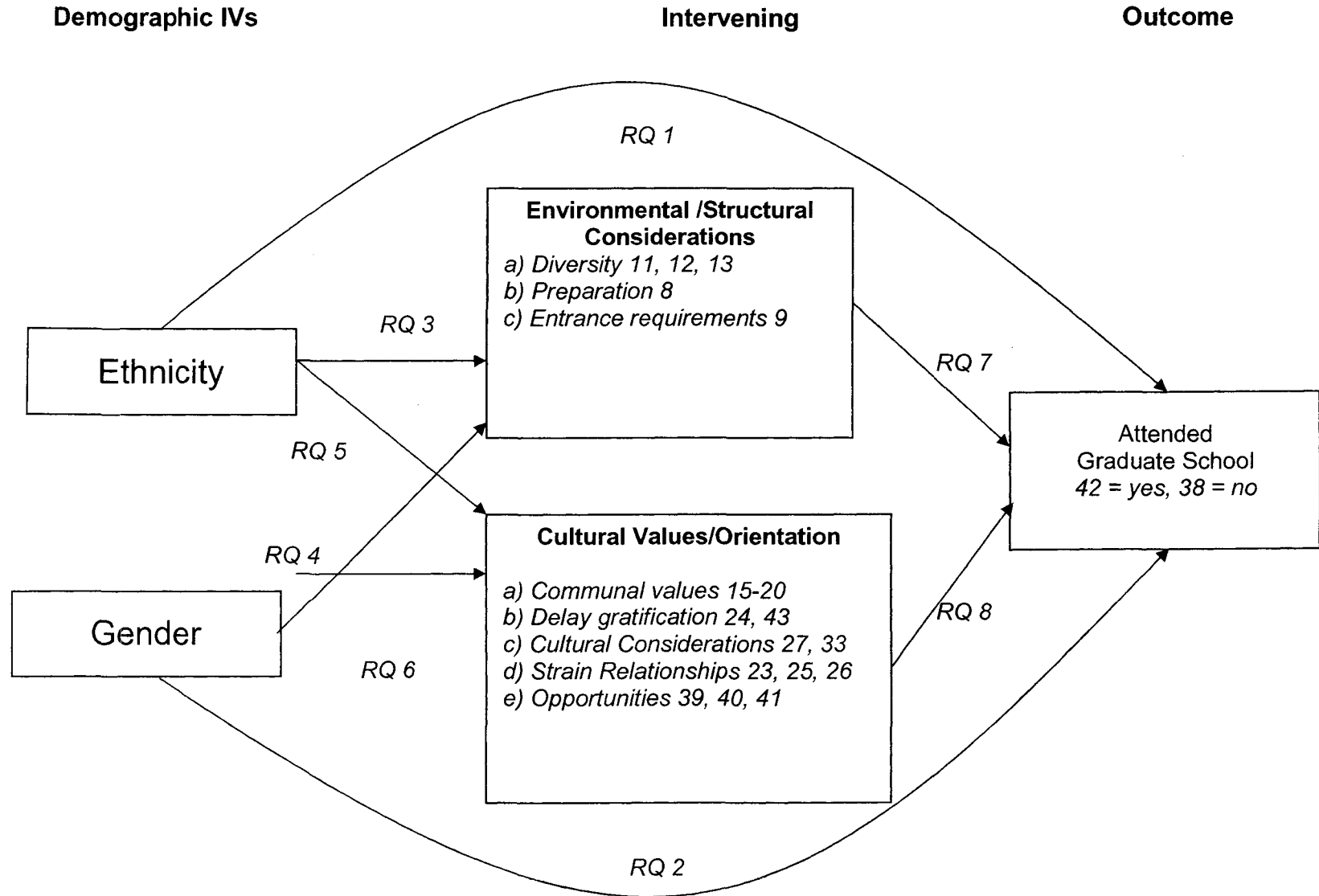


Figure 3.2 Study Constructs. Note: The numbers in Italics refer to the items on the survey, see Appendix A, used to compute the scale score.

Data Collection Procedure

The Colorado State University Human Subjects Review Committee approved survey was mailed out with the approved cover letter attached describing the study's purpose and potential value to social work education (Appendix F). Graduates from the two programs were given three weeks to complete and return the instrument in a pre-addressed stamped envelope by the announced deadline. The research procedure employed three mailings: the initial mailing, a reminder postcard to those not received within a week and a half after the initial mailing, and a follow-up mailing that included a second copy of the instrument and cover letter.

Data Analysis

Several statistical processes of analysis proved useful for this study. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS 12.0). For the purposes for this study, descriptive statistics, independent sample *t* tests, chi-square, and logistic regression were used to investigate the perceived impact of environmental/structural and cultural values/orientations on students' decisions to seek, or not, advanced social work education.

From the findings of this study, social work education program administrators and social service agency administrators can gain some knowledge that would help enhance efforts to increase the number of African American students entering MSW and doctoral social work programs.

By graduating more advanced social workers, the pool of direct practitioners, program developers, faculty of color, and researchers qualified to perform more advanced tasks will be increased and the quality of human services and policies will be enhanced.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

This study was conducted to identify factors impacting Bachelor of Social Work graduates (BSWs) eligible to seek the Masters of Social Work (MSW) degree. Several key conceptions were identified from the extant literature as supportive factors, or as those that serve as impediments to students' pursuit of advanced social work education. Figure 3.2, the graphical sketch of the study presented in Chapter III: Methodology, identifies 10 key concepts that grounded this research study. Two BSW programs were selected for study, one in Colorado and the other in Louisiana. The two primary concepts for this study were: (a) environmental/structural considerations and (b) cultural values/orientations, as both conceptually are thought to have an impact on whether students seek advanced degrees in social work.

First, this chapter describes the descriptive statistics for the outcome/dependent variable. For this study, whether BSW students attended graduate school or not, and the intervening factors impeding or fostering students seeking advanced social work degrees. Second, the chapter focuses on the eight key concepts serving as intervening variables. These variables include conceptual framings within nine primary research questions. Statistics for each question, and where appropriate each sub-question, follows. And third, highlights of the major findings of the research study are discussed in a summary.

Descriptive Information

The accessible population and selected sample consisted of 340 BSW graduates from Colorado and Louisiana, and each was mailed a copy of the survey instrument (Appendix A) that was used in this study. Participants returned surveys (24.0% response rate) for data analysis. Key descriptive statistics regarding the independent variables (i.e., gender and ethnicity) have been reported in Chapter III for the sample. The number of students attending graduate school or having completed graduate school totaled 42 students. There were 38 students in the sample who had never attended graduate school.

Table 4.1 shows the cross-tabulation of ethnicity and education level. From the population of African American participants, 14 (66.7%) students had either attended graduate school or were attending at the time of the study, while 7 (33.3%) percent had not attended graduate school. Among the Caucasian students who participated in the study, 26 (49.1%) of BSW students had either attended graduate school or were currently attending, while 27 (50.9%) had not attended graduate school.

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics by Ethnicity and Education Level

	African American	Caucasians	Totals
Graduate Enrollment			
Attended	14 (66.7)	26 (49.1)	40 (54.1)
Did not attend	7 (33.3)	27 (50.9)	34 (45.9)
N			74 (100.0)
Hispanics and others, not included in this analysis			6 (7.5)

The Pearson Chi-Square results ($\chi^2 = 1.24$, $df = 1$, $p = .171$) for the question: (1) "Is there a difference between African Americans and Caucasians in terms of whether students attend graduate school?" indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between the two categorical variables (ethnicity and education level). Therefore, there is no difference between African Americans and Caucasians in this study in terms of whether students attend graduate school or not?

Table 4.2 shows the cross-tabulation of gender and education level of participants. In this analysis, all 80 participants were included regardless of ethnicity. There were 4 (50.0%) males who had attended graduate school or were currently attending, while 38 (57.5%) females had attended or were currently attending. Four males (50.0%) had not attended graduate school, and 34 (42.5%) females had not attended graduate school.

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics by Gender and Education Level

	Males	Females	Totals
Graduate Enrollment			
Attended	4 (50.0)	38 (52.8)	42 (52.5)
Did not attend	4 (50.0)	34 (47.2)	38 (47.5)
N			80 (100.0)
Missing			0 (0.0)

(All 80 participants included in this analysis)

The resulting chi-square ($\chi^2 = .002$, $df=1$, $p= .881$) indicates there is no statistically significant difference between males and females in terms of whether students attend graduate school or not? Therefore, among the male and female participants in this study there is no difference on research question #2; “Is there a difference between males and females in terms of whether students attend graduate school or not?”

Analyses of Research Questions

Research questions 3-8 center around the two major constructs presented in previous chapters – environmental/structural considerations and cultural values orientation. Both constructs contain several sub-categories that deal more specifically with selected topical areas, which for environmental/structural considerations include three subgroupings. Table 4.3 provides descriptive data on the three environmental/structural considerations: (1) diversity; (2) perceptions of preparation; and (3) perceptions of entrance requirements, as factors impacting student decisions to attend graduate school.

The first, *diversity*, was constructed using the summed score of survey questions 11, 12, and 13. The primary focus of these three questions addressed environmental/structural factors relating to faculty diversity, availability of minority faculty for mentoring, and the program's curriculum focused on working with vulnerable populations. Of the 79 participants responding, 48 percent were neutral, 23 percent disagreed, and 29 percent agreed that such factors were considerations in their decision to attend graduate school.

Table 4.3

Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Environmental/Structural Considerations: Diversity, Perceptions of Preparation, and Entrance Requirements as Factors Affecting the Decision to Attend Graduate School

Environmental/structural Considerations	<i>N</i>	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Diversity	79	23	48	29	3.03	.86
Perceptions of Preparation	80	19	11	70	3.67	1.08
Perceptions of Entrance Requirements	79	19	11	70	3.75	1.13

Note. Scores based on a scale 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

In order to identify between group differences, the independent samples *t* test was performed to determine the following: (1) how diversity considerations for attending graduate school differs for African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students; (2) how feeling prepared to attend graduate school differs for African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students; and (3) how perceived impacts of entrance

requirements on attending graduate school differs for African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students.

Table 4.4 indicates Caucasians had significantly higher responses (Mean= 3.24) than their African American counterparts (Mean= 2.63), although neither group saw this as a strong “pushing” factor. Perhaps, the “pulling” factors (e.g., location of educational programs, educational and employment opportunities, and professional ideologies) described by Le-Doux (1996) for participants in this study were a more influential factor in students’ decisions to attend or not attend graduate school. Thus, in the *diversity* construct, African Americans disagreed that faculty diversity, number of minority faculty, and a program relevant to working with vulnerable populations were key considerations impacting their graduate school intentions. African American students in this study tended to score between disagree, and neutral, with regard to the environmental/structural considerations of diversity, while Caucasians scored between neutral and agree. For environmental/structural *diversity* considerations, $t(71) = -3.03$, $p=.003$ (the number in parentheses is the *df*); and $d=.75$ (indicates a medium to high effect size).

Environmental/structural considerations also included whether feeling prepared to attend graduate school differed for African American BSW students, as compared to Caucasian BSW students. The data shows that there is no statistically significant difference between African American and Caucasian BSW students on feeling prepared to attend graduate school, as a consideration in their decision to attend graduate school.

Third, perceptions of entrance requirements (survey question #9) asked students about the impact entrance requirements had on their decision to apply to graduate school. The data for the third *t* test also addressed, how do perceptions of entrance requirements impact attending graduate school differ as for African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students? There was no significant difference between African American and Caucasian BSW students with regard to perceived impact of entrance requirements.

Table 4.4

Independent Samples t Tests Comparing Ethnicity on Environmental/Structural Considerations: Diversity, Feeling Prepared Academically, and Entrance Requirements as Factors Affecting the Decision to Attend Graduate School

Ethnicity	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Diversity					
African Americans	21	2.63	.918		
Caucasians	52	3.24	.707	-3.03	.003**
Feeling Prepared Academically					
African Americans	21	3.95	1.20		
Caucasians	53	3.75	1.10	.675	.502
Entrance Requirements					
African Americans	21	3.62	1.20		
Caucasians	52	3.77	1.00	-.547	.586

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$,

Note: Scores based on a scale 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

In addition to ethnicity, gender was the second independent variable in the study. Regarding research question #4; “How are the three environmental/structural considerations for attending graduate school different for male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?” Table 4.5 shows the results of the *t* test for gender and environmental/structural considerations – diversity, feeling, prepared, and perceptions of entrance requirements.

Table 4.5

Independent Samples t Test Comparing Gender on Three Environmental/Structural Considerations: Diversity, Feeling Prepared, and Perceptions of Entrance Requirements as Factors Affecting the Decision to Attend Graduate School

Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Diversity					
Males	8	3.19	.449		
Females	71	3.02	.898	.522	.603
Feeling Prepared Academically					
Males	8	3.63	1.19		
Females	71	3.76	1.13	-.328	.774
Entrance Requirements					
Males	8	3.25	1.49		
Females	21	3.72	1.03	-1.16	.249

Note: Scores based on a scale 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

There were no significant differences between male BSW and female BSW students with regard to environmental/structural considerations within any of the three categories – diversity, feeling prepared, and perceptions of entrance requirements. Therefore, the population of males and females participating in the study express some marginal differences, but none large enough to be significant at the .05 level.

Turning next to *cultural values orientation* as a second possible intervening variable construct, there are five key sub-categories selected for consideration. Research question #5 addressed the overarching theme: “What differences in the five cultural values exist between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students? With the exception of the communal values orientation, all other sub-categories for the cultural values orientation construct used the Likert scale (Appendix A). Table 4.6 provides descriptive statistics for the five cultural values orientations.

Table 4.6

Frequencies, Percentages, Means, Standard Deviations for Cultural Values Orientation: Communal values, Delay of Gratification, Cultural Considerations, Perceptions of Straining Personal Relationships, and Perceptions of Professional Opportunities as Factors Affecting the Decision to Attend Graduate School

Cultural Values Orientation	N	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree	M	SD
Communal Values Orientation	79	—	—	—	1.73	.247
Delay of Gratification	76	26	20	54	3.20	1.19
Cultural Considerations	79	22	28	50	3.20	.975
Straining Relationships	80	40	25	35	2.95	1.11
Professional Opportunities	78	4	19	77	3.97	.698

Note. A communal value orientation was an average of six pairs of words scored as communal value = 2 and individualistic value = 1. The Likert scale scores were based on 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

The mean score (1.73) for communal values orientation indicates that overall African American and Caucasian respondents aligned more closely with communal values orientation as opposed to a more individualistic values orientation. Participants were asked to choose between two items (survey questions 15-20) by identifying the one item that most represented their personal values. In order to have a numerical value representative of the summed score that was meaningful, the summed scores for each respondent was divided by the total number of questions in this section. After the summation of respondents'

scores they were then divided by 6, and those with a greater than 1.5 average were determined to be more aligned with communal values orientation in their selections (2= communal values and 1 = individualist values orientation).

For the remaining four categories (delay gratification, cultural considerations, straining relationships, and perceptions of opportunities) participants responded to a Likert scale with a range of 1-5 (1=strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree). More than half of the respondents (54.0%) felt they were able to delay job opportunities while pursuing the graduate degree and that increasing student loan debt was worth it in order to pursue a graduate degree. In addition, many respondents (50.0%) felt that cultural considerations of fit and respect for cultural differences were important considerations in their decision to attend graduate school. Seventy-seven percent of the participants in the study believe that a graduate degree in social work would increase their opportunities with regard to mobility, status among peers, and opportunities for administration.

Again, to identify between group differences, independent samples *t* tests were performed to determine the following: (1) what difference in communal values are there between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students; (2) what difference in delay of gratification is there between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students; (3) what difference in cultural considerations is there between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students; (4) what difference in perceptions of straining personal relationships are there between African American and Caucasian BSW students; and (5) what difference in

perceptions of professional opportunities is there between African American BSW students as compared to Caucasian BSW students?

Table 4.7 shows the independent samples *t* tests for the five sub-groupings for cultural considerations and participant's ethnicity. On four of the five constructs, there was found no significant difference with regard to participant's ethnicity. For communal values orientation, delay of gratification, cultural considerations, and perceptions of professional opportunities, the differences between African Americans and Caucasians were not different enough to produce statistical significance. However, with regard to perceptions of straining personal relationships, the data indicate that one can be quite certain that African Americans and Caucasians are different on this construct $t(72) = -2.26, p = .027$ (where the number in parentheses is the *df*). As the *t* test does not indicate the strength of the relationship it is necessary to calculate the effect size ($d = .60$, indicating a medium to large effect size). African American BSW graduates were significantly more likely to perceive the MSW as *straining personal relationships*, alienating them from family, and would mean abandoning key roles in their families in relation to pursuing the graduate degree in social work, as compared to Caucasian BSW students.

Limb and Organista (2003) indicate in their study comparing Caucasian students and students of color indicate that student motivations for entering an MSW Program are different. This study supports, in part, their findings in relation to the internal motivations of serving the disadvantaged in society. Although this study found no significant difference between the two ethnic groups with regard to communal values orientations, straining personal relationships was key.

Table 4.7

Independent Samples t Test of Ethnicity and Cultural Values Orientation: Communal Values, Delay of Gratification, Cultural Consideration, Perceptions of Straining Personal Relationships, and Perceptions of Professional Opportunities as Factors Affecting the Decision to Attend Graduate School

Ethnicity	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Communal Values					
African Americans	21	1.82	.182	1.52	.133
Caucasians	52	1.72	.266		
Delay of Gratification					
African Americans	20	3.63	1.04	1.71	.092
Caucasians	50	3.11	1.17		
Cultural Considerations					
African Americans	21	3.24	1.11	.149	.882
Caucasians	52	3.20	.859		
Straining Relationships					
African Americans	21	2.54	.986	-2.26	.027*
Caucasians	53	3.17	1.11		
Professional Opportunities					
African Americans	21	4.21	.721	1.46	.150
Caucasians	51	3.97	.625		

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Note. Scores based on a scale 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. For the communal values construct 1 = a more individualist value orientation and 2 = a more communal values orientation.

Next, the five cultural values were addressed using the second independent variable –gender. Question #6 addressed the following: (1) what difference in communal values is there between male BSW and female BSW students? (2) What difference in delay of gratification is there between male BSW and female BSW students? (3) What difference in cultural considerations is there between male BSW students as compared to female BSW students? (4) What difference in perceptions of straining personal relationships are there between male BSW students as compared to female BSW students? And (5) What difference in perceptions of professional opportunities is there between male BSW students as compared to female BSW students?

Among these five cultural values orientations and between the two groups (males and females) the data from the independent samples *t* tests indicate there were no significant differences. Therefore, males and females participating in this study were similar in their responses to communal values, delay of gratification, cultural considerations, perceptions of professional opportunities, and perceptions of straining personal relationships survey questions. Table 4.8 shows these data, to include frequencies, means, standard deviations, *t*, and *p* values. Clearly, both BSW males and females recognize the increased professional opportunities associated with obtaining the MSW degree. While Limb and Organista (2003) suggest that MSW students of color express views more in line with social work's traditional values, the current study also reveals that BSW males and females agree on the opportunities the MSW can provide personally and professionally.

Table 4.8

Independent Samples t Test of Gender and Cultural Values Orientation: Communal Values, Delay of Gratification, Cultural Consideration, Perceptions of Straining Personal Relationships, and Perceptions of Professional Opportunities as Factors Affecting the Decision to Attend Graduate School

Gender	N	M	SD	t	p
Communal Values					
Males	8	1.79	.214		
Females	71	1.73	.251	.719	.475
Delay of Gratification					
Males	7	3.64	1.14		
Females	69	3.15	1.19	1.04	.301
Cultural Considerations					
Males	8	3.69	.998		
Females	71	3.14	.964	.151	.134
Straining Relationships					
Males	8	2.35	.953		
Females	72	3.01	1.11	-1.61	.112
Professional Opportunities					
Males	8	4.21	.796		
Females	70	3.94	.688	1.03	.307

Note: Scores based on a scale 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Questions #7 and #8 addressed whether the two intervening variables of environmental/structural considerations and cultural values orientations, and whether BSW students attended graduate school? These two questions address the outcome variable (dependent variable) for the study- whether BSW students attend graduate school- and what factors, if any, might impact this outcome.

Question # 7 asked: Is there a relationship between the three environmental/structural considerations and whether BSW students attend graduate school or not? Three independent samples *t* tests were conducted to determine if a relationship existed between diversity considerations and whether students attend graduate school, between feeling prepared and whether students attend, and between perceptions of entrance requirements and whether BSW students attend graduate school? Table 4.9 shows that diversity and perceptions of entrance requirements were not significant. However, the *t* was significant for perceptions of feeling prepared $t(68.5)=4.70, p=.001$ (where the number in parentheses is the *df*). Because the *t* is statistically significant, one can be very certain that BSW students who had high perceptions of feeling prepared were much more likely to attend graduate school than those BSW graduates who had perceptions of feelings less prepared to attend ($d=1.08$, very large effect size according to Cohen, 1988).

Table 4.9

Independent Samples t Test of Graduate Enrollment and Environmental/Structural Considerations: Diversity, Feeling Prepared, and Entrance Requirements as Factors Affecting the Decision to Attend Graduate School

Graduate Enrollment	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Diversity					
Graduate School	41	3.11	.848		
No Graduate School	38	2.96	.883	.745	.458
Feeling Prepared Academically					
Graduate School	42	4.26	.857		
No Graduate School	38	3.18	1.14	4.75	.001***
Entrance Requirements					
Graduate School	42	3.86	1.14		
No Graduate School	37	3.46	.989	1.65	.104

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Note. Scores based on a scale 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Considering research question #8; "Is there a relationship between the five cultural values and whether students attend graduate school?" Five *t* tests were conducted to determine between group relationships. Table 4.10 shows the results of the five sub-groupings to include frequencies, means, standard deviations, and the *t* and *p* values.

Table 4.10

Independent Samples t Test of Graduate Enrollment and Cultural Values Orientation: Communal Values, Delay of Gratification, Cultural Consideration, Perceptions of Straining Personal Relationships, and Perceptions of Professional Opportunities as Factors Affecting the Decision to Attend Graduate School

Graduate Enrollment	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Communal Values					
Graduate School	41	1.75	.242		
No Graduate School	38	1.71	.253	.745	.458
Delay of Gratification					
Graduate School	39	3.91	.751		
No Graduate School	37	2.45	1.104	6.79	.001***
Cultural Considerations					
Graduate School	41	3.43	.932		
No Graduate School	38	2.95	.971	2.24	.028*
Straining Relationships					
Graduate School	42	2.86	1.11		
No Graduate School	38	3.04	1.12	-.731	.467
Professional Opportunities					
Graduate School	41	4.09	.641		
No Graduate School	37	3.84	.744	1.58	.119

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Note: Scores based on a scale 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

The resulting statistical analysis revealed two statistically significant relationships among the five variables within the cultural values orientations construct. Students who were able to delay gratification are significantly more likely to go to a MSW program (graduate school) than those who are not $t(63.04)=6.73, p=.001 (d = .62, \text{medium to large effect size according to Cohen, 1988})$. In addition, BSW graduates who attend graduate school say that “cultural considerations” are more important than those BSW graduates who do not attend graduate school $t(77)=2.24, p= .028 (d = .51, \text{indicating a medium effect size according to Cohen})$. For the remaining cultural values orientations sub-groupings – communal values, personal relationships, and increased opportunities there was no statistically significant difference.

It is, however, important to note that for the construct of perceptions of professional opportunities there was no difference between BSW graduates who went and those who did not attend graduate and that both means are relatively high. That is to say, that both groups, those attending and those not attending, perceive that the MSW degree would increase professional opportunities.

Lastly question # 9 asked: What is the best combination of ethnicity, gender, environmental/structural and cultural values factors that predicts whether students attend graduate school or not? The logistic regression statistic was used to assist in determining whether there is a combination of independent and intervening variables that predicts whether BSW students attend graduate school, or not? Thus, the “logistic regression is helpful when you want to predict a categorical variable from a set of predictor variables” (Leech, Barrett, &

Morgan, 2005, p. 109). The results of the logistic regression are summarized in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11

Graduate School Participation for BSW Students Associated With Ethnicity, Gender, Environmental/Structural Considerations, and Cultural Values Orientations as Factors Affecting the Decision to Attend Graduate School

	Odds Ratio	(95% CI)	<i>p</i>
Gender	0.9	(.081-11.7)	.983
Ethnicity	2.0	(.749-5.4)	.166
Diversity	1.6	(.436-5.5)	.498
Feeling prepared academically	0.3	(.120-.74)	.009*
Perceptions of entrance requirements	1.1	(.452-2.5)	.874
Communal values orientation	5.3	(.283-98.3)	.265
Delay of gratification	0.1	(.045-.46)	.001*
Cultural considerations	0.3	(.09-101)	.064
Straining personal relationships	0.8	(.366-1.8)	.591
Opportunities for professional growth	2.8	(.646-11.8)	.170

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

When all ten predictors were considered together, we can predict those who went to graduate school, as well as those who did not attend from the presenting logistic regression data $X^2 = 46.52$ $df = 10$, $N = 68$, $p < .001$. Table 4.11 presents the odds ratios, which suggest that the odds of estimating correctly who attends graduate school and who will not. The classification table indicated that 86% of those who attended graduate school are predicted correctly, and 84% of those who did not attend graduate school are predicted correctly. Of the

10 variables, only two are significant. They are feeling prepared and willing to delay gratification. Thus, a combination of feeling prepared and being able to delay gratification provides a good prediction of whether or not a BSW student will attend graduate school. Note that neither gender nor ethnicity contribute significantly to this prediction.

Summary

To summarize, Figure 4.1 illustrates the 4 significant relationships found in this study. First, feeling prepared academically was found to have a very strong relationship with whether BSW graduates went on to graduate school or not. Second, delay of gratification and cultural considerations also had a significant association with whether BSW graduates decided to attend graduate school or not. Lastly, regarding differences between the two ethnic groups selected for this study (African Americans and Caucasians) the only statistically significant variable was in relation to straining personal relationships. Perhaps with more African American participants the resultant significance might be different.

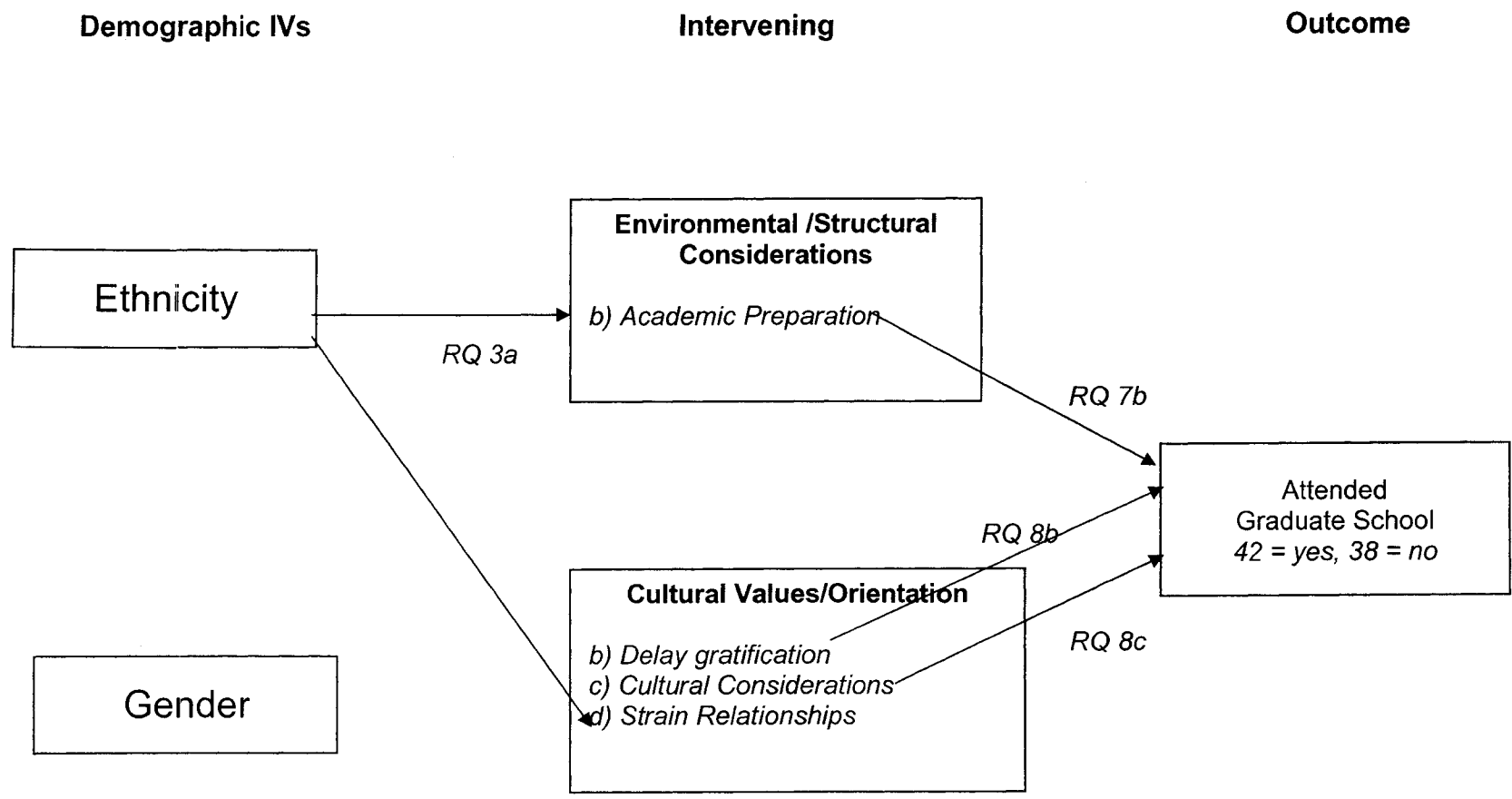


Figure 4.1 Study Construct and Statistically Significant Variables

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Specifically, this chapter summarizes and discusses the findings for this study of factors influencing the progression of students from the bachelor's (BSW) to the master's (MSW) level of social work education. The two primary constructs for the study were environmental/structural considerations, and cultural values/orientations. This research study sought to investigate the perceived degree to which these two constructs (and their subsequent factors) impact students' decisions to seek advanced social work education. Additionally, this research study sought to determine whether differences exist between African American and Caucasian BSW participants, and to identify differences between male and female BSW participants.

Summary of the Literature

The review of the related literature for this study focused on the key concepts and factors that influence students' decisions to seek advanced credentials in the field of social work. More specifically, the literature review addressed historical trends of African American participation, first in higher education in general and then, in particular, in graduate social work education. In addition, the literature review addressed environmental/structural considerations and cultural values/orientations as key constructs that impact student decisions to seek advanced social work degrees.

After initially focusing on the two primary constructs, the literature review addressed gender role expectations and their impact on male and female

students seeking graduate degrees in social work. Much like in educational settings (K-12 teachers), the social work profession has long been dominated by females. Therefore, it is necessary to look critically at gender differences and the implications of this characteristic on student decisions to attend graduate school.

Social work, indeed, has struggled to diversify among its more advanced credentialed professionals, and has only slightly improved African American participation (CSWE, 2004). Consistently, the social work profession has sought greater diversity among its worker pool, as the profession recognizes America's growing diversity (Chunn, Duston, & Ross-Sheriff, 1983; Council on Social Work Education, 1984; Jackson, 1966). Strategically, social work has thought about how to attract greater numbers of minority group members into MSW and doctoral programs (Berger, 1989). After identifying a myriad of potential impacts from the literature, recurring themes emerged that fit well into the two primary constructs of environmental/structural factors and cultural values/orientations.

Each of these constructs bears upon students' graduate degree intentions. The several factors considered consisted of financial support, diminishing public funding of public colleges and universities, rising tuition, decreased need-based financial assistance, career commitment, unrewarding jobs, employment opportunities, and structural discrimination (Valentine, 2004; Belcastro & Koeske, 1996; Le-Doux, 1996). Also, interpersonal factors such as personality characteristics, psychosocial development, cognition, problem-solving skills, and emotional temperament were also considerations (Morales & Sheafor, 2004).

In spite of many recruitment and retention efforts, social work programs and other programs outside of social work still find increasing minority

participation challenging. In theory, the social work profession's hope is that increased minority participation at the advanced social work levels will aid in helping to meet the profession's commitment to diversity, equality, and social justice.

Summary of the Methodology

Participants in this study had completed the BSW degree from two selected Council on Social Work Education accredited programs – one predominantly African American, the other predominantly Caucasian. The BSW participants were mailed the survey instrument and encouraged to voluntarily complete and return the survey for inclusion with other participant data. In addition, this chapter offers suggestions for social work schools, departments and programs, and their administrators and faculty, in an effort to foster greater participation of African American BSW students in graduate social work education. The final two sections of this chapter introduce the limitations of the study and offer recommendations and implications for future research as they relate to the two primary constructs and their subsequent concepts.

This study utilized a survey research design to investigate the perceived degree to which environmental/structural, also cultural values/orientation factors impact students' decisions to seek advanced social work education to investigate differences that may exist between African American and Caucasian BSW participants; and to identify variations between genders. The survey design was employed in order to generalize about the larger theoretical population from the sample.

The selected sample in this study consisted of 340 BSW graduates from two states – Colorado and Louisiana. Each participant was mailed a copy of the instrument complete with a cover letter explaining the nature of the research study, the potential benefit, voluntary participation, and issues of confidentiality. The survey instrument (Appendix A) was mailed to participants in early December, 2004. The respondents to this survey consisted of 80 (24% response rate) BSW graduates from the two CSWE accredited social work programs.

The 58-item survey instrument was organized into three sections, which included Environmental/Structural Considerations, Cultural Values/Orientations, and Demographic Information. Primarily, the survey utilized Likert scales that allowed participants to select the most appropriate response to a set of statements.

Several analyses were conducted within this research study using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Chi-square analyses, independent samples *t* tests, cross-tabulations, and logistic regression were used to discover whether there were differences between African American and Caucasian BSW students, and male and female BSW students and their degree seeking intentions. By these analyses, it was possible to determine what, if any, statistically significant differences exist based on both independent variables (ethnicity and gender), with regard to the outcome variable (attended graduate school).

Major Findings

The results of this study have confirmed and revealed several important factors that help bring greater clarity to recent BSW graduates' perceptions of

environmental/structural considerations. Because there were no statistically significant differences between genders, no major findings related to gender are reported in this section.

However, African American students differed significantly ($p=.003$) from Caucasian students with regard to the *diversity* construct. Table 4.4 indicates Caucasians had significantly higher responses (Mean= 3.24) than their African American counterparts (Mean= 2.63). Thus, in the *diversity* construct, African Americans were more likely to disagree that faculty diversity, number of minority faculty, and a program relevant to working with vulnerable populations were key considerations impacting their graduate school intentions. African American students in this study tended to score between disagree and neutral, with regard to the environmental/structural considerations of diversity, while Caucasians scored between neutral and agree. Therefore, from this data one can conclude that Caucasian BSW students tend to pay closer attention to faculty diversity, number of minority faculty, and program relevancy in working with vulnerable populations. However, it is necessary to be cautious in drawing conclusions that African Americans do not pay close attention to these considerations. Rather, it may be more accurate to conclude that for African Americans participating in this study, the *diversity* construct was thought to be less important in selecting a graduate school.

In addition, but not so surprisingly, students who attended graduate school were significantly ($p=.001$) different from those who did not attend graduate school regarding the environmental/structural consideration of feeling academically prepared. From the data in Table 4.9, one can be very certain that

BSW students who had high perceptions of feeling prepared were much more likely to attend graduate school than those BSW graduates who had perceptions of feeling less prepared to attend. Thus, it is vital to understand better those characteristics that students identify as aiding in their feeling academically prepared to attend, while simultaneously working to create ways for students to know if they are adequately prepared for graduate social work education. This is important to improve the participation of all students in social work graduate level education, but particularly important in increasing the participation of African American students in their pursuit of these advanced degrees in social work.

Turning to the key findings among the cultural values/orientation construct, several were found to be significant. First, African Americans differed significantly ($p=.027$) from Caucasians with regard to straining personal relationships. For African Americans and “perceptions of straining personal relationships,” the data indicate that one can be quite certain that African Americans and Caucasians are different on this construct. As compared to Caucasians BSW students, African American BSW graduates significantly disagree that *straining relationships* is worth the pay-off of pursuing the graduate degree in social work.

Second, delay of gratification and cultural considerations were also key findings among the factors related to the cultural values/orientation construct. The statistical analysis revealed that a statistically significant difference exists between students who went to graduate school and those who did not attend for both delay of gratification and cultural considerations. Students who were able to delay gratification are significantly more likely to go to a MSW program (graduate

school) than those who are not ($p = .001$). In addition, BSW graduates who attended graduate school said that “cultural considerations” of cultural fit and respect for cultural differences are more important than those BSW graduates who do not attend graduate school ($p = .028$).

It is, however, important to note that for the construct of perceptions of professional opportunities there was no difference between BSW graduates who went and those who did not attend graduate school. That is to say that both groups, those attending and those not attending, perceived that the MSW degree would increase professional opportunities. Therefore, the perception that the MSW degree will provide increased opportunities alone is not sufficient to ensure BSW graduates will seek the MSW degree.

Discussion

In relation to the *diversity* construct, African Americans disagreed that faculty diversity, number of minority faculty, and a program relevant to working with vulnerable populations were key considerations impacting their graduate school intentions. African American students in this study tended to score between disagree and neutral with regard to the environmental/structural considerations of diversity, while Caucasians scored between neutral and agree. What is not clear, however, from these data is the direction of the influence of the *diversity* construct. Once revealed (faculty diversity, etc.), do Caucasian BSW students seek MSW degrees from social work programs with greater diversity, or do they seek schools that may reflect more their individual ethnic backgrounds. The same holds true for African American BSW students with regard to this construct. In fact, these data may indicate that African American BSW students

are more likely to attend social work programs and schools that have less diversity (fewer diverse faculty members) than their Caucasian counterparts, which may be helpful in recruitment efforts. Or, these findings could mean that they want to attend an all or almost all Black program.

In addition, the findings of this study cast new light on the environmental/structural considerations of feeling academically prepared. Though little can be found in the literature with regard to the specific characteristics BSW students identify as markers of their feeling prepared, one can reasonably assume that grades, test scores, and GRE scores may play a role in students' perceptions of academic preparation. Therefore, students who feel they can compete academically are more likely to continue their educational and professional development. The more confident and positive they are about their undergraduate social work education and training experiences, the greater the likelihood BSW students will pursue more advanced educational opportunities in social work.

Next, the social work literature is rife with articles and writings regarding the need to be more culturally sensitive and aware in practice settings, so that the profession might serve its diverse clientele in more effective ways. For the social work agency administrators and program directors, and the directors and department heads of social work education programs, culturally informed choices surrounding recruitment and retention of minority students can be important. The African Americans in this study felt that straining personal relationships to pursue the MSW degree was less worth the pay-off than their Caucasian counterparts. Therefore, consideration should be given to developing innovative ways of

delivering graduate education and training that allow students to maintain their personal relationship ties, or at least decreases the perceived strain on them.

A common theme within the literature that has a profound impact on students going to college, and particularly pursuing advanced degrees, is that of costs. Ballooning tuition costs, according to the literature, has moved a college degree beyond the reach of many students. Coupled with out-of-state fees, other financial obligations such as family responsibilities and repayment of undergraduate student loans make it more difficult to pursue graduate level education. Consequently, it is not surprising that delay of gratification becomes an influential factor for consideration. As this study has shown, students who were able to delay getting a job after completing the undergraduate degree, those with financial means to defray, at least in part, some of the costs, and those who thought the long-term pay-off of the MSW was worth it, are more likely to go on for the MSW degree.

Lastly, BSW students who went to graduate school said that cultural considerations were more important than those who did not attend. The construct of cultural considerations asked participants about the importance of “cultural fit” and “respect for cultural difference” as key factors in their decision to attend graduate school. That is to say, BSW students who go on to graduate school are more willing to assume the schools will be culturally accepting and that graduate programs will be respectful in meeting their cultural expectations. In essence, this may be a major consideration given the considerable investments of time and money for graduate education, and the perceived requirements of a successful outcome (completing graduate school).

Conclusions

The purposes of this research study were two-fold. First, this study sought to investigate the perceived degree to which environmental/structural factors and cultural values/orientations seems to impact students' decisions to seek advanced social work education. Second, this study sought to investigate differences between African Americans and Caucasians, and male and female BSW graduates. The literature review revealed that environmental/structural factors and cultural values/orientations impact students' decisions to seek graduate level education and training. Respondents in this study completed a 58-question survey instrument (Appendix A) that was divided into three parts. Although there were no significant differences found in these data between male and female BSW graduates the analysis concluded that several statistically significant differences exist between African American and Caucasian participants, and between participants who attend graduate school and those who did not.

In conclusion, participants in this study have shed light on key environmental/structural considerations and key cultural values/orientations that are important in students' graduate school decisions. Social work administrators should be aware of these factors and should seek to offset their negative effects on students' graduate degree intentions.

Limitations

During the course of conducting this study, several limitations were discovered that the reader should be aware of as follow-up research studies are considered and formulated. These limitations should serve as a frame of

reference for future researchers' consideration in their design constructs and methodological approach to additional investigations.

The results of this study should not be generalized to ethnic minority groups beyond African Americans. Though it is true that other ethnic minority groups face many of the same challenges in America with regard to higher education, and in particular to obtaining advanced social work degrees, to do so would not be advisable with regard to this study's data. Hence, the results of this study might have yielded considerably different results for persons not of African American or Caucasian ethnic backgrounds.

The study may also be limited by the number of participants. Even though the 80 participants in this study clearly reflect the current demographic make up of the larger theoretical population to which it might be generalized, the sample, especially of males, remains small. Furthermore, the numbers of African Americans (21 participants) is considerably less than was expected. However, it was still representative of the percentage of African Americans from the theoretical population.

In addition, consideration should be given to the reality that both schools, though in different regions of the country (southern and mountain regions), were public land-grant institutions. Therefore, generalizing toward BSW students who graduate from private institutions may not be advisable, as such institutions were not considered in the scope of this study.

Recommendations

The data presented in this study represents social work programs at one public land-grant institution from Colorado and one from Louisiana. The study

revealed several significant findings and thus the synthesis of these results are summarized and are stated here as recommendations for colleges, universities, social work program administrators, and social service agency administrators interested in furthering efforts to increase African American participation among advanced credentialed social workers.

First, social work leaders should consider the impacts of the environmental/structural consideration of *preparation*, and seek to ensure that BSW students are supported in their preparation and their ability to perceive themselves as academically prepared for graduate-level study. Though this study does not identify the specific characteristics BSW students identify as aiding in their feeling prepared, the data clearly indicates that those who feel prepared are significantly more likely to move toward graduate level education.

Second, cultural values/orientations as presented in this study yielded significant findings with regard to delay of gratification, cultural considerations, and straining personal relationships. Thus, considerations should be given to these key findings as they relate to graduate degree seeking intentions of BSW graduates.

With regard to cultural considerations, programs should ensure that the quality of the MSW program is well-articulated, but also that media concerning MSW programs (e.g., flyers, brochures, websites, etc.) reflect the program's respect for cultural differences in accurate and relevant ways. That is to say that campus student-support organizations, the campus community and climate, and the community-at-large found at and around the university may bear more on student choices than does program diversity alone.

Lastly, programs should consider alternative and innovative ways of reaching BSW graduates who find straining personal relationships and pursuing the MSW degree challenging. For example, more and more institutions are designing programs that offer alternatives to resident instruction (on-campus instruction) and are utilizing more online, night, and weekend classes to meet these challenges. Similar efforts in social work could offset the perception of straining personal relationships by attending distant graduate programs.

Further research should be conducted to examine differences between African American males and African American females on their participation in graduate social work education. In addition, future research efforts should consider investigating the indices which might influence African American students' feelings of being prepared academically for MSW level education and training (e.g., GPA, GRE scores, positive practice experiences, etc.).

Also, though not a significant finding in this study, perhaps due to the very small male sample, male BSW graduates seemed somewhat more likely than female BSW graduates to disagree that straining personal relationships was worth obtaining the MSW degree. Greater understanding and clarity through additional research may reveal more detail as to the rationale behind this phenomenon and to compare male social workers with males in other professions. That is to raise the question, "Are males less inclined to strain relationships for a graduate degree in a female dominated profession, and more likely to strain them for an advanced degree say in medical or legal professions?"

Further studies might also consider looking at the experiences and perceptions of ethnic groups that fell outside the scope of this research study.

For example, studies might be undertaken that investigate the participation of Asian, Hispanic, and Native American students and those factors impacting their MSW degree seeking intentions in social work. Limb and Organista (2003) in their study help to advance the clarity with which we see ethnic group differences among entering MSW students and their views on the profession's traditional mission, career motivations, and practice preferences. However, the need to understand environmental/structural and cultural/values orientations impact students' decisions to pursue the advanced degree in social work are also important. Through these two lenses (environmental/structural and culture/values) we can begin to better understand the societal scripts that reinforce gender and cultural scripts that are both external and internal. That is to say, better understanding the influences of the environment and that of culture and cultural scripts, helps in overcoming barriers and obstacles that might retard the full participation outgroup members. Likewise, this understanding helps to identify those factors that serve as supports and motivators, that they might be solidified and strengthened.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

School of Social Work
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1586
(970) 491-6612
FAX: (970) 491-7280
www.colostate.edu/Depts/SocWork

October 2004

Dear Alumni Social Workers:

Currently information is being gathered on factors impacting BSW students eligible to seek advanced (graduate level) social work education. The research titled *Factors impacting African Americans seeking advanced social work education*, explores students' attitudes and actions with regard to graduate school. Completing this questionnaire will provide valuable information to assist educators to better understand students' perceptions and behaviors, which in turn could strengthen recruitment and retention strategies, and institutional and agency policies regarding higher education attainment. The survey instrument is divided into three primary sections. The sole criterion for participation in this study is that you have graduated from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited baccalaureate program between May 1999 and May 2002.

First, please understand that your participation is ***strictly voluntary***. It is my intention to keep your individual responses and information confidential. Though your participation is voluntary, you may chose to decline participation in the study, or, return the survey only partially completed. After all the information has been collected and the data compiled, a full report with no identifiers will be presented to your institution for their review. Again, your ***participation is voluntary and confidential***, and your name should not be included on this survey. The first page of the survey has a tracking number that is only being used to track the response rate and will not be used to identify participants in the reporting or this research.

No more than 20-30 minutes is required to respond to the questionnaire. Upon completing the survey, please return it in the self-addressed stamped envelope that has been provided for you labeled *Malcolm E. Scott, 127 Education, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1586*.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safe guards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Celia Walker, Director of Regulatory Compliance, at 970-491-1553. I anticipate the findings of this study being compiled and presented in a social work professional journal. If you would like summary information about the study, or if you have any questions concerning this study, please contact Malcolm E. Scott at 970- 491-5818 or via email mmscott@cahs.colostat.edu.

Sincerely,

Malcolm E. Scott, MSW
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Social Work
Colorado State University

Brian Cobb, Ph.D., Committee Chair
School of Education
Colorado State University

in choosing a social work graduate school to attend.						
12. My attending a social work graduate school <u>will depend/was dependent</u> on the number of minority faculty available to be mentors.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
13. Programs relevant to working with vulnerable populations <u>will be/was</u> a consideration in my graduate school intentions.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA

PART II This section of the survey instrument is designed to investigate participant's perceptions of cultural factors that may impact degree seeking intentions. Such factors might include the opportunity to give back to community, greater job flexibility/mobility, individual goals, etc).

14. Please select the one most important personal factor impacting/that impacted your graduate school aspirations in social work.

- Economic Reward
- Opportunity to Work in Community
- Social Status
- Professional Growth/Development
- Social Justice
- Opportunity for Advancement
- Administrative Job Opportunity
- Other

Please choose the one value (from each of the items numbered 15-20) that most identifies with your personal values and beliefs.

15. Self-determination or Ascription (assigning value based on inborn traits)
16. Independence or Collective Work & Responsibility
17. Collective Economics or Work
18. Individualism or Unity
19. Mobility or Purpose
20. Status or Creativity

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the response that most closely reflects your personal views, perceptions, and opinions right now. The ranking labels are identified below:

SD=Strongly Disagree D=Disagree N=Neutral A=Agree SA=Strongly Agree

Perceived Impact of Cultural Scripts (PICS) and Graduate School Intentions

21. A graduate degree in social work is highly regarded in my community.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
22. The economic gains of a MSW degree are worth the additional years of schooling.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
23. Attending graduate school will be/is a strain on my personal relationships.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA

24. I am able to delay job opportunities now, while pursuing a graduate degree.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
25. Alienation from family while attending school will be difficult/or is difficult.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
26. Attending graduate school would mean abandoning key roles in my family.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
27. "Cultural fit" would be/or is an important factor in choosing a graduate school to attend.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
28. The opportunity to work to better my community is <u>not</u> important in my attending graduate school.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
29. Because of my race/ethnicity, people sometimes stereotype me as not able to compete academically.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
30. Social work is a female oriented job and males would fare better in other professions.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
31. Sometimes I feel there is little expectation for my attending graduate school.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
32. Attending graduate school out of state would be difficult given my current family situation.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
33. Respect for cultural differences would be a key factor in my decision to attend a graduate school.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
34. Faith is important in making key educational decisions.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
35. Caring for people is vitally important to being a good social worker.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
36. It <u>is/was</u> a family expectation that I attend graduate school after completing the baccalaureate degree.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
37. The people in my life whose opinions I value <u>may/do</u> disapprove of my attending graduate school.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
38. Given my financial situation, I <u>can/could</u> afford to go to graduate school without outside assistance.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
39. Attending graduate school <u>will/did</u> increase my opportunities for an administrative level position.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
40. A graduate degree <u>will/did</u> give me greater influence among my peers in social work.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA

41. Earning a graduate degree <u>will/did</u> give me greater mobility in relocating.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
42. My current work situation <u>will/did</u> make it easy to attend graduate school.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
43. Increasing my student loan debt <u>is/was</u> worth it in order for me to get a graduate degree.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
44. Attending graduate school is outside the norm for males in my community.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA
45. I personally do not think of social work as the best job for males.	SA	A	N	D	SD	NA

PART III

46. Highest degree attained as August 1 2004:

____ BSW Degree

____ MSW Degree

____ Ph.D./DSW Degree

47. Have you taken the GRE: ____ YES ____ NO

48. Graduate school you are thinking of attending, you are currently attending, or have attended: _____

(Please Specify)

49. If you are attending or have already attended graduate school what if any assistance did you receive: (Please be specific, e.g. grants, fellowships, scholarships, teaching assistantships, research, etc.)

50. Mother's Education: (choose only one)

- ____ Some High School
- ____ Completed High School
- ____ Some College
- ____ Completed College
- ____ Attended Graduate School
- ____ Complete Graduate School (Masters Level)
- ____ Some Ph.D. or Professional Degree Training
- ____ Completed Ph.D. or Professional Degree

Father's Education: (choose only one)

51. Household estimated yearly income: (Voluntary)

What do you expect to be your yearly income for 2004 rounded to the nearest \$5,000.00?
\$ _____ .00

52. Marital Status: _____ Single _____ Married _____ Divorced _____ Widowed
_____ Partnered

53. Family Status:

_____ Living alone, no children
_____ Living alone one or more children
_____ Living with spouse or partner, no children
_____ Living with spouse one or more children

Other _____
(Please specify)

54. Number of biological children if any _____

55. Gender: _____ Male _____ female

56. Is there more than one language spoken at home: _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, which languages: _____

57. Currently Work as a social worker: _____ Yes _____ No

58. Ethnicity: _____ African American _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
_____ Hispanic/Latino (Non-White) _____ Native American
_____ White American _____ Multi-Racial
_____ Other (Specify) _____

If there are any additional thoughts you would like to share or add, please do so in the space provided below.

Thank you for your participation in this survey research. Please take a few moments to review your responses for completeness before returning the survey in the return envelope and returning it to me. Your participation is greatly appreciated and thanks again for your time and support regarding this important study.

Malcolm E. Scott, MSW (Doctoral Candidate)

APPENDIX B
APPROVAL TO CONDUCT HUMAN RESEARCH

MEMORANDUM

TO: Brian Cobb, School of Education, 1588
FROM: Janell A. Meldrem, Administrator
Human Research Committee

SUBJECT: **PROJECT APPROVAL**

Title: Factors Impacting African American students Seeking Advanced Social
Work Education

Protocol No.: 04-277H

Funding Agency: N/A

DATE: November 8, 2004

The above-referenced project was approved by the Human Research Committee on October 31, 2004 for the period October 31, 2004 to October 4, 2005. Because of the nature of this research, it will not be necessary to obtain a signed consent form. However, all subjects must receive a copy of the approved cover letter printed on department letterhead. The requirement of documentation of a consent form is waived under § __.117(c)(2). **Approval is for 340 participants.**

A status report of this project will be required within a 12-month period from the date of approval. Renewal is the Principal Investigator's responsibility, but as a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder approximately two months before the protocol expires. The Principal Investigator will report on the numbers of subjects who have participated this year and project-to-date, about problems encountered, and provide a verifying copy of the consent form or cover letter used. The necessary form (H-101) is available from the Regulatory Compliance web page (see below). Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.

It is the responsibility of the investigator to immediately inform the Committee of any serious complications, unexpected risks, or injuries resulting from this research. It is also the investigator's responsibility to notify the Committee of any changes in experimental design, participant population, or consent procedures or documents. This can be done with a memo which completely describes the changes and their consequences (new consent form or cover letter, or altered survey instrument, for example). Students serving as Co-Principal Investigators may not alter projects without first obtaining PI approval. The PI is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project.

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's OHRP Federal Wide Assurance 00000647 issued July 1, 2004. If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.

Please direct any questions about the Committee's action on this project to me for routing to the Committee. Additional information is available from the Regulatory Compliance web site at <http://www.research.colostate.edu/rcoweb/>.

Attachment
cc: Malcolm Scott

APPENDIX C
LETTERS TO PARTICIPATING PROGRAMS

August 20, 2004

Director, Colorado State University
School of Social Work
127 Education Building
Fort Collins, CO 80523

School of Social Work
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1586
(970) 491-6612
FAX: (970) 491-7280
www.colostate.edu/Depts/SocWork

Dear Dr. Valentine

My name is Malcolm E. Scott and I am a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University. My dissertation topic is "Factors Impacting African Americans Seeking Advanced Social Work Education." As a social work educator, it is my belief this research will be helpful in strengthening current efforts to recruit African Americans into social work graduate programs, and possibly establishing more effective recruitment and retention strategies for meeting the profession's overall goal regarding minority participation. As a result, I have designed my doctoral dissertation, for Colorado State University, to clarify differences that potentially exist between African Americans and their Caucasian counterparts, with regard to possible environmental/structural factors, cultural factors, and potential gender constructs.

At this time, I respectfully request your permission to include recent graduates from your social work program at Colorado State University in my study. The sample population consists of all BSW graduates from your program from May 1999 thru May 2001 academic years. I will take every step possible to ensure participants' complete confidentiality. Please note that **participation by these social work graduates is strictly voluntary.**

Possibly, you receive many requests to conduct research using former graduates as participants, however, I strongly believe that Colorado State University's social work program could benefit greatly through participation in this particular research study. After completion of this study, I would gladly share the results with you and members of your social work faculty and staff.

Please let me know if you require any additional information, regarding my request. If there are any questions, please call me at 970-491-5818 or email me at mmscott@cahs.colostate.edu. Please send your response on appropriate letterhead by August 25, 2004. Thank you in advance for your prompt and positive actions regarding this request.

Professionally,

Malcolm E. Scott
Doctoral Candidate

August 20, 2004

Chair, Southern University, Baton Rouge
Department of Social Work
308 Higgins Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70813

Dear Dr. Demetria H. McJulien,

My name is Malcolm E. Scott and I am a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University. My dissertation topic is "Factors Impacting African Americans Seeking Advanced Social Work Education." As a social work educator, it is my belief this research will be helpful in strengthening current efforts to recruit African Americans into social work graduate programs, and possibly establishing more effective recruitment and retention strategies for meeting the profession's overall goal regarding minority participation. As a result, I have designed my doctoral dissertation, for Colorado State University, to clarify differences that potentially exist between African Americans and their Caucasian counterparts, with regard to possible environmental/structural factors, cultural factors, and potential gender constructs.

At this time, I respectfully request your permission to include recent graduates from your social work program at Southern University in my study. The sample population consists of all BSW graduates from your program from May 1999 thru May 2002 academic years and their most current mailing addresses and telephones. I will take every step possible to ensure participants' complete confidentiality. Please note that **participation by these social work graduates is strictly voluntary.**

Possibly, you receive many requests to conduct research using former graduates as participants, however, I strongly believe that Southern University's social work program could benefit greatly through participation in this particular research study. After completion of this study, I would gladly share the results with you and members of your social work faculty and staff.

Please let me know if you require any additional information, regarding my request. If there are any questions, please call me at 970-491-5818 or email me at mmscott@cahs.colostate.edu. Please send your response on appropriate letterhead by September 24, 2004. Thank you in advance for your prompt and positive actions regarding this request.

Professionally,

Malcolm E. Scott
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D
APPROVAL BY PARTICIPATING PROGRAMS



*Knowledge to Go
Places*

School of Social Work
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1586
Phone (970) 491-6612
Fax (970) 491-7280

September 22, 2004

Mr. Malcolm E. Scott, MSW
Doctoral Candidate
School of Social Work
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1586

Dear Malcolm:

I am please to grant your request to use former graduates from the School of Social Work here at Colorado State University in your research. I believe the School of Social Work could benefit through participation in this particular research study.

Efforts to recruit African Americans into social work graduate programs and possibly establishing more effective recruitment and retention strategies can potentially advance the profession's goal regarding minority participation.

Therefore, pending approval by the Institutional Review Board, the list of BSW graduates from Colorado State University's School of Social Work is being prepared to make available to you for this research. The current mailing addresses and telephone numbers of students graduating between Spring 1999 thru Spring 2002 will be sent to you once the list has been compiled.

If you have questions or additional needs, please contact me. Best wishes on completion of your doctoral study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah Valentine".

Deborah P. Valentine, Ph.D.
Director and Professor



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
P.O. Box 9243
Baton Rouge, LA 70813

Phone:(225) 771-5450
Fax: (225) 771-4234

August 31, 2004

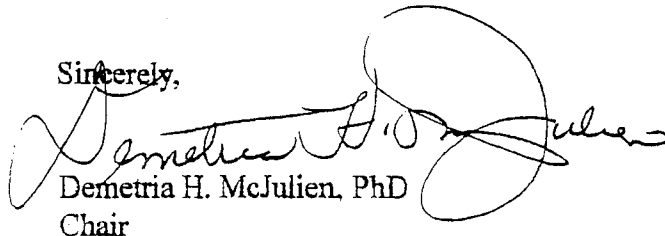
Mr. Malcolm E. Scott
Doctoral Candidate
School of Social Work
Colorado State University
Fort Collins CO 80523-1586

Dear Malcolm:

I have asked Ms. Barbra Bilberry to send you the names and addresses of all graduates of the Department of Social Work at Southern University-Baton Rouge for the period requested.

If you have questions or additional needs, please contact me. Best wishes on completion of your doctoral study.

Sincerely,



Demetria H. McJulien, PhD
Chair

xc: B. J. Bilberry

APPENDIX E
LETTERS TO PARTICIPATING BSW GRADUATES

November 2004

School of Social Work
1586 Campus Delivery
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1586
(970) 491-6612
FAX: (970) 491-7280
www.cahs.colostate.edu/sw

Dear Graduate,

Schools of social work are concerned about a broad spectrum of factors that impact students' decision to seek advanced social work education, and thus would like to look at factors surrounding this issue. Currently, a doctoral candidate is conducting a research survey to document former BSW students' perceptions of supports and impediments to obtaining a graduate degree in the field of social work. Some issues of interest include academic readiness for graduate school, access to higher education (financial support and entrance requirements, and cultural factors that have both external and internal impacts on such graduate school decisions.

This is where you come in. Because you play a critical role in the work of the profession with your BSW degree, we need your input in making informed decisions. In several days, you will receive the Environmental and Structural Impact Survey (ESI) and a return envelope. We ask that you complete and return the questionnaire as soon as possible. **Please be assured that all responses will be strictly confidential, and your participation, though encouraged, is strictly voluntary.**

The data will be used as a quantitative measure of how strongly certain factors influence behavior, to show where more attention may be needed to increase the numbers of students seeking advance degrees in social work. The results will also be reported to the schools as part of promoting opportunities for future BSW graduates.

We know your time is valuable and we thank you in advance for taking time to help us out with this important project. We look forward to your responses when you get your survey next week. Remember, we can't succeed without you!

Sincerely,

Malcolm Earl Scott, Ph.D. [Candidate]
Colorado State University

APPENDIX F
REMINDER POST CARD/LETTER

School of Social Work
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1586
(970) 491-6612
FAX: (970) 491-7280
www.colostate.edu/Depts/SocWork

December 20, 2004

Last week you received a survey with regard to the research titled *Factors impacting African Americans seeking advanced social work education*, in the mail seeking your experiences and thoughts on factors impacting BSW students seeking advanced social work education.

If you have already returned the research survey, please accept our sincere thanks. If not, please do so today. It is critical that your responses be included so that the results accurately represent the opinions and experiences of BSWs from your school. **Please be assured that all responses will be strictly confidential, and your participation, though encouraged, is strictly voluntary.**

If you did not receive the survey, or if it got misplaced, please call Malcolm E. Scott at 970-491-5818 so that we can get another to you immediately. Leave your address, the date and time you called, and your request for another survey only on the voice mail. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Malcolm E. Scott
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Social Work
Colorado State University
970-491-5818 FAX: 970-491

Brian Cobb, Ph.D., Professor
School of Education
Colorado State University