

Black Male Persistence in Graduate School of Education.

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Jabari Sims

Executive Summary

The Teachers of Tomorrow Graduate School of Education (TOTGSE) offers a two-year teaching residency program for recent college graduates interested in beginning a career in education or individuals interested in switching careers. Many of these individuals have no formal educational background. Administrative data from TOTGSE indicate that Black male graduation rates are significantly lower than their peers. Approximately 60% of the Black men that enter the two-year program, exit, and do not complete the requirements for graduation. This is a sharp contrast to the over 90% graduation rates amongst all other race and gender groups that enter the graduate school.

This capstone project is a study of the Black male experiences that completed and did not complete the program. Specifically, this project explores the experiences of 5 Black men and the ecological and sociological barriers faced as they worked to persist through the program. These barriers include racialized and gendered experiences within the program as well as critical relationships and interactions with peers and advisors. The main question I address is:

What factors (ecological and sociological) contribute to Black male participant persistence in the program?

The findings reveal participants reporting feelings of hypervisibility due to the comparatively small enrollment of Black men in the program and the traumatic effects of witnessing many other Black males leave the program. Participants consistently referred to pressure to perform well in the program as they became more representatives of Black men as a whole. Participants felt stress, anxiety, and threats to their psychological safety in the program. The increased stress caused some participants to leave the program. Those that continued on in the program sought out peers for support. In some cases, seeing and building relationships with other Black men was supportive. Some participants expanded their peer group to include Black women. The support from Black women were not consistently supportive. Black men also sought out support from TOTGSE faculty and staff. Administrative data revealed that as compared to all students in the program, Black males indicated satisfaction with faculty and staff was amongst the lowest rated in a host of student program indicators. Additionally, participants report feelings of inauthenticity, experiencing bias, and microaggressions from faculty and staff that led to lowered trust.

Based on these findings, two recommendations are made for TOTGSE to improve graduation rates at this site.

Recommendation 1: The creation of Black Male Affinity Groups

To address the feelings of hypervisibility, stress, and performance pressure, the creation of Black male affinity groups can foster connections and support. When affinity groups are consisting of individuals sharing common characteristics, interests and shared identity, they can provide emotional support (Segal, 2013; Douglas, 2008).

Recommendation 2: Consistent execution of Culturally Responsive Advising

Several data sources revealed that students did not feel supported by faculty and staff. The implementation of culturally responsive academic advisement as an intervention would support Black male participants in feeling seen and valued in genuine relationships and lead to meeting high academic outcomes.

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Introduction

Numerous studies have shown that having a Black male teacher during K-12 school years have demonstrated significant academic outcomes for all students (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Grissom, Skiba, & Noguera 2010; Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017). Additionally, since 2014, students of color make up more than half of the public-school student population, which includes 15% of students identifying as Black (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Yet approximately 80 percent of teachers are white females, and 2 percent of teachers are Black men (Bridges, 2009). These results have prompted many school districts and teacher education programs (TEPs) to increase Black male teachers to ensure a more diverse student population also has a more diverse teacher population.

While recruitment efforts within teacher education programs can recruit Black men to enter programs, many Black men do not reach successful completion (Scott & Rodriguez 2014). Once accepted into TEP's, certification and testing practices adversely impact Black males (Goings & Bianco 2016). For those that do complete TEP's, many do not remain in the classroom, as Ingersoll and Mall (2011) found that male teachers of color, including Black man, had a higher turnover rate than for other teachers and were more likely to migrate from one school to another.

Organization Context

The Teachers of Tomorrow Graduate School of Education's mission is to teach teachers and leaders to develop all P-12 students' academic skills and strength of character needed to succeed in college and life. TOTGSE is a fully accredited, non-profit institution of higher education, originally founded in the early 2000's in the Northeast region of the United States. The origins started as one campus and has now grown to 18 campuses. The site of this study's data collection is found in the Southern region of the United States and averages approximately 200 students yearly. To accomplish the mission, there are several programs offered across its 18 national campuses, including a summer teaching experience for undergraduates, the National Principals Academy Fellowship, and a traditional teaching program culminating with a Masters in the Art of Teaching. TOTGSE offers a two-year teaching residency for recent college graduates interested in beginning a career in education or individuals interested in switching careers. Many of these individuals have no formal educational background. As a part of the two-year program, residents can gain state certification and a master's degree in teaching with tuition of less than \$9,000. To join the residency, applicants must have at least a 2.75 undergraduate grade point average and complete a rigorous application process that includes a sample teaching exercise and robust learning, leadership, and social justice mindsets. As a part of the residency, Residents engage in several learning opportunities, most notably Deliberate Practice (DP).

During the first year of the residency, residents are hired with full-time employment by a school partner and paid a \$25,000 salary with benefits. The school partner is interested in hiring the resident during the second year when they become a certified Teacher of Record (TOR). Residents work under the supervision of Resident Advisors (mentor teachers in K-12 classrooms) and have a gradual release of responsibility across the school year. At the same time, residents are also full-time graduate students enrolled in 2-3 courses per semester. Because of the limited staff, TOTGSE professors also serve as academic advisors for students as well.

Each year, TOTGSE enrolls approximately 150 students into the program. Black men represent less than 10% of participants. Over the course of the two-year program, Black men have exited the program at alarming rates.

The graph (Figure 1) below represents the percentage of students by race and gender that exit the program before graduation. The graph shows that Black men are exiting the program at much higher rates than their peers. Across the past 3 years, approximately 70% exit the program. Figure 2 compares the completion rates for Black males for the graduating classes of 2017-2019. For the class of 2017, as of October 1, 2015, seven Black men were enrolled in the program however, five students exited the program and did not complete the graduation requirements. Similarly, only one of the four Black men in the graduating class of 2018 completed the program and two of five Black men graduated with the class of 2019. During the years 2017-2019, on average 70 percent of black men that enrolled, exited the program.

Figure 1: TOTGSE exit rates by race and gender

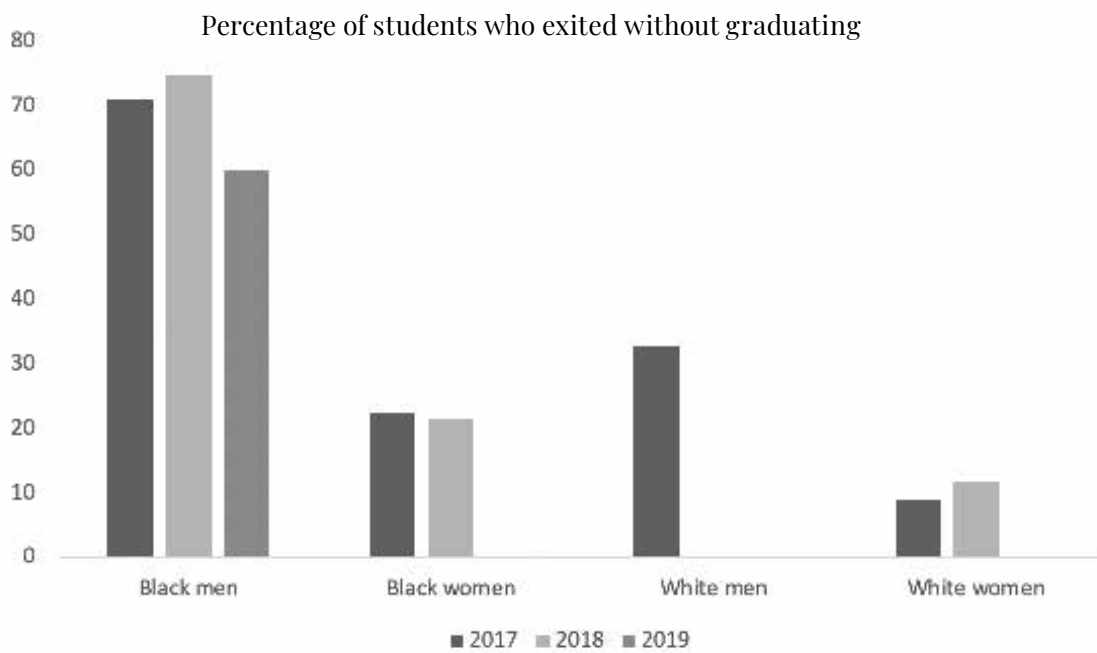
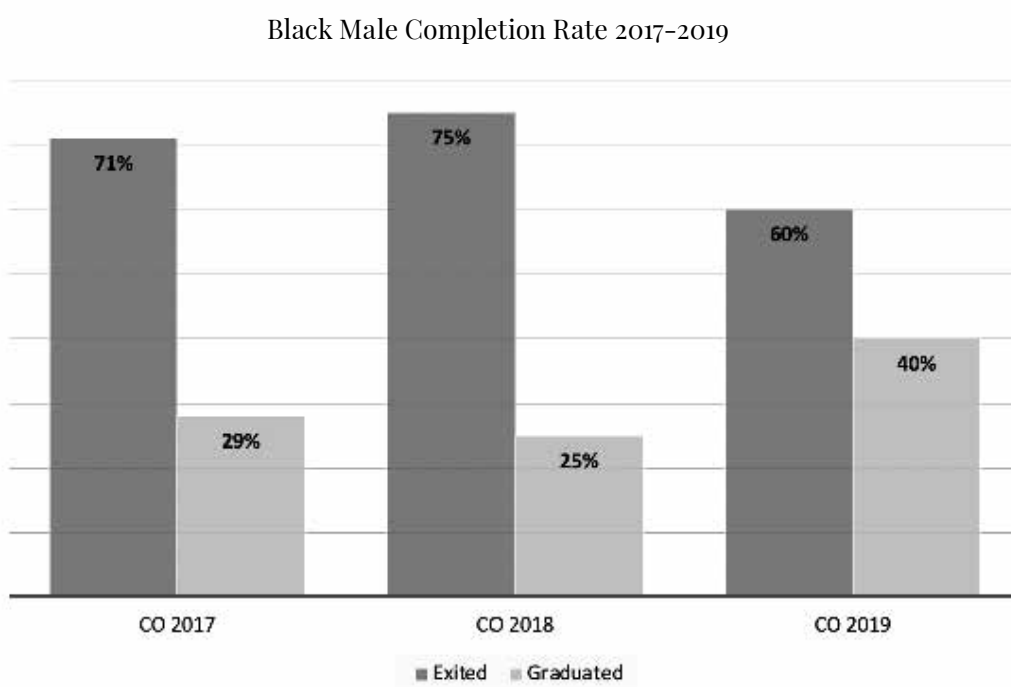


Figure 2: TOTGSE Black male completion rate



The administrative data represented in Figures 1 and 2 were first analyzed by the administrators of TOTGSE. As they seek to graduate and produce teachers that are reflective of a more diverse society, the primary problem of practice is solving for how to increase Black male graduation and completion rates. This problem of practice connects more broadly in the field as several graduate schools of education seek to increase the numbers of Black male educators. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated, “Less than 15 percent of our teachers are Black or Latino. It is especially troubling that less than two percent of our nation's teachers are African American males. Less than one in 50! It's unacceptable” (Duncan, 2011). By solving this problem, more Black boys will aspire to become teachers because of the positive snowball effect caused by Black males in classrooms. Additionally, having a Black male teacher, especially between grades 3 and 5, decreases dropout rates by 30% and improves the likelihood of Black boys entering higher education (Gershenson et. al 2017). The purpose of this capstone project is to study the barriers that threaten Black male persistence in a graduate school of education and make recommendations to increase graduation rates.



Research Question and Conceptual Framework

Ecological Factors.

Both ecological and sociological factors have been shown to shape Black male students experiences in both graduate school in general and teaching in particular. Ecological factors refer to the underrepresentation of Black males in graduate schools of education that contribute to being considered as tokens and the underlining pressure to perform and represent well (Kanter 1977; Bristol 2014). Sociological factors refer to student socialization during graduate school that include social influences of academic and faculty advisors and peer groups. These sociological factors also align with tenets of social constructivism due to the relationships involved.

Several ecological factors impact Black male's experiences in graduate school as Black men are underrepresented in most graduate schools of education (Bristol 2014). As Black men represent two percent of the overall teacher workforce, they can be considered as tokens (Kanter 1977). Kanter's (1977) research on proportional representation refers to majority group members as "dominants" and minority group members as "tokens." Dominants control the group and culture, while tokens have very little power in situations. Tokens are often treated as representatives of their category as symbols rather than individuals (Kanter, 1977). This suggests that entering a graduate school with very few students that represent your race and gender would have effects on tokens. Furthermore, these effects may become exacerbated as tokens (for example, Black men) witness other Black men drop out of the program as dominants, or members of the majority groups, become aware.

Being the "only one" or "token [person of color]" expected to represent a race is exhausting and further promotes trauma and stereotype management (Burt, Williams, & Smith 2018). Tokens are expected to perform their jobs under symbolic conditions different from those of dominants which creates performance pressure (Kanter 1977, p. 212). Minority workers are expected to enact tasks with the burden of believing that their social group identity influences both their interactions with colleagues and the product derived from the work (Bristol 2014). Additionally, Black male students may also experience boundary heightening, or the perception that each interaction with colleagues in the numerical majority is shaped by one's social group identity (Bristol 2018). These perceptions potentially lead Black male to doubt their content knowledge, fit for the profession, and may lead their peers to view them as either underqualified or incompetent to teach (Bristol 2018).

When Black students feel a sense of isolation or presumed incompetent, they feel obligated to prove they are smart enough and belong at their institution and in their graduate program (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2005). The often-racialized experiences also contribute to overall wellness deterioration and negatively influence students' sense of belonging on campus and their persistence (Truong & Meseus, 2012). Taken as a whole, many students may desire to seek other avenues to be with more people that look like them. The demand for Black men to perform well in environments may influence turnover because as "tokens" they may believe their output to be of a lesser quality when compared to individuals in the numerical majority (Bristol 2014).

Sociological Factors.

Sociological factors also influence Black male graduate student experiences including relationships with advisors and peers and tenets of social constructivism. The relationship with an academic advisor in graduate school is essential. Positive relationships with faculty and staff are contributing factors of persistence (Herndandez 2000). Advisors can help students in TEPs navigate campus policies, advocacy, resources, and various networks. Gee (2008) defined social constructivism as learning that is mediated by language and is dependent on a "relationship between an individual with both a mind and a body and an environment in which the individual thinks, feels, acts, and interacts" (p. 81). Because advisors also serve as professors at TOTGSE, the student-teacher relationship is important. Experts with whom learners interact are integral to learning (Vygotsky 1978). Relatedly, social constructivism proposes that students rely on culture and experts, among other things, to acquire knowledge (Vygotsky 1978). Academic advisors can give shape to how Black men experience the learning environment. Gee (2008) argued and emphasized that learners' opportunities to learn are impacted by their perception of the learning environment and when the environment recognizes their personal, social, or ethnic culture, they are better able to learn.

The advising relationship can become strain if the advisor does not attend to the sociological needs of Black men (Smith, et. al., 2007). Racialized incidents can diminish a sense of belonging for Black men at graduate schools. Smith, Allen, and Danley's (2007) research found Black men feeling marginalized, objective, targeted, and unwelcome on the campuses and surrounding communities. The researchers identified the effects of racial battle fatigue. For Black men, racial experiences extend towards the faculty-student relationship, including bias and racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Sue et al. 2007, p. 271). The effects of racial microaggressions make individuals feel "othered" and often cause psychological stress (Burt, McKen, Burkhart, Hormell, & Knight, 2016; Pierce, 1970; Smith, Yosso, et al., 2007).

Advisors can also play a role in recognizing and promoting the support of peers for Black male students. Students learn through interactions with their peers (Gatson-Gayles & Kelly, 2004). Peers can play an essential role in helping students feel a sense of belonging and connection and providing instructional support and reminders. Peers can also help clarify, and as students may have a feeling of safety instead of shame, if the student does not know something, the advisor thinks they should know (Fries-Britt et al., 2012). Peer groups can be a source of stress, as well. Peers may become co-conspirators with faculty in asking Black men to speak for their entire race or ethnicity, making students of color feel isolated and othered (Harper & Palmer, 2016).

Research Question:

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into issues of persistence with Black males in TOTGSE. The benefits of this research will be to understand the factors of completers and non-completers and inform the experiences of future participants and actions of staff members. This capstone project is a study of the Black male experiences that completed and did not complete the program. Specifically, this project explores the experiences of 5 Black men and the ecological and sociological barriers faced as they worked to persist through the program. These barriers include racialized and gendered experiences within the program as well as critical relationships and interactions with peers and advisors. The following research question guides this capstone:

What factors (ecological and sociological) contribute to Black male participant persistence in the program?

Methods.

A phenomenological research design was used. Told from a first-person perspective, phenomenological research examines experiences (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) notes this form of research is one in which it is crucial to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon in order to develop practices and a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenon and its features are illustrated using examples from participants' direct experiences and reflections during the TOTGSE program.

Setting and Participants.

The sample consisted of 5 Black males who pursued or completed teacher certification and a Master's degree in the Arts of Teaching at TOTGSE. TOTGSE was initially founded in New York City in the early 2000s as a relatively new certification and Master's degree pathway. While TOTGSE began as a single campus, it now has over 20 campuses nationwide.

Students participate as a part of a teaching residency that spans over two academic years, including one year as a teacher resident and one year as a full-time teacher of record. Participants in this study all attended one campus in the Southeast region of the United States.

A purposive sample (Patton, 1990), due to knowledge of the population, its elements, and the study's purpose, were interviewed. All participants identify as Black males and are representative of the distribution of participants' background characteristics. These characteristics include ethno-racial self-identification (Black), participation in the TOTGSE program as a completer or non-completer, and male gender identification. The following represent pseudonyms of students that were interviewed:

Name	TOTGSE completion status
Anthony	Program non-completer
Byron	Program completer
Carl	Program completer
Darnell	Program completer
Edward	Program non-completer

Data Collection

A standard open-ended interview protocol (Patton, 1990) was administered to all qualitative study participants. The wording and sequence were developed in advance, and all interviewees were asked the same questions in the same order. The protocol included interview questions that were general and broad, open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994) related to participants' experiences within TOTGSE, and school placements with a specific focus on how ecological and sociological factors shaped these experiences (see Appendix 1 for interview questions). Some interview questions included What were some barriers you faced while in the program? Did you access any resources to try to overcome those barriers; In what ways, if at all, did your advisor recognize what you may be facing as a Black male in the program? Each interview was approximately 45 minutes and was conducted individually.

A student experience survey was administered with data available for the class of 2019. The survey was used to determine student satisfaction with TOTGSE programmatic elements using a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. These indicators included assessments, blended program, core and content faculty, curriculum, faculty/staff support, impact on PK-12 student achievement, impact on teaching, mission and vision, reputation in higher education and workload.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the non-numerical assessment of observations made through participant observation, content analysis, and in-depth interviews (Patton 1990). Data from interviews were analyzed by identifying the most significant statements and then combining these quotations into themes or codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These codes were support, peers, and relationships. The support code was related to reflections made about the school environment teacher residents were placed in and the mentorship that took place at the school site. The peer code is comprised of the ecological underrepresentation of Black males as peers and mentor supports. The relationship code included participants' reflections on the role of relationships with faculty advisors and cultural competency in their advising. These codes were then redefined to reflect three themes (i.e., intentional support groups of Black men, faculty proficiency with culturally competent advising, and conditions of school placement sites).

Findings.

What factors (ecological and sociological) contribute to Black male participant persistence in the program?

Given the research question, regarding the ecological and sociological barriers that contribute to Black male persistence in the program, participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences openly. The participants noted how their race and gender contributed to their tenure in the program. This section presents the findings on how hypervisibility within the program led to feelings of tokenism and performance pressures. As a result, participants sought out peers for support. In some cases, seeing and building relationships with other Black men in the peer group was supportive. However, in some cases given the underrepresentation of Black men, when the peer group was expanded to include a majority Black female peer group, the support was not as impactful. Survey results and qualitative findings indicate that satisfaction with faculty and staff support was low and may have stemmed from a lack of cultural recognition and biased experiences.

All Eyes on Me: Hypervisibility and Performance Pressure

Based on administrative data, Black men represented about 10% of total student enrollment. Therefore, they would be considered tokens, according to Kanter (1977). Participants described feelings of hypervisibility after seeing Black men repeatedly leave the program. Most recall seeing just a few other Black men within the large populations of female students. For example, Carl, a program completer, described the experience witnessing Black men leaving as traumatic: “*We only had a few of us. Then one of the black males in the math cohort, he was out like first semester, first year. He was gone. But then the other one, he stayed like the whole first year. And then he dropped over the summer. A couple of people dropped over the summer, actually. I don't know what it is about that second year, but a lot of us didn't make it. It played with my head a bit. I remember starting the second year as the only Black man in my math content class and feeling like all eyes were on me.*” Carl’s description of seeing Black men drop out of the program, “played with [his] head” demonstrates the mental toll of hypervisibility. He saw multiple people with shared identity markers leave the program, which reflects issues many tokens face with pressure to perform. Carl’s narrative confirms previous finding that considerations must be made regarding the psychological toll Black men experience in being visible because they are one of the few or only Black male teachers in their school, as well as being invisible because colleagues have limited belief in their ability to be effective pedagogues (Bristol & Goings 2018).

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In addition to hypervisibility, participants expressed feeling performance pressure to make up for the decline of Black men that exited the program early and to change perceived stereotypes of themselves. The phenomenon of tokenism is spread across many of the participant narratives as well as the reluctance to perpetuate negative stereotypes often faced by Black men as aggressive or not well informed which is a common occurrence in research (Bristol & Goings, 2019).

As Carl mentioned, he felt like “all eyes were on him.” Darnell, a program completer, similarly felt the performance pressure. He said, *“When I first started the program, several Black men were a part of the program, and then towards our final year, I think I was probably the one who stayed that was in my cohort, as well as a few Black women had left as well. And so, me and all the other students were making jokes, “Man, the Black people dropped one by one. Make sure that you're staying in the program, because we don't know who's going to hang on. Come on Darnell you can't leave. You're like the only Black guy still here.”* Darnell notes that his peers of the majority in the program were also aware of the decline of Black students, including men and women. They also “joke” about the decline and apply pressure to Darnell completing the program as the only representation of Black men in the program. This pressure brings stress, anxiety, and threats to Darnell’s psychological safety in the program. Darnell describes a sense of hypervisibility because of the perceived and real differences and otherness he felt compared to his peers. These racialized experiences impact the mental health and well-being of participants.

Despite these pressures, Darnell is expected to push through the potential stress and remain in the program. Darnell says, “That was, I guess, probably the main reason I stayed. At that point, that was one of the realizations like, “Oh, I really, really need to complete this program not if only for me but to show everybody, all of the classmates, I can do this as well. I don't know what happened with all the other Black guys, but I'm still here. And, I'm going to make sure I show out, too.” That was my motivation for completing it.” Darnell quote reinforces giving up his own motivation to completing the program. Darnell’s motivation shifts to proving that he can excel and complete the program to compensate for the Black students that exited. Because of the hypervisibility, Edward, a program non-completer felt the pressure to succeed as too much. Edward shared, *“I wanted to come back to the school, I just didn't want to do TOTGSE anymore because I just kind of got tired of being under a microscope.”* The hypervisibility and stated pressure to succeed from the campus majority contributes to threats to the mental health of Black men and contribute to Black male students leaving the program.

Seeking Support: Intersections of Race and Gender

The hypervisibility and pressures to perform led participants to seek out support from the few other Black men in the program. Because Black male students were underrepresented, the presence of other Black male students were particularly important to them. In white-dominated spaces, Black men are able to find psychological safety when in close proximity with each other. As Edward, a non-completer said, *“I had a relationship with other Black men. Actually, almost all of them [in the program]. Obviously when we came into the program and we saw there wasn't that many of us, we understood that. That's something we talked about I think the first day, just on our own, away from all the professors, away from everything. When we came in, our cohort, I was able to remember, we actually went to get tacos and we all just sat down and talked about the importance of black males in the educational system and what it means to see that, to give kids. Being true to helping the students and just making sure we help one another within the program.”* Edward's quote reinforces Black men's underrepresentation in the program and highlights that Black men often recognize the underrepresentation. Black men often look for other Black men when entering spaces. This recognition eases tensions, fears, and feelings of isolation. Research has shown that coming together in groups of similar identities supports students to build a collective body of knowledge for responding to institutional oppression, achieving professional development goals, and strengthening a sense of belongingness and cultural pride threatened by poor inclusive and equity practices at their organizations (PourKhorshid, 2016). To see each other as Black men means recognizing the wholeness of the person often in a world where they are overlooked. As a result, Edward and the other Black men on the very first day of the program sought each other out to find non-structured TOTGSE time to build relationships with each other. They also discussed their role within the broader educational setting. Coming together in a small group of individuals with similar identity markers created a space of vulnerability and trust.

“I had a relationship with other Black men. Actually, almost all of them [in the program]. Obviously when we came into the program and we saw there wasn't that many of us, we understood that...”

While Edward's initial experience allowed him to build relationships with other Black men, Darnell, program completer had a different experience. He assumed that TOTGSE would have more programming designed to bring Black men together. Darnell notes, *"I did not have a support system within my peers. And so if [TOTGSE] could try their best. Because it's a fellowship. It is a graduate school, but it's also a fellowship. I think that whole fellowship aspect really needs to be flushed out in terms of how are we supporting these teachers? And, some of them coming from all over the country, how are we supporting these teachers to making sure that their transition is as easy as possible, and that they actually have a support system amongst their peers. Because there are so few of us Black men. One way is if you have one or two Black men in the program, you are going to need a lot more intention in bringing us together, because they're going to most likely want to fellowship with other Black men."* There are few Black men enrolled in the TOTGSE program. As Darnell's quote mentions, he assumed that TOTGSE would recognize the underrepresentation of Black men and put in elements of a fellowship to group graduate students by identity markers intentionally. His selection also illuminates that often participants are moving from various locations around the country and would like to connect with others that look like them, especially during transitions. Darnell requests a sense of belonging that can be found in fellowships. The isolation felt in predominantly white spaces causes Black men to seek each other out for safety and support.

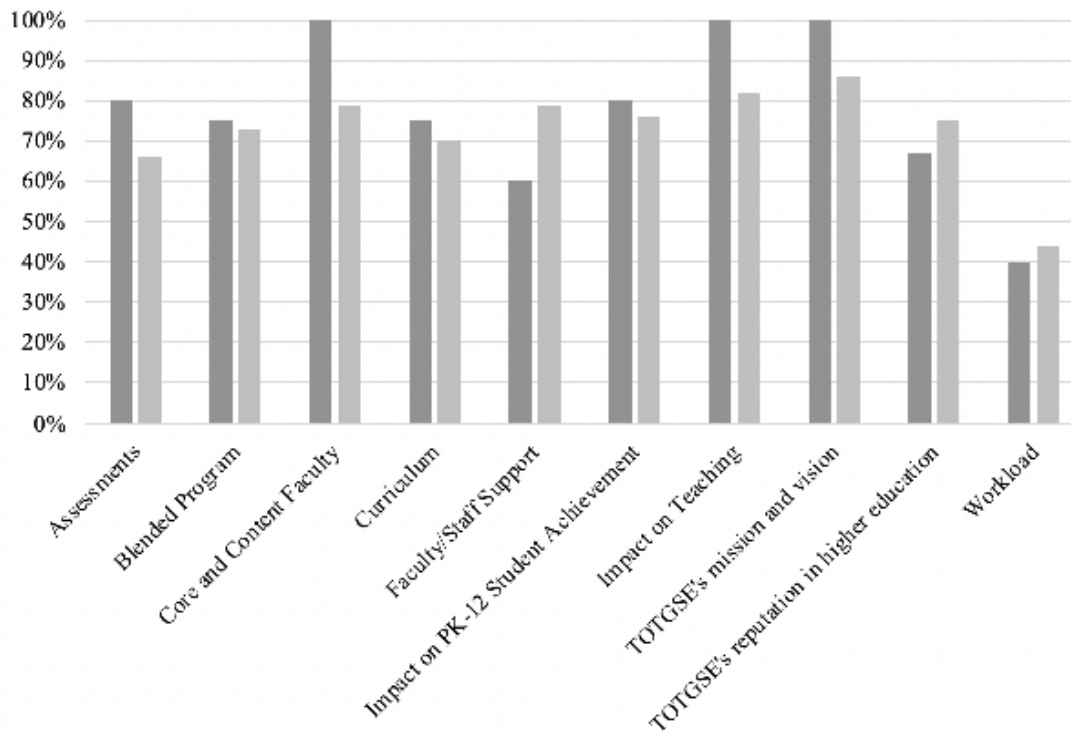
Black men may see themselves as a part of the larger Black culture regardless of gender, given the large percentage of female teachers. With so few Black men, some participants broadened support from Black women in their peer group. Carl describes his experience: *"So whenever it came time to push through to the finish, especially the black women that were around me at the time, they were like, you got to, just got to commit. Because all the other black men were like dropping. I was like, is this worth it? Is this really worth it? And they were like, "Man, we made it this far. We got to make it to the end. We can't be drop out at this point." I don't think my maleness was as big of a factor as my blackness though. For sure. I think I found a lot more support within my black community."* To contrast Carl's experience within a broadened peer group, Anthony, a program non-completer said, *"I could see that a lot of them [other Black students] become close friends. But I think another thing was a lot of them were Black women. And so, they kind of just all clicked up. It was not that I was left out. They never left me out. But, it was clearly, you all are all friends. And so, I didn't really have a solid support system. But, I did always feel like if I ever needed something, I could ask them."* The hypervisibility, tokenism, and peer pressures led Carl and Anthony to seek out further support. Witnessing so many Black men leave the program, Carl relied on the Black community and found the support system he needed. Anthony's experience with his peers was notable in the difference. He recognized his peer groups as all Black participants. Within the larger representation of Black women, Anthony did not form close relationships. While he did feel a part of the group, the underrepresentation of Black male connections contributed to a lack of support from his peers. His experience highlights critical elements of how ecological barriers, such as underrepresentation, may contribute to Black male completion in the program.

Advising Relationships

Because of the hypervisibility and performance pressures, participants sought out support from peers as well as TOTGSE faculty and staff. To gauge the satisfaction of participant experiences, TOTGSE administered student surveys. Table 2 shows student satisfaction with various aspects of the TOTGSE student experience including satisfaction with curriculum, assessments, and workload. The impact on teaching, TOTGSE’s mission and vision, and core and content faculty were all consistently rated high. However, outside of direct teaching, faculty/staff support was amongst the lowest rated indicators as compared to all students. This data supports that Black male students are not satisfied with support and advising from faculty and staff because of lack of cultural awareness, microaggressions, and inauthenticity in interactions.

Table 2: TOTGSE Student Program Indicator Satisfaction Survey

Student Satisfaction Indicators in Fall, 2019
(Black Males N=5; All Students N=108)



Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, and Yonai (2014) reported that students' stress level was directly impacted by the degree of comfort students experienced during academic interactions. Academic advisors' role is to recognize each student's experience individually and support them towards successful completion of the program. It is the advisor's responsibility to build strong relationships with advisees. Given the underrepresentation of Black males in the program, professors and advisors should intentionally connect with Black males. Byron, a program completer, names a mis-match between his background and his advisor. He said, *I wouldn't say, "She [the advisor] was culturally incompetent," but I don't really have the feeling that most of the professors really got where I was coming from.* They may have interacted with people with a similar background, but they weren't in it. It's important for advisors to build relationships with students and understand their backgrounds. Byron's quote reinforces that his advisor may have interacted with other Black men but those interactions didn't impact how his advisor supported him. Byron further explains this saying, *"I mean, here's the thing, man. These were all very nice people. But they were like, "You may have gone through some of it, but for the most part, you're doing all right." You [the professor] seemed to be a nice stable middle, upper-middle-class white lady. And I had a lot of issues, man. I was really just out of my mind as a young person. Did a lot of crazy shit. Hung out with a lot of very grimy people and just being exposed to really seedy elements of humanity. It does a lot to shape your perspective when it's going on when you're like 17-years-old. And so I'm talking to these people and I'm like, "You don't know shit about shit, because if you did, you wouldn't say what you just said."* Byron's early exposures as a young adult influenced his perspective and worldview. He saw his professors based on race and class: "a nice stable middle, upper-middle-class white lady." This observation signals that the advisor might not understand his perspective as he might have experienced instability as a Black man. As a result of understanding how Byron's upbringing impacted his worldview, the advisor had an opportunity to establish a warm, welcoming relationship, identify his strengths, and help him navigate his academic journey. Instead, when advisors treat all students the same, they miss out on opportunities to build connections and support Black male students that are underrepresented and hyper-visible. Byron notes, *"It's kind of like that whole rehearsed vibe. I'm here and this isn't how I really talk, but this is how I'm going to talk to you for the foreseeable future. And it's like, "Ah, geeze."* Byron's quote supports that many of the professors had a "rehearsed vibe," which he interpreted as inauthentic. Byron's experiences may have led to a missed opportunity to build a real relationship between advisor and student. Byron mentions potential stress in having to endure a professor that has a "rehearsed vibe," which potentially impacts his experience in the program. This quote also shows how Byron needed to cover and code-switch with his advisor as he needed to adjust how he talked with advisor. This contributes further to the lowered sense of belonging and trust in the relationship with the advisor. He could not be his true self because the advisor never acknowledges his cultural background. These missed opportunities to see the individual strengths of students and bring awareness to each students' cultural background reinforce sociological barriers within the program.

Edward, a program non-completer, also had similar concerns about inauthenticity related to grading. To treat all students that same, advisors were seen as robots. Edward said, “But the struggle came with what I felt was like just a bit too aggressive on worrying about the little things instead of kids actually learning. There are times where the professor was concerned about the things that were on the rubric and the nuances of the rubric for the grade, but missed the bigger picture around the impact that you were making with kids. I think the people who do the grades, sometimes I think you have to get away from the rubric, because if you have things being read robotically, it's not as good as it may seem. Here, Edward questions what was valued in using classroom observations as grades. His quote notes that the professor was more concerned with the inputs rather than the student achievement outcomes. This mismatch in expectations reinforces the need for TOTGSE staff to understand the values of each student and leverage this knowledge in support of academic pursuits. This is key as research supports that teacher education programs often perpetuate White, middle class experiences, values, and perspectives (Cheruvu, Souto-Manning, Lencl, & Chin-Calubaquib, 2015).

Because of the limited staff, TOTGSE professors also serve as academic advisors for students as well. There are times where the relationship between students and advisors become strained. Edward, a program non-completer, shares an example of a racialized experience that took place in his first few months of the program that shaped his tenure in the program. He said, “One experience at TOTGSE that a few of the other Black students nor I didn't like. Because it seemed like one teacher was singling us out because we were Black, of course, I'm not going to say that was the reason. It was probably because all the Black people were sitting at a specific table, and at times we would start whispering. But again, other people were whispering as well. Other people were on their phones. But for some reason, this advisor decided to hover over us and make sure that our phones were put away, and make sure we were paying attention. Edward's experience above is an example of a microaggression. He notes that while "others were on the phone," the professor only addressed his table. Microaggressions erode trust between advisors and students. This perceived bias expressed very early on in the program contributes to the psychological stress that Black men endure in the program. This is consistent with research that show that first interactions are crucial to advisor-student relationships, which make microaggressions that occur during these early interactions particularly problematic (Burt, et al. 2018).

Anthony, a program non-completer, also shared bias he felt after struggling to meet deadlines with assignments. Anthony shared, “I was having issues completing work. And over Christmas break, I had been telling her [the advisor], hey this is what's going on. And she was not really hearing it. But I realized that it was something wrong. Something I just couldn't figure out. I actually went to go see a doctor a few times. Ended up being diagnosed with A.D.D. and so I was basically seeing a doctor, had medication. At this point I remember being on probation. I had doctor's note and everything else but it didn't seem to prove to her why I was struggling. She just kept saying turn stuff in.” Anthony was a token student and didn't have strong relationships with his peers. When he turned to his advisor for help and support, she “was not really hearing it.” He is forced to find solutions outside of TOTGSE and finds a solution from his medical doctor. In this example, Anthony shares vulnerable information about his health status to his advisor after struggling to complete assignment and the advisor does not provide any accommodations. Some students express a diminished sense self after poor relationships across racial lines, which threatens retention (Burt, et al. 2018). Ultimately, Anthony was dismissed from the program. He entered another TEP and successfully completed the program. He is still teaching at his original placement school. Anthony's experience, like the other participants, highlights the various barriers Black men faced during enrollment. The Black men saw few students that looked like them and described hypervisibility as a barrier to success. The support of faculty advisors felt inauthentic and at times, tense. These barriers led to many of the participants leaving the program.

Summary of Findings

The results from this capstone support findings from previous scholarship on Black men in teacher education programs seeking to belong, connect, and feel welcome amidst the numerous calls to diversify the profession. Black men are hyperaware of their minority status amongst White peers and faculty as well as how they are often perceived (Lewis, 2014). Given this landscape, the pressure to perform well and exceed perceived and real expectations and assumptions contributed to barriers Black men needed to overcome. The realities of tokenism and performance pressure informed their actions to continue or exit the program. (Woodson and Pabon, 2016).

The pressure to perform well contributes to Black men being less likely to demonstrate diverse expressions of their racial, gendered, and sexual identities around peers and faculty/staff (Woodson and Pabon, 2016). Without strong relationships from faculty members, pre-service teachers of color mask elements of their racial and linguistic identities in order to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes, fit in, and prove they belong as learners (Anzaldú, 1987). Consistent in research are the need for faculty who advise Black men to demonstrate investment and belief in student's ability and the impact of informal interactions on student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995). While only one student spoke of a specific microaggression, there was a trend of faculty and staff representing White dominant culture and contributing to inauthentic relationships and misaligned values.

Identifying these harmful behaviors is important because racial microaggressions, bias, and a lack of strong faculty/student relationships are likely to impact student retention, achievement, sense-of-self, and identity as an engineer (Burt, 2016). Additionally administrative data revealed of all student program indicators, faculty and staff supports received the lowest satisfaction rating from Black men as compared to all other students.

Tokenism, isolation, and exclusion also positioned Black men on the margins of their teacher education programs and prevented them from accessing professional peer-groups that could sustain and support their classroom practices as future teachers. Findings also revealed that participants had to negotiate racialized and gendered relationships with peers (Cheruvu, Souto-Manning, Lencl, & Chin-Calubaquib, 2015). Less present in research were Black men that expanded their peer group to include Black women and the overall impact of this.

Vasquez (2019) proposes that predominantly White TEP's develop a framework that is inclusive of the unique counter stories of men of color rather than merely positioning them as tokens. Increasing the number of Black men in the program as well as providing a safe space specifically designed for Black men would lead to higher retention. For example, by not providing a space for the men in this TEP to engage in knowledge-making and discussion, they were in effect rendered invisible. (Vasquez, 2019).

Recommendations

The findings illuminated several barriers Black men encounter as students in the TOTGSE program. Students are faced with threats to their psychological safety which makes completing the program challenging and ambitious, especially compared to their white peers. The recommendations for this site are based on the core themes from the findings. These recommendations are presented as interventions to the program currently.

Recommendation #1: Create Black Male Affinity Groups

When affinity groups are consisting of individuals sharing common characteristics, interests and shared identity, they can provide emotional support (Segal, 2013; Douglas, 2008). The growing body of research on Black male participation in affinity groups suggests the groups can create spaces for healing, spaces to build a collective body of knowledge for responding to institutional oppression, strengthening a sense of belonging, and can provide a psychologically safe space in which they can describe the microaggressions they experience (Pour-Khorshid 2018; Fant 2017; Bristol & Mentor 2014). Affinity groups offer a safe space for Black men to be themselves, find comfort and support, and been seen when they are often consigned to places on the margins within white society. The students enrolled at TOTGSE are underrepresented and faced with threats to their psychological safety without clear organizational structures in place to support them. The finding show that Black men often enter spaces and look for representations of themselves.

TOTGSE's creation of Black male affinity groups signals the importance of recognizing marginalized culture and preserving retention and directly aligns with its stated problem of practice. While there is less research on specific Black male affinity groups in graduate schools, research does support racial affinity groups decreasing isolation and increasing retention for Black teachers (Mosely 2018; Gist 2018). These similar interventions support overall retention and show alignment. To address the ecological and sociological barriers Black men face, affinity groups could improve the Black male experience and overall retention.



The following logic model (figure 1) outlines the direction, activities, and outcomes for the Black male affinity group intervention.

Figure 1:

Black Male Affinity Group Logic Model

INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES		
	Activities	Implementation	Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Faculty •Staff •Facilitators •Time •Resources •Black male student inputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Black male affinity group task force creation •Deliver facilitation training •Project plan creation •Supply resources to faculty, staff, and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Assessing current state of Black male experiences •Defining desired vision for Black male experiences •Identifying structure of Affinity groups •Progress monitoring to identify potential challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Faculty and staff increase knowledge of current Black males' experiences •Identification of factors influencing experience •Launch of Black male affinity groups •Increased belonging among Black males 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Increase in positive findings amongst Black males on student experience survey •Intervention areas of strength and areas of improvement identified and improved •Increase relationships between faculty and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Increased retention of Black males •Increased NPS to aid in further Black male recruitment

My recommendation includes gathering faculty and staff to create a Black male affinity group taskforce to identify a leader to get the initiative started. Once identified, these leaders should start soliciting the input and experiences of current and former Black male students to guide the formation of the affinity group. This input could be conducted through survey questions, focus groups or individual interviews. These data will provide information on who is best positioned to facilitate the group as well as serve as a liaison for faculty and staff as well as baseline data to set improvement goals for the intervention. As a result of the task force, the faculty and staff can assess the current state of the Black male experience, define a desired vision and accompanying metrics, as well as progress monitoring during implementation to celebrate wins and identify potential challenges. As a result of the implementation of the affinity groups, TOTGSE could establish short terms outcomes including the creation of a safe, identity-affirming space for Black males and long terms outcomes increasing the retention of Black males and increase Net Promoter Scores to aid recruitment efforts for more Black men.

Recommendation #2: Culturally Responsive Academic Advising

My recommendation is to ensure all advisors utilize a culturally responsive academic advising framework to support Black men meeting TOTGSE requirements and completing the program successfully. This recommendation aligns with the findings as advisors were seen as inauthentic, demonstrated missed opportunities to recognize student’s cultural funds of knowledge, and committed microaggressions that damaged relationships with Black male students. Several researchers have demonstrated that positive interactions with faculty and staff positively impact Black male graduate student achievement (Santos and Reigadas 2002; Robertson & Mason 2010; Reid 2013). Furthermore, increasing academic achievement and retention could be increased by addressing the cultural gaps that exist between a student’s culture and the culture of instructors, could reduce the stress, anxiety and feelings of alienation experienced by students of color (Gay 2004). TOTGSE advisors play a large role in shaping the experiences of Black males in the program.

I would recommend TOTGSE implement an audit of the existing advising practices and build appropriate interventions based on the Bowes (2017) Culturally Responsive Academic Advisement Framework (see table 3). Bowes’ (2017) research evaluated a culturally responsive advisement framework aimed to reduce and possibly eliminate the gaps between Black males and their female and white counterparts as institutions of higher education. Findings from Bowes’ (2017) research showed that 93% of African American male students consistently selected somewhat agree or strongly agree on advisement related survey questions by the end of the academic year. Further, African American male students indicated during focus groups that faculty advisors worked to get to know them and used that knowledge to help them be successful with coursework.

Tenet	Definition	Suggested Action Steps
Relationships	Build and maintain positive relationships with students based on respectful curiosity about and awareness of students’ culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand definition of culture to include ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class, race, ability, etc. - Be aware that culture is enacted differently by each individual. Avoid cultural over generalizations; - Identify students’ short and long-term goals; - Become aware of students’ non-academic competing interests; - Create safe spaces in which diversity is celebrated; - Share appropriate information about yourself; - Interact informally with students when opportunities arise; - Make it clear via actions and language that you are invested every students’ success.
Empathy	Demonstrate empathy especially when students are faced with challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledge and validate students’ feelings; - Use open-ended probing questions, statements; - Use key questions – where, when, how, what, who; never ask why; - Use scaling and miracle questions to help student prioritize challenges; - Avoid judgment and assumptions; - Help students to create their own solutions
Advocacy	Advocate for students to effect change within biased systems. Advocate on behalf of students when the power dynamic exceeds their locus of control.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider challenges traditionally faced by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - first generation graduate students, - historically underserved students, - non-traditional students, - traditionally marginalized and/or underrepresented members of society; - Consider stereotype threat; - Consider challenges that are context specific.
Cultural Awareness	Increase your cultural awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take steps to learn about your students’ cultures; - Identify and monitor your own biases; - Monitor bias embedded in curriculum/institutional norms; - Find ways to respectfully and appropriately integrate students’ culture into sessions; - Invite, learn from and take action from student and peer feedback on your practices.
High Expectations	Maintain high expectations for all students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain high standards of excellence for students despite school context, undergraduate IHE, SES, race, etc.; - Invest students in the standard of excellence; - Differentiate support so that all students are pushed to mastery.
Empowerment	Empower students to succeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determine students’ level of proficiency with self-advocacy, time management strategies and life skills; - Identify ways to help students build proficiency where gaps exist.
Support	Support students with academic and non-academic challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stay abreast of student progress in all enrolled courses - Engage in proactive advisement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Initiate communications with students, ~ Offer convenient (time/location) office hours, ~ Offer tutoring, ~ Work with internal and external partners to create a network of academic support for students; - Be aware of potential challenges students may face; - Mental health, family responsibilities, work responsibilities, financial challenges, etc.; - Help students to leverage their own support network; - Compile for referral, a list of community resources; - Help students to create their own best solutions; - Avoid advice giving

Bowes' (2017) involves the following interventions that are recommended for TOTGSE:

1. Intentionally training advisors to better serve students by (a) cultivating warm and welcoming relationships with students to gain comprehensive knowledge of students' expression of culture, needs, responsibilities, and goals; (b) remaining abreast of all requirements students would need to satisfactorily complete their program of study, including State Department of Education (SDOE) certification process; (c) incorporating best practices of mentorship that empower students to achieve long and short term professional goals and; (d) collaborating with and referring to appropriate community support services and implementation and monitoring of best practices by advisors (Shultz, Colton & Colton, 2001; Kolenovic, Linderman & Karp, 2013; Gary, Kling & Dodd, 2004).
2. Facilitating opportunities for advisors to build and strengthen relationships with students by increasing informal interactions with students, (e.g. advisory sessions with students, socials, etc.) and use those trusting relationships to provide social support, facilitate proactive academic monitoring, and respond with timely and effective interventions (Shultz, Colton & Colton, 2001; Kolenovic, Linderman & Karp, 2013).
3. Helping students overcome identified barriers to success, such as time management, stress, and self-advocacy, by designing and delivering instructional sessions that provide students with concrete skills in the identified areas (Addus & Khan, 2007; George et al., 2008).

Conclusion

“Our goal is to create a **beloved community** and this will require a qualitative change in our souls. as well as a quantitative change in our lives.” — **Martin Luther King Jr.**

The beloved community Dr. King mentions in the quote above is created by recognizing the humanity, strengths, and talents of one another to create a better society for us all. The Black males that participated in interviews were open to sharing their experiences as well as providing recommendations on how to improve the TOTGSE program. TOTGSE acknowledged a key problem of practice that influences K-12 student outcomes by increasing the number of Black male teachers. By improving retention at this campus, TOTGSE has the opportunity to share best practices and become a bright spot for other higher education institutions. This can be accomplished by the creation of Black male affinity groups and consistent implementation of culturally responsive academic advisement. This study utilized interviews to understand the barriers faced by Black male students and to recommend interventions to address the ecological and sociological barriers that surfaced towards a establishing a beloved community within the TOTGSE program.

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Interview Questions

General Background

1. Please tell me about some particularly memorable experiences you had in K-12 school? Undergraduate school?
2. How many Black male teachers did you have in K-12 or undergraduate school?
3. How did you perform academically in school?
4. What were your motivations in becoming a teacher? Joining TOTGSE?
5. How did your family feel about you becoming an educator?
6. What's your general impression of the program?
7. Did you complete the program? Why/Why not?

Experience

8. What were some barriers you faced while in the program? Did you access any resources to try to overcome those barriers?
9. What role did your race and gender have in completing the program?
10. What structures within the program were most helpful to your success? Least?
11. Can you please tell me about your relationship with your advisor? How, if at all, did you discuss the challenges you were experiencing with your advisor?
12. "In what ways, if at all, did your advisor recognize what you may be facing as a Black male in the program? (or ask directly about perceived cultural competence).
13. What was your relationship like with your peers? To what extent did you experience a sense of belonging among peers?

Sense-making

14. What is your current profession?
15. What, if any, changes would you make to the program?
16. If applicable, how long do you plan to stay in education?
17. Be honest that many Black males do not complete. What factors do you think most helped you to complete the program?
18. If applicable, would you return to the program for completion?
19. Anything else you wish to share?

