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Mentoring at the College Level: A Qualitative Study Examining the Perceptions of African American Men Who Hold a Four-Year Degree and are Professionally Employed

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MENTORING AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXAMINING THE

PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN WHO HOLD A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE

AND ARE PROFESSIONALLY EMPLOYED

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Title: Mentoring at the College Level: A Qualitative Study Examining the Perceptions of African American Men Who Hold a Four-Year Degree and are Professionally Employed

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Studies have suggested that the impact of formal and informal mentoring programs have had a positive impact on young African American males from K-12. However, at the college level, African American males, in the United States, struggle to stay in college. African American males have been underachieving educationally, since slavery was abolished and to this date over 67.6 percent of freshmen, African American males, fail to graduate from colleges and university throughout the country. Through the review of past studies this study will seek to identify how having a mentor, helped eight professionally employed African American men graduate from four-year colleges and universities, during their undergraduate career. In addition, the study will examine the influence that these mentors have had on them beyond college.

Sedlacek's (2011) using non-cognitive variables in assessing readiness in higher education, Tinto's (1975) student integration model, and Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering provide the theoretical frameworks for this study.

Sedlacek's (2011) use of non-cognitive variables was the first theoretical foundation examined in this study. It encompassed eight factors that he identified in AA men who have persisted in higher education beyond the traditional intellectual or cognitive variables. Tinto (1975) examined the impact of academic integration and social integration in college and the

impact the two had on the participant's academic success. Schlossberg's (1989) theory, Marginality and Mattering, indicated that all students matter and institutions that focus on student involvement may experience a greater level of student involvement (Schlossberg, 1989). According to Schlossberg, students of color felt as though they mattered because of their involvement on campus and being a part of organizational activities associated with the university or college they attended.

Eight professionally employed African American men, who graduated from four-year colleges and universities, who were mentored, were interviewed for this study. This study expanded upon mentoring literature and an evaluation of how mentoring relationships impact the probability of African American male students graduating four-year colleges and universities.

The study reviewed literature regarding mentoring, as well as address the institutional inequalities and structures, associated with predominately White institution of higher education and how they impact African American male students directly and indirectly. An analysis of how being mentored during undergraduate studies, enhanced the participant's life after college will enable institutions of higher education

DEDICATION

To Allen Lane Jr., my son, my motivation, you are my 'Legacy.' You have inspired me to be a better man, and you taught me how to love myself and become the father that you needed me to be. To Thomas Alexander Lane (RIP), my baby-boy, the first time I was able to see you… You were gone. God called you home, but I felt your presence and it still remains, you have been my guardian 'Angel' and protector. To Anna Mae Lane, (RIP) my mother and the one who gave me life… I miss you so much! You taught me to be strong and to never give up, you were and still are my 'Rock', whenever, I felt discouraged your teachings empowered me to continue. To Louis Lane Sr., my father and backbone of not only me, but all of my siblings, I am the man that I am because of you and I hope that I have made you proud.

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To Crystal McCormick, thank you for pushing me to pursue my masters and doctorate degree. It was you that said keep going, you can do it and you helped me believe that I was capable and I finished my masters with 3.91 GPA.

To my family and friends, thank you for your love and support over the last five years. At times I wanted to give up because of the many things going on in my life, but I did not want to let my son and you all down. Each of you, were there to lift me up and encourage me to continue pushing forward. I am forever grateful for your support.

Life, has taught me many good and bad lessons, but I learned from each. My desire to be the best at whatever I done, came from my parents. I am who I am because of them. My hard work, loyalty, and commitment, comes from being one of fifteen siblings and my mother and father. Eleven of my siblings and my parents were my first supporters, and helped raise me with a passion for helping others and their leading by example allowed me to raise my son as a single parent.

However, I would be remiss, if I did not mention and thank, someone who has played a critical role in who I am today… from the first time I met you, at fourteen years old, you took me under your wing and have been my role model since, you have been a friend, confidant, and most of all a Big-Brother to me, to this date. Fred Brown, I thank you for all that you have taught me and all that you continue to teach me daily, I am blessed to have you. Having you as a mentor for all these years has been a Godsend throughout this program, I am humbled by your generosity, tutelage, and I could never thank you enough and I hope I have made you proud.

In closing, I give all thanks and praise to God. Without Him, I am nothing, but with Him, All Things Are Possible and He have and will always be my ultimate educator, so Lord I Thank You!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although many African American males have made substantial contributions to this country, they continue to be one of the least represented in the United States in earning a college degree. African American (AA) males fail to graduate from colleges and universities more than African American females and any other male counterpart. Robinson (2014) showed four percent of all college students are Black men. However, 67.6 percent of AA male freshman do not obtain degrees). The AA male population in colleges and universities are extremely low and enrollment in higher education is not only exceptionally low (Dellums Commission, 2006; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Davis, 2010), but enrollment and graduation rates continue to remain significantly less than all other college students (Tate, 2008). The national college graduation rate for AA males in 2009-2010 was 52 percent compared to 78 percent for White male students (Hague-Palmer, 2013).

Hague-Palmer (2013) reported, "In 2010, the U.S. Census showed AA male students accounted for 5.5 percent (1.2 million) of all college students, while 5.6 million white male students made up 27 percent" (p. 11). Toldson and Lewis (2012) study did not include African American females, yet AA females outperformed AA males by earning two-thirds of the degrees awarded to AA students and statistics exposed the underachievement among AA males.

Beyond Bad News about Black Male Students, an article written by University of Pennsylvania's Dr. Shawn Harper, suggested "AA males are disengaged and underrepresented among college students and degree earners" (Harper, 2012, p. 3). Below, Harper detailed the struggles and imbalances that are stereotypically magnified nationally in dialog, research journals, policy reports, and various forms of media:

- Only 47 percent of AA male students graduated on time from U.S. high schools in 2008 compared to 78 percent of White male students (Harper, 2012).

- AA male students are often comparatively less prepared than are others for the rigors of college- level academic work (Harper, 2012).

- According to Harper (2012), in 2009 AA males made up 55.3 percent of football and basketball players at public NCAA Division I institutions. Yet, in 2009, only 3.6 were undergraduate students. This shows how overrepresented intercollegiate sports teams are with AA male student-athletes compared to the AA male non-student-athletes.

- AA male college completion rates are lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education (Harper, 2012).

- AA male undergraduate men, like some other racial minority students at predominantly white institutions, routinely encounter racist stereotypes and racial micro-aggressions that undermine their achievement and sense of belonging (Harper, 2012).

The retention rate of AA males who attend colleges and universities has impacted the AA family structure, community stability, and economic reduction at all levels. Experts at Columbia, Princeton, Harvard, and others institutions are focusing on life patterns of AA males. According to Ronald B. Mincy, professor of social work at Columbia University and editor of "*Black Males Left Behind*" (2006) there is a vast group of inadequately educated AA men who are becoming more disconnected from mainstream society and their male counterparts. According to Eckholm (2006) AA males completing high school in the country's inner cities, are the exception, legal jobs are rare, and prison for this population is almost predictable based on incarceration rates.

This has created a sense of hopelessness for AA males in the United States and leaving potential young AA males in need of direction. As an example, Smiley (2011) reported that young AA males lag behind educationally, on every level, while adding to the incarceration rate among AA men. According to Smiley, there are more AA males in prison in the United States than any of their ethnic counterparts. Holliday and Strange (2013) supported Smiley's report. Their study revealed AA males are enrolling in college and universities, but academically they are not at the same level as their White counterparts or any other ethnicity.

Mason's (2012) study depicted the on-going challenges AA male students encounter regularly in colleges and universities across the country. In addition, Mason (2012), referring to New York's Mayor Michael Bloomberg's 2012 speech, stated "Even though skin color in America no longer determines a child's fate, sadly it tells us far more about a child's future than it should. That reality is not something we ever tell a child. Because, how could we possibly explain to young Black and Latino boys that they are twice as likely as White children to grow up in poverty, twice as likely to drop out of school, and twice as likely to end up out of work" (p. 2). Mason described how colleges and universities modeled themselves in response to Bloomberg's concerns and stated "Unfortunately, the beginning of the 21st century finds colleges and universities mirroring Bloomberg's vocalized concerns and still struggling with their undergraduate African American male population" (p. 2). Also, these colleges and universities continue to struggle with their undergraduate AA males' graduation rates.

Some research focused on AA males in education centers around primary and secondary level educational problems and transitioning to college freshmen experience and life beyond college (Harper, 2007). However, insufficient research has been conducted on the AA male experience between freshmen and senior year as they finish their undergraduate

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studies. Besides, institutions are inclined to concentrate on how they impact the success of the AA male students' matriculation in higher education (Allen, 1999).

This research examines the perceptions of professionally-employed, AA male college graduates who were mentored during their undergraduate years and the impact that mentoring had on completing their degrees and their success beyond graduation. According to Jacobi (1991), the relationship between mentor and mentee utilizes the mentor's experiences in order to help educate the mentee who is experiencing things similar to what the mentor experienced at his or her age. She described the mentor and protégé relationship as when an experienced person imparts information to the protégé based on his or her similar experiences. Harris (2007) suggested "the role of the mentor is to guide and advise the protégé toward self-identification, accomplishments, and eventual self-realization" (p. 23).

Historically, the word 'mentor' stems from Greek mythology. Blount (2011) revealed Mentor was the name of a character in Homer's *Odyssey* at the height of Greece's Golden Age and his role was that of a trusted friend, counselor, or a teacher. According to Blount (2011) mentors are just what young Black males need to survive in the United States. Whether, they are male or female, young or old, as long as individuals are willing to help assist, in improving the wellbeing of this population. Harper (2012) wrote, for years, many different individuals among several organizations have collectively come together, in efforts to address the plight of young Black males. However, not enough has been done policy wise to push the issue politically. Although, there have been many initiatives targeted at closing the disproportionate educational gap, AA males have statistically been unrepresented and need more stakeholders to become involved at the next level (Harper, 2012).

Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones & Allen, (2010) reported AA student enrollment increased 45 percent between 1980 and 2000, in colleges and universities, across the country. However, the increase is a result of African American female students, achieving academically, and graduation rates increasing among that population. While, AA male students continue to dropout, fail academically, or have personal issues that cause them to leave school after the first year (Griffin, et al., (2010).

Many undergraduate AA males match the narrative of the aforementioned population as many of them experience difficulty in various aspects of their lives. Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) examined faculty and student mentoring relationships to see what the outcomes would be. The results showed that the participants, both the mentor and mentee, believed the relationship produce positive outcomes. Therefore, mentoring may influence an individual's growth and progress, towards degree attainment, and making the argument that mentoring can directly or indirectly influence retention among AA male college students (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Blount (2011) suggested that the giving of knowledge during the acquiring process for the mentee and mentor occurs within a setting where the mentor closes the door, to the world of ivory towers, and unlocks the entrance to means of support. The mentor begins to share his or her life experiences with the mentee, personalizing the process of mentoring, but through a lens of transparency.

Problem Statement

Far too many AA males in the United States are seemingly ill-prepared to achieve academically as students and, due to that, to be productive citizens in adulthood (Hague-Palmer, 2013). For example, Hague-Palmer (2013) indicated that in primary and secondary grades, AA male students who are often labeled behavior problems are often misdiagnosed academically.

However, with a proper diagnosis the behavior problem may have been diagnosed as a mental disorder or a delay. Eventually, this leads to AA males being placed in classes that do not challenge them or meet their needs. Once this occurs, many AA male students may be forced to survive educationally in an educational environment unprepared to facilitate a quality education designed to meet their needs. Noguera (2003) reported that AA males are targeted because of this and routinely face disciplinary action and as a result may be stereotyped negatively for most of their educational career.

Based on a review of literature, many educational studies about AA males do not take into consideration the historical underrepresentation that continues to plague the majority of the AA population. Howard's (2008) study used the critical race theory as a model to investigate the experiences of AA males in primary and secondary schools. However, of this population AA men have underachieved in academia (Holliday & Strange, 2013). Only limited research shows positive outcomes for AA males in higher education (Hague-Palmer, 2013). This study examined the perceptions of eight professionally-employed AA males' achievement outcomes that graduated four year colleges and universities in order to help educators and governing bodies on all academic levels find and create plausible solutions for AA males to be successful academically.

Purpose Statement

This study will examine the perceptions of professionally-employed, AA male college graduates who were mentored formally and informally during their undergraduate years regarding the impact mentoring had on completing their degrees and their success in life since graduation. In addition, it will provide insight to the reader, first-hand knowledge on how institutions of higher education can help AA males graduate from college.

Alexander (2011), in *The New Jim Crow*, stated, "More AA men are in prison or jail, on probation or parole than were enslaved in 1850, before the Civil War began." Robinson (2014) suggested that to help AA males in higher education, it is vital to identify with the many obstacles the AA male is confronted with daily, yet also be cognizant of the causes for success and begin to re-think the way success is evaluated. In addition, research conducted has seemingly not encouraged administrators in higher education to realize the crucial construct and methods to help AA males complete their education (Robinson, 2014).

Significance of Study

This study has implications for policy and practice in that the findings may clarify important issues negatively impacting not only AA students in general, but specifically AA male students' academic success. This study offered an opportunity for professionally-employed AA men who were formally mentored during their undergraduate program an opportunity to speak specifically on the educational needs of collegiate males. The study seeks to understand the impact mentoring had on them, through sharing their undergraduate academic experience and success. The answers may signal professional educational leadership, and academic significance, that can potentially increase and retain AA students in higher education. Furthermore, it could provide validation for the implementation of formalized programs for AA male students attending institutions of higher education. These programs could increase persistence and graduation rates of AA students, specifically AA males.

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical foundations will be used in this study, however, Sedlacek's (2011) Non-cognitive assessing readiness in higher education" provides a theoretical framework that can be directly applied to non-cognitive factors that are accurate predictive measures of success for AA

male's persistence in higher education. Sedlacek (2011) mentioned the eight factors that he identified in AA men who have persisted in higher education, beyond the traditional intellectual or cognitive variables. These motivational factors are: "(1) positive self-concept, (2) realistic self-appraisal, (3) successfully handling the system (racism), (4) preference for long-term goals, (5) availability, of strong support person, (6) leadership experience, (7) community involvement, and (8) knowledge acquired in a field." Each of these factors have been tested and validated to be predictors of persistence in higher education for AA men).

Next, Tinto's (1975) student integration model shows an individual's persistence in college may be influenced by social integration. In addition, values, attitudes, interests, and family background were identified as factors that contributed to student persistence and the social environment. According to Tinto (1975), academic integration, suggested that an individual and his or her, social persistence occurs when a student successfully integrates into the institution academically and socially. More specifically, Tinto (1975) examined the impact of academic integration and social integration in college and the impact the two had on the participant's academic success.

Lastly, Schlossberg's (1989) theory, Marginality and Mattering, indicates that students matter and institutions that focus on student involvement and advocate for them achieve greater involvement (Schlossberg, 1989). According to Schlossberg, students of color felt as though they mattered because of their involvement on campus and being a part of organizational activities associated with the university or college they attend.

Research Questions

The following questions are fundamental issues addressed in this study:

1. What role did mentoring play in creating an educational environment that helped empower African American males to graduate?

2. To what degree did mentoring have on your academic success during and after graduating college?

Definition of Terms

Throughout this study the perceptions and lived experiences of professionally-employed AA male participants will be explored as it relates to the impact mentoring had on graduating from institutions of higher education. This study utilizes some key terms that could be subject to interpretation; therefore, for the purposes of this dissertation the following definitions of key terms are provided.

Academic achievement- "The ability to meet the academic standards set by local, state, and federal educational institutions, including positive interaction in extra-curricular and other social activities" (Prigmore, 2013, p. 18).

Achievement gap- This term will be used to represent the disproportion between AA males and their counterparts, ethnically, and across genders. Also, it will be reported statistically based on grades, scores, and high school and college graduation rates.

African-American males- *"*American males of African descent, the term African American, Black, Black Americans, and Black males, may be used interchangeably according to the source" (Prigmore, 2013, p.18).

AA and Black- These terms will be used synonymously in this study.

Professionally-employed- For purposes of this study, "professionally employed" means a job for which a college degree is required.

Non-cognitive Variables- Non-cognitive variables, such as being raised by a single mother, having an absent father, and poverty, helped to describe how participants in this study graduated from four year colleges and universities. Sedlacek (2011) suggested these non-cognitive variables motivate individuals of color, educationally, socially, and culturally to succeed in whatever they chose to do in life.

Limitations of Study

Possible limitations for this study exist. First, the researcher is a Black man who also graduated from an institution of higher education. This may provide a comfortable environment for the participants during the study's interview process and cause the participants to feel the need to say what they perceive the researcher wants to hear.

Second, being an AA man may allow the researcher an opportunity to build a relationship with the AA male participants, offering a seemingly safe place during the interview. However, some participants may feel inclined to say what they believe the researcher might want to hear, based on the researcher's ethnicity. Also, the participants will only be professionally-employed AA male graduates from institutions of higher education. The findings will not be generalizable for all professionally-employed AA males. This study will not examine AA males who graduated from trade schools, military, or AA males who did not graduate from college.

Lastly, the participants will be a sampling of AA males from the greater Pittsburgh area who are professionally-employed.

Summary

This research may provide educators with insight and clear recommendations on how they can begin to provide AA men the tools they need to persist in higher education (Sedlacek, 2007, Strayhorn, 2010, Harper, 2012). As mentioned earlier, it is necessary to understand the issues that AA men face, which could prove helpful for professionals in higher education to understand what they can do to help more AA men persist in higher education.

This chapter provides an overview of this qualitative study of professionally-employed AA males who were formally mentored and have graduated from four year colleges and universities. It provides educators with insight and unobstructed understanding on how administrators and educators can begin to offer AA males the necessary tools needed to persist in higher education. This study will also add to research relating to the persistence of AA men in higher education. As mentioned earlier, it is necessary to understand the issues that AA men face which could prove helpful for professionals in higher education to understand what they can do to help more AA men persist in higher education.

The next chapter will provide a review of existing literature examining the history of AA's in education, AA males who persist in college, and the influences that helped them graduate from institution of higher education. Chapter two also takes a look at non-cognitive factors that seem to be facilitated through mentors and their relationships with AA men in higher education. Furthermore, the next chapter will review related literature associated with AA male college students, while examining the three theoretical foundations of Sedlacek (2011), Tinto's (1975) and Schlossberg (1989).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviewed literature that scrutinized the history of AA males in higher education and their evolution in higher education. The details of the mentoring relationship and the impact that mentoring had on AA males who persisted in higher education was also studied. The review of literature addresses mentoring of non-traditional students, mentoring AA males, mentoring obstacles and how mentoring, formal and informal, are defined. In addition, challenges of mentoring AA males at-risk, factors that contribute to failure, and student engagement and satisfaction will be discussed in this chapter. Also, cognitive and non-cognitive institutional factors that influence the experience of AA males in college will be addressed.

Based on the review of literature, literature will present a gap, showing there is not enough research relating to mentoring AA males in higher education as a conduit for helping in the development of AA men. The final section will examine the theoretical framework for this study, which will include Sedlacek's (2011) non-cognitive assessing readiness model, Tinto's (1975) student integration model and Schlossberg (1989) theory of marginality and mattering.

Hayworth (2014) noted that the minority population in the U.S. is surpassing the non-minority sector and "over the next half century the U.S. population is expected to increase by 50 percent from 275 to 394 million citizens" (p. 12). Hague-Palmer (2013) reported African American males on college campuses in the United States have shown disturbing downward developments for almost half a century. The dropout rate for AA males is higher than any other race or gender.

Moreover, only 33.1 percent earned college degrees, while their counterparts earned degrees at a rate over 54 percent. AA males enroll in institutions of higher education throughout the country, however, their attrition rate has been the highest in decades at four-year predominantly White institutions (Pruitt, 2013).

Several factors contribute to the widespread gap between AA males and other ethnic groups. Factors range from quality of life, substandard primary and secondary school preparation, and nonexistence of a family college tradition (Peterson, 1978). In addition, socio-economic status (SES) may make it impossible for them to go, or continue college. Researchers, Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson, (2009) conveyed that decline in degree attainment in postsecondary education among the members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED) in 2006. According to Bowen et al., (2009) the decline was large compared to previous years. Based on their results, factors aforementioned contribute to the barriers AA males have when it comes to graduating college.

Hague-Palmer's (2013) study indicated the researchers agreed that colleges and universities need to create an academic environment that promotes strengthening cultural engagement for African Americans, in order to counter this narrative. Historically, it has been shown that Blacks have fought for education.

Historical Overview of African Americans in Education

Hague-Palmer (2013) revealed that African Americans' desire for education began in the early days of slavery. However, there were laws that separated Blacks from Whites and it was against the law for African American, male and female, to receive an education. They were considered intellectually and academically inferior in their ability to comprehend complex concepts and skills compared to Whites (Hague-Palmer, 2013).

Bell's (2004) study revealed that Whites believed if Blacks were afforded the opportunity to receive an education, it might improve their quality of life and it would jeopardize America's control of them. African Americans pursued education, while protesting laws that prohibited them from doing so. Blacks sought to educate, emancipate, and improve one another and their people while seeking freedom and suffering hardships, from trying to educate themselves and each other (Cope, 2009).

Harper, Patton, and Wooden's (2009) study suggested a college education is one of the highest academic achievements that many AA males seek to obtain. However, obtaining that level of academic success continue to be limited for this specific population because of countless barrier that continue to go unaddressed by educational leaders, community officials, and governing bodies, who intentionally ignore plight of AA males. Harper et al. (2009) expressed how African Americans did not receive equal treatment, equal rights, or opportunity for an equal education due to slave owners' fear of slaves rebelling against them. Lowery's (2015) study revealed that enslaved African Americans were refused a legal education and for those who tried to receive it or obtain it illegally, were punished or put to death.

Lowery's (2015) study reported that since the early colonization of America, blacks have experienced great racial inequality because of the color of their skin and their history in higher education is a reflection of that fact. Masters (2014) showed, "the history of African Americans in higher education directly correlates to the ways in which Blacks were treated in society" (p.161). The practices of slavery held Blacks as property and submissive to their owners with no opportunity to advance in society upon America's colonization. The thought of Blacks receiving an education was unrealistic, yet, it was a dream held by many (Masters, 2014).

Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) wrote about Alexander Lucius who was the first of three African Americans to graduate from college. According to Harper et al. (2009) in 1823, Alexander Lucius Twilight graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont and three years later, two other African Americans from Amherst and Bowdoin College followed. Although the institutions graduated these three respectively, Oberlin College permitted African Americans to attend in greater numbers. Brazzell (1996) explained the awarding of degrees indicated the start of a movement to gradually expand college opportunity to freed slaves (Harper et al., 2009).

In 1896, Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court argued how the educational system was unequal, as it pertained to African Americans receiving an education in the United States (Cashin, 2003). *Brown v. Board of Education,* concluded that the policy in place for African Americans was not racially equal because Black and White students were being segregated based on a state-mandate (Cashin, 2003). Warren believed, "To separate African American from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone" (p. 341).

According to Brown (2013), African American students are now being embraced in the United States in the desire to achieve an ethnically diverse student population, but history shows diversity did not occur at Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCU) until 1962 (Williams, 1997). "James Meredith, a native of Mississippi was admitted to the University of Mississippi at Oxford after the Fifth Circuit Court overturned the university's decision to deny his admission based on race" (Brown, 2013, p. 13). The ruling was groundbreaking and other forms of racial discrimination since have been outlawed.

Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot (2005) stated racial discrimination has been replaced as "indirect or subtle and invisible institutional forms of racism, which is referred to today as structural inequality" (p. 14). Structural inequalities in higher education are those pre-existing elements that often go unnoticed as a result of being a part of the framework of an organization or system since its establishment. Examples of structural inequality within higher education can include the assumption by a HWCU that all students, regardless of background, will be successful at completing their undergraduate coursework in a climate created to ensure the success of White men (Brown, 2013).

Smith, Altbach & Lomotey (2002) noted being "unseen" at HWCUs, many AA men became isolated on a campus that did not recognize their differences in learning and life experiences when compared to the majority. In addition, failure on the university's part for not considering the impact that creating a climate of inclusion can have on the educational experience of AA men was another example of structural inequality at the collegiate level (Smith et al., 2002).

Lowery (2015) revealed, African Americans represented a small number of education professionals in the United States. However, during the *"Jim Crow"* era, there were several African Americans working as teachers in the South who influenced other African Americans, who later spoke out about the Black teachers who motivated them (Fairclough, 2004). According to Fairclough (2004), part of the decline for educational professionals is due to the lack of authority teachers have over the classroom. Years ago, "Schools used corporal punishment to enhance teachers' authority they would beat the living stew out of you," (pp. 4-5). Today, that has changed, yet, African Americans are still limited access educationally, socially, and most of all professionally.

Mentoring Non-Traditional Students

Robinson (2014) suggested that mentoring relationships be considered for non-traditional students and African Americans because it could benefit a diverse population of people. Historically, in academia nontraditional students have been underrepresented; and as a result, little is known as far as mentoring non-traditional groups of people, and what works for them and under what set of conditions. Robinson (2014) revealed this is true in other disciplines, making it critical for all educational professionals to understand how mentoring relationships for non-traditional students and students of color, differ from relationships with traditional students.

Mentoring AA Male Students

Robinson's (2014) study uncovered AA male students who attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) are the complete opposite of those who attend HBCUs. According to Robinson (2014), AA male students often experienced racial battle fatigue and suffered from identity and self-esteem issues. African Americans males and females, who encounter chronic exposure to racial discrimination, become frustrated, angry, exhausted, and emotionally withdrawn. Therefore, they are likely to experience race battle fatigue. By investigating the impact of mentoring, researchers attempted to address and rectify this problematic issue on a person's identity and self-esteem. Robinson (2014) revealed, "Mentors are individuals who take time to encourage and motivate students while demonstrating to their protégés, we are in this together" (p. 18). The mentality of a mentor is to help make life better for their mentee anyway they can in order to help better them.

Lee (1991) and Loeser (2008), as cited in Robinson (2014), discovered that mentoring had a positive impact on AA males in higher education. However, Lee (1991) was one of the first to investigate the impact mentoring had on AAs in higher education and identify a sense of

alienation as one of the many reasons AA men did not continue, in higher education. Both studies claimed that protégés often felt their mentors provided insight on how to navigate through college academically, as well as culturally. According to Robinson's (2014) study, mentoring inspired AA men to become more socially responsible. Furthermore, it showed that AA men who receive mentoring remained in college, their self-esteem improved, and they stood a better chance at matriculating through college.

Mentoring Obstacles

Several obstacles were identified in studies that tend to prevent students of color from being mentored. Robinson (2014) discovered there were not enough educators of color to facilitate mentoring to students of color at PWIs. Therefore, students of color often resisted pursuing mentors because they felt individuals who did not look like them would not understand them (Sedlacek, Benjamin, Schlosser, & Sheu, 2007). According to the researchers, the obstacles were: "(a) a lack of faculty role models of color, (b) differences in cultural values between mentor and protégé, (c) not understanding the importance of good mentoring to succeed in one's persistence in higher education, and (d) reluctance entering a cross-race advising or mentoring relationship" (p. 19).

Although research indicates that mentoring both impacts and increases retention for students of color, it is also evident that there are many barriers in higher education that impede students of color, specifically AA male students, from receiving mentoring in higher education (Robinson, 2014). Research, also indicates there are AA faculty who experienced the same problems as AA male students, such as insufficient mentoring and professional development (Sedlacek, Benjamin, Schlosser, & Sheu, 2007)

Mentoring Defined

'Mentoring' is not easy to define and the definition varies based on the perspective and the individual who is explaining it. According to Blount (2011), as said before, Mentor is a character created by the Ancient Greek Poet Homer in the *Odyssey*. Homer, depicted Mentor as an educator, counselor, and Ithacan noble, whose job was to protect the son of his friend. Wai-Packard (2009) noted that mentoring usually involved a person or persons with more experience offering tutelage to a younger or less experienced individual or one who may need assistance in his or her life.

Haggerty (2011) revealed that certain individuals believed mentoring is taught to many individuals and to some it comes naturally. She argued that earlier life experiences could possibly be the reason some mentors were able to help students, in multiple areas of their lives, and that mentoring was not instinctive. Haggerty's (2011) study showed the mentor/mentee relationship produced positive outcomes for both.

According to Blechman (1992), most successful mentors use based social-learning to achieve outcomes that are often not produce in low-income communities among the at-risk population. Therefore, Blechman suggested that mentoring programs could be used to help at-risk youth by using a social-learning foundation. Mentors who are well versed in reaching this population are often effective when engaging with students facing multiple concerns academically, socially, and culturally. In order for the mentor/mentee relationship to work, both must be willing to committed and transparent throughout the relationship.

<div align="center">

Informal and Formal Mentoring

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Based on the literature, mentor-mentee relationships can be formal or informal. Most mentoring relationships begin as informal relationships between youth and adults. Ragins and

Cotton (1999) emphasized that the relationship stems from a shared connection. Mentors often select mentees who appear to be younger versions of themselves, and request to mentor them, possibly because they were mentored when they were young. This desire may stem from a need to contribute to the future generation (Erickson, 1963). Mentees, in the early stages, seek productive individuals to emulate. Developing a relationship with this type of individual provides both learning opportunities and maybe career opportunities as well.

Informal Mentoring

Informal mentoring relationships are often described as very personal, intense, and even loving (Kram,1985). Kram (1985) asserted close relationship outcomes are due to a strong bond between the two and a high-level of mutual trust components were necessary for those engaged to benefit the most from mentoring relationships. These strong relationships result in more mentoring functions being provided and more intrinsic and extrinsic benefits for both mentor and protégé. Knowledge seems to play a major role in the development of informal mentoring relationships (Allen, Burroughs, & Burroughs, 1997; Carroll, Feren, Giannantonio & Olian, 1988; Kram,1983;1985).

Mentors select mentees whom they perceive to be skilled since they feel these mentees are more likely to achieve, thus exhibiting positively on the mentor. According to Miller (2007), research demonstrates mentees are inclined to perform better than their peers who are not in mentoring relationships. Mentees select mentors who have the skills they want. Therefore, making it imperative to understand the nature of the informal mentoring relationship since this is what formal mentoring programs are trying to duplicate.

Formal Mentoring

Formal mentoring is a designed program that is structured within an organization or facility. Many programs specify clear goals with training and support while others are more accommodating, relaxed, with limited guidance and encouragement (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Palmer and Gasman (2008) that mentoring relationships develop out of the demands and needs of the individuals involved and the means and opportunities presented to them. For formal mentoring programs to be successful, they must increase the likelihood that this personal merging of needs and resources will materialize. In order, for this to occur, objectives, needs, and goals have to be met and understood, for the processes through which the program and the relationship will work (Harper, 2007).

Challenges of Mentoring At-Risk African-American Youth

Tamika Thompson's (2011) study explored at-risk behaviors that young AA males face faced due to dissimilarities amongst ethnic groups. Thompson (2011) stated "behind every fact is a face. Behind every statistic is a story. Behind every catch phrase is a young person whose future will be lost if something is not done immediately to change his or her reality." According to Thompson (2011), when it comes to young AA males, the numbers are devastating and the reality is disturbing. Across the board, young Black males score well below other racial and ethnic groups when it comes to graduation rates, literacy rates, and college preparedness. Countless AA males are basically being locked out of employment and are flooding the nation's prisons in disproportionate numbers (Amurao, 2013).

Thompson's (2011) revealed the impact that structural inequality has had on both AA men and boys in America. Below are some of the statistics:

- "54 percent of African Americans graduate from high school, compared to more than three quarters of white and Asian students.

- Nationally, African American male students in grades K-12 were nearly 2½ times as likely to be suspended from school in 2000 as white students.

- In 2007, nearly 6.2 million young people were high school dropouts. Every student who did not complete high school costs our society an estimated $260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity.

- On average, African American twelfth-grade students read at the same level as white eighth-grade students.

- The twelfth-grade reading scores of African American males were significantly lower than those for men and women across every other racial and ethnic group.

- Only 14 percent of African American eighth graders score at or above the proficient level. These results reveal that millions of young people cannot understand or evaluate text, provide relevant details, or support inferences about the written documents they read.

- The majority of the 2.3 million people incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails are people of color, people with mental health issues and drug addiction, people with low levels of educational attainment, and people with a history of unemployment or underemployment" (Thompson, n.d., p. 1).

Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, and Casserly (2010) revealed that young black males are in a state of crisis. In the United States, opportunities for AA males are not equal when compared to their counterparts and female peers. Lewis et al., (2010) reported that AA male deaths have increased and their ability to receive medical care is limited. Young Black males continue to struggle social, emotionally, and culturally, but most of all, across America they are underachieving academically, due to the following:

- "They are more likely to live in single-parent homes and less likely to participate in early childcare programs. They are less likely to be raised in a household with a fully employed adult, and they are more likely to live in poverty.

- As adults, Black males are less likely than their peers to be employed.

- At almost every juncture, the odds are stacked against these young men in ways that result in too much unfulfilled potential and too many fractured lives.

- The balances appear to be uneven for young Black males, causing unfulfilled potential and too many lives damaged." (Lewis et al., p. 4)

Lewis et al. (2010) indicated AA males in the United States faced many challenges and on practically every statistic; academically, they performed lower than their peers throughout the country. Although, educational leaders claim to make an attempt at closing the achievement gap, little progress has been made compared to other ethnicities and genders based on the educational climate, in the United State. Educationally, educators are failing many AA males. The United States Department of Education, State and local school districts across the country have made no integrated, tangible, sustainable strategy to close the gap (Lewis, et al., 2010).

Kafele (2012) noted many inner-city black males have short life expectancies and believe they will not live beyond the age of 21. Most AA males want to know and that educators are interested in them beyond academics. Kafele (2012) suggested that teachers build relationships with their AA male students outside of academics and learn to listen to them in order for them to see that the educators care. Also, he believes educators who teach AA males have a responsibility to motivate, inspire, and to assure their AA male students are treated fairly and with respect. Our experiences provide us an opportunity to share and connect with these young Black males, in the hopes of having a positive impact on each of their lives (Kafele, 2012).

According to Kafele (2012) teachers cannot teach to a population that they do not understand, let alone, expect the student to understand them. First, they must learn about AA males' plight and ask themselves what they need to do to inspire them. Many AA males find school to be difficult, especially schools that are predominately White and many times, the climate of the culture makes it almost impossible to equal their counterparts academically (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012).

Corprew and Cunningham (2012) revealed when AA males fall behind their counterparts, they become discouraged and often do not continue their education beyond high school and in many cases AA males' dropout of high school. In addition, AA males, statistically, are suspended or disciplined more often than their peers, ethnically, and compared across genders, for the same offenses that their counterparts commit. Often, as a result, AA males find themselves in prison once they reach adulthood (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012).

The National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families (2012), reported Black males are experiences the largest inequalities among their peers, even though society and political leaders assert they have the same opportunities to be successful in life as

their counterparts. History indicates some AA men have achieved educationally, politically, and economically, however, it is extremely minor compared to their counterparts, male and female, across ethnicities (Cabrera, 2009).

Cabrera (2009) examined the cultural beliefs of 43 White male undergraduate college students who attended two multicultural universities and how they perceive issues of racial inequality. Each participant was interviewed and asked specific questions about racial inequalities, how they felt about it, and what experiences did they have that influenced their beliefs (Cabrera 2009). The participants' responses revealed two conclusions, one group answered as if there was no racial inequality between Whites and individuals of color and the other group questioned the inequalities between themselves and their counterparts. Participants who were unconcerned about the inequalities appeared to be irritated by the questions because they believed things were as they should be. However, the group that was trying to better understand, why the inequalities existed, displayed concern for those of color and were interested in closing the gap towards equality.

Although the Constitution of the United States considers 'All men as equal,' past and current literature, media outlets, and history illustrated the opposite towards AA males in America. Gamble-Hilton (2012) examined the achievement gap between AA males and their female siblings in order to demonstrate how AA males' are underachieved within their own household when compared to their sisters. History portrays people of color, specifically AA males with a negative connotation among their counterparts (Gamble-Hilton, 2012). Furthermore, African Americans, in general, have endured "a lifetime of socioeconomic injustice affecting every aspect of one's life not only economically, but also physically, mentally, and emotionally" (p. 16).

The American Psychological Association (2012) argued "unless more ethnic and racial minority young people achieve higher levels of education and training, the U. S. society in general will fail to cultivate the human talent that is essential for the health and success of our nation" (p. 5). Greene and Winters (2006) reported that in 2003 high school graduation rate impacted the dropout rate among AA male students. AA males' graduation rate was 11 percent less than AA female students, nationally. Collins (2009) indicated "African American males graduate at a rate of 48 percent while African American females graduate at a 59 percent rate" (p. 3). In addition, AA male students in 2003 college graduation rate was 26 percent less than AA females (Greene & Winters, 2006)

Harper (2012) reported AA males ages 15 to 24 died as a result of homicide, and leading the nine other leading causes combined. Harpers' (2012) data indicated there were multiple factors that caused negative outcomes for male and female African American students. An example of this comes from a 2011 article, titled *A Mentor's Goal: Keeping At-Risk Chicago Teens Alive* (Schaper, 2011). In 2010, 27 out of 245 public school students in Chicago were killed as a result of gun violence forcing educational leaders to develop a system that would help keep students safe during school.

In 2010, Johnathan Moy, a project director in Chicago, developed a plan to combat the violence there. Although, his plan was not perfect, it was working and helped identify over 200 teenagers who had a probable chance of being shot and a one in five chance of it happening within two years. The plan identified one of the major factors AA males face daily while trying to receive an education in America. The plan developed in Chicago is an example that could be use in other cities to help decrease the murders of young AA males in and out of school. By developing a mentoring program, the educational leaders were able to provide students guidance,

find jobs, and try to teach life-skills to teenagers in and out of school with the hope of keeping them away from violence. Also, this program has been recognized throughout the country. Based, on the programs' success, it is identified among others in the country (Schaper, 2011).

<div align="center">**Factors that Impact Student Outcomes**</div>

Academic Preparation

Academic preparation is a contributing factor in the academic success and failure of many AA males. AA males tend to need support beyond the educational environment setting and that involves a number of variables, cognitive and non-cognitive. Sedlacek (2011) noted non-cognitive variables are advantageous in influencing each student and delivering sustainable options in measuring the skills for students of color, gender, nontraditional students, and students who may have unique needs.

Sedlacek (2011) stated, "Successful students possess confidence, strong "self" feeling, and strength of character, determination, and independence" (p. 6). Sedlacek (2011) identified specific non-cognitive variables that impact successful outcomes for AA males in higher education. Lowery (2015) argued, in order to achieve positive outcomes, colleges and universities must integrate programs that will increase the academic performance of students of color who are underperforming by creating logical academic pathways.

Graham (2016) reported factors that impact the academic performance of AA male students. Factors cited may include:

- "African American fathers being in prison, leaving young AA males without a male presence in the home
- Single mothers forced to assume both parental roles, as provider and caregiver.
- An increase in high school dropout rates.

- Violence, ranging from fighting, drugs, and shootings leading to an increase in homicides, in urban communities throughout the United States." (Graham, 2016, pp. 8-9)

All of the above among others are major contributing factors impacting student outcomes among AA students in the United States. Fletcher (2015) said, "Since 2000, study of African American college students has concentrated on certain constructs, in higher education that impact African American enrollment, persistence, academic achievement and overall collegiate experience. These studies have investigated variables such as institutional commitment to providing academic support and services for African American college students" (pp. 1-2). Although, there has been an increase in enrollment for AA male students, AA males have not been graduating at the same rate. Therefore, researchers have redirected their focus to studying AA male retention in higher education (Fletcher, 2015).

Cognitive Variables

Fletcher (2015) reported cognitive variables are factors such as high school grade point average, levels of math and English completed, reading comprehension scores and college placement scores. However, these are not the only factors that influence African American male students' outcome in higher education.

Non-Cognitive Variables

Program implementation and curriculum development were not the only cognitive variables that influenced AA male students, according to Sedlacek, (2004, 2010, 2011). Researchers revealed that AA male students were more impacted by non-cognitive variables. Robinson's (2014) study confirmed that using non-cognitive variables influence the persistence of AA college students. The correlation between academic success of non-traditional students

and non-variables allows mentors to stress advantageous outcomes for the mentee. Three of the advantages in utilizing non-cognitive variables to non-traditional students:

1. "The non-cognitive variables are developmental in nature and students can be evaluated on their progress along the dimensions.

2. There are methods available to assess each of the non-cognitive variables in several ways.

3. Using non-cognitive variables allows for the training of mentors around a structure that can be practiced and duplicated for many mentors, so they are operating in a similar and coordinated manner." (Robinson, 2014, p. 29)

Robinson (2014) indicates students are measured using cognitive variables, like standardized and placement testing, that is considered the norm in primary and secondary education, along with SAT and ACT testing in order to gain admittance into post-secondary education. Students, specifically, AA males, are motivated by non-cognitive measures that are normally absent from those standard tests that generally measure verbal and quantitative talent (Robinson, 2014). However, Zell (2011) concentrated more on adjustment, motivation, and student perception. Non-cognitive variables are not limited to academic performance; they also help AA students' persistence in higher education.

Zell (2011) revealed how peer mentoring could positively impact academic outcomes for AA male college students. Furthermore, AA male students, who had someone willing to listen, encourage, and understood them provided an outlet to release stressful issues, such as financial problem back home, past childhood experiences that were holding on to because they felt no one could understand and for some they were ashamed.

Contributing Factors that Cause Failure

Harper and Williams (2014) reported African American and Latino males are frequently stereotyped based on the color of their skin causing both to be discriminated against socially, culturally, and educationally. For years, many have perceived both populations as hopeless, criminals, and unable to comprehend educationally, specifically, AA males. Lee and Ransom (2011) noted, "AA males experienced social and economic vulnerabilities, such as being homicide victims, perpetrators, suicide victims, and HIV and AIDs sufferers; with high rates arrest/conviction and incarceration, high infant mortality, declining life expectancy and high unemployment" (p. 22).

Rolland (2011) indicated AA male's underachievement and failures academically contributed to their lack of success academically. He revealed that AA males experience isolation from early childhood throughout high school in America. The results caused major limitations in their socioeconomic mobility, eventually leading to high rates of unemployment, crime, and incarceration for a substantial number of young AA men. Brown (2013) revealed African American students often felt as if their needs went unnoticed on a campus made up of predominantly White students and faculty.

Mills (1997) noted AA men become disengaged from campus life and develop a lack of confidence in their ability to compete intellectually. Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot (2005) discovered that unrecognized structural inequalities within institutions produce fewer, positive learning experience for AA students. Furthermore, researchers studied the University of Michigan's AA students and found that they were being stereotyped, experienced racial struggles, and were excluded throughout their college career; however, White students stated their college experiences were positive.

Chesler et al. (2005) stated, "White students who do not understand their own racial membership cannot understand the reality and status of students of color" (p. 84). Yet, AA students undergo feelings of isolation and educational problems while White students are frequently blind to issues of race.

Chesler et al. (2005) provided insight, to Black and White students, faculty, and community members experiences, positive and negative descriptions of what it was like attending and working in higher education. The results showed that the climate of the institution impact the way faculty members develop curriculum and their delivery to the diverse population of students (Chesler et al. (2005). Chesler et al. (2005) reported how vital, it is for the office of student affair to be involved with impacting the climate of an institution,

According to Brown (2013), before the 1950s, African American students primarily received bachelor's degrees from Historical Black Colleges and Universities, but by the late 1970s, African American student attendance shifted to where more than fifty percent of these students were attending Historically White colleges and universities (HWCU). Although the change suggested that Black and White students would have an equal education, Black students attending HWCUs continued to be at disadvantaged compared to their White counterparts (Brown, 2013).

Brown's (2013) study noted AA students' struggles are beyond their coursework and that in higher education structural inequality remains, both academically and socially. PWI have not made enough efforts in providing AA students an education advantageous to their learning styles (Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2000). Holmes et al. (2000) stated, "This is not to imply that predominantly White institutions have intentionally created learning communities that are unresponsive to the needs of diverse student groups" (p. 45).

Brubacher and Rudy (1997) noted institutions of higher education were not created to educate people of color. Orfield and Lee (2004) reported public schools are about sixty percent White nationwide and most White students have little contact with racial minority students. School districts in large cities and the suburbs are mainly segregated, and most of the racial minority schools are very poor and significantly reduce the African American student's opportunity to excel academically. Orfield and Lee (2004) stated it was rare for segregated White schools to experience a lack of funding. Swanson's (2004) indicated Blacks had a little more than a one in two chance of graduating from high school in 2001. Furthermore, in high poverty populated urban school districts, it was even lower. However, Whites had a three in four chance of graduating from high school.

According to Peart-Forbes (2004), in the mid-1990s Black students represented roughly 9.3 percent of students in colleges and universities throughout the country. Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) discovered that Black students, compared to White students, had a lower degree completion rate at all four-year universities nationwide. The study validated a 1998 survey that was conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Census; factors such as being prepared for college, student's family background, personal values, and attitudes were explored. The survey also explored how a lack of financial aid affected racial minority students attending PWIs of higher education (Peart-Forbes, 2004). In order to find a resolution, institutions of higher education must change in order to meet the needs of racial minority students while continuing to hold on to the federal support that currently exist (Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2000).

Student Engagement and Satisfaction

Bowden (2014) described student engagement as the amount of time a student puts into his or her academics and how much the university invests in helping its students achieve academically. According to Bowden, AA males at PWIs need extra attention academically to help close the existing gap between them and their counterparts. Chickering and Gamson (1987) shared their 7 best practices in higher education. These seven principles are: (a) "encouraging contact between students and faculty, (b) developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, (c) encouraging active learning, (d) giving prompt feedback, (e) emphasizing time on task, (f) communicating high expectations, and (g) respecting diverse talents and ways of learning" (p. 2). These principles are used as guidelines for faculty members, students, and administrators with support from state agencies and trustees to improve teaching, learning, and student engagement.

<center>**Summary**</center>

The literature presented a historical overview of AAs in education and addressed possible reasons for the persistence of AA males in higher education. In addition, it discussed the mentoring of non-traditional students, mentoring AA males, mentoring obstacles, and how mentoring is defined, along with models and programs of mentoring. Also, cognitive and non-cognitive variables that might be useful for assisting AA college male students graduate and the challenges of mentoring at-risk AA males; factors that contribute to failure, and student engagement and satisfaction was discussed in this chapter, as well as the institutional factors that influence the experience of AA males in college (Hague-Palmer, 2013). Many of the factors presented serve as an indication for the reasons many AA males in higher education do not continue (Robinson, 2014).

Chapter three will address the research methodology that will be utilized to implement this study. Also, chapter three will describe the purpose of the study, research methodology, research design, participants and setting, the piloting process, data collection, data analysis process, interview questions, ethical considerations, reliability and validity, and a chapter summary.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of African American men who graduated from four-year colleges and universities, who were mentored during their undergraduate years, regarding the impact mentoring had on them completing their degree programs and their success in life since graduation. This study offered these men an opportunity to speak specifically on the impact of having a mentor and the educational needs for African American males to help them graduate college.

Qualitative methodology was chosen for this study as this method allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how being mentored while in college impacted the participants in this study. Creswell (2007) referred to qualitative research as that which utilizes interviews and involves a process that enables the researcher to submerge himself into the lives, perspectives, and feelings of the participants.

Data were gathered through a series of personal, in-depth interviews with eight African American men, who hold a four-year degree and are professionally employed, as well as an examination of personal artifacts that demonstrate how mentoring impacted them during and beyond their college careers. The face-to-face interviews were conducted over a span of two to four weeks for a period of no more than 60-minute session per participant.

Research Questions

This study used information gathered during in-depth, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews, examining the perceptions of African American men who hold a four-year degree, and are professionally employed.

The study examined their perceptions on how having been mentored impacted them during and beyond graduating college. This basic interpretive qualitative approach addressed the following research questions, which guided the study:

1. What role does the institution play in creating an educational environment that helps empower African American males to graduate?

2. To what degree did mentoring have on your academic success during and after graduating college?

This chapter presented the research methods and research design for this study. In addition, detailed the significance of qualitative research, awareness from relevant theorists, and information on how the data were collected and analyzed. A description of the research methods, the timeline for this study, and ethical concerns that required consideration was explored.

Research Design

In this study a qualitative interpretive approach was used to investigate the perceptions of six to eight AA men who graduated from four-year colleges and universities (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research was chosen for the study design as this method allowed for an in-depth understanding of how these AA men graduated from a four-year college or university and how being mentored impacted them during college and in their professional careers since graduating. The interpretive approach was appropriate for inquiry into the perceptions of these AA men based on their experience of having been mentored, and allowed these AA men an opportunity to describe the impact mentoring had on them during and beyond their college career. Also, using an interpretive approach allowed for an analysis as to how mentoring helped them throughout their participation, as well as the impact it has had in their professional careers.

Rolland (2011) argued, "Qualitative methods help find the natural solutions to problems the solutions that people devise without policy intervention" (p. 15). Furthermore, qualitative research is "a broad approach to the study of social phenomenon; its various genres are naturalistic and interpretive, and they draw on multiple methods of inquiry" (p. 2). In this study, I gathered information from interviewing eight professionally-employed African American men and collect demographic profile data. This qualitative research method allowed the researcher to learn directly from these African American men on how being mentored impacted them while attending college and how it helped them in their professional careers.

Research Participants and Setting

For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted research in the Greater Pittsburgh area which allowed access to the targeted population needed for this study. The selected city allowed the researcher an opportunity to gain the personal perspectives of six to eight African American men who were mentored while in college. It was anticipated that the selected city could be compared to other cities, communities, and diverse regions that possessed similar demographic and geographic profiles.

Participation in the study was limited to African American males who had been mentored during their undergraduate years. All participants were graduates of a four-year college or university and professionally employed. Each, were of African descent and had completed their bachelor's degree from four-year colleges and universities. Qualifying criteria was established to ensure that the sample population was representative for the intent and purpose of this study.

General criteria include the following:

1. Mentoring status: Must have been mentored in a mentoring program (targeted) designed to specifically support African American males during their undergraduate years or who were either formally or informally mentored by a college/university-affiliated employee or organization.

2. Educational status: Hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited college/university Geographical location: Lives within the Greater Pittsburgh area.

3. Career status: Professionally employed in a career field that requires a bachelor's degree. For purposes of this study, "professionally employed" means a job for which a college degree is required.

4. Geographical location: Lives within the Greater Pittsburgh area.

5. Age demographic: Over 21 years of age

Research excluded individuals who were not AA men who have graduated from four-year colleges and universities and had not participated in a targeted mentoring program as an undergraduate.

The researcher, throughout the past several decades, associated with African American men who have worked with programs designed to support African American male students' academically, socially, and emotionally in order to prepare them to be productive members in society. After the IRB approval was granted from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, based on these acquaintanceships, the researcher contact selected individuals associated with mentoring African American males asking them to provide a letter of invitation/informed consent pertaining to this study to individuals who they believe may meet the inclusion criteria and be interested in participating in this study; this occurred by email or personal contact.

In addition, the interview protocol was provided so that prospective participants can consider this when deciding whether or not to participate. This method was utilized to avoid any specter of coercion or to avoid any ethical considerations that may exist between these intermediaries and prospective participants. Once the researcher heard from interested prospective participants, personal contact was made to assure that they met the selection criteria for this study and to answer any questions that they may have regarding the study.

Prospective participants were assured that they may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher by email, phone, or in person; if the interview was underway, the participant could simply exit the interview. Eight individuals participated in this research project. Prospective participants had one week to decide to participate and return the signed consent form via email or in person. A follow-up email was sent to remind those potential participants who contacted the researcher but did not respond to the opportunity to participate by returning the informed consent form.

There was no true study site for this study as it was being approached as a purposive participant selection process as described above. However, the interview session for each participant lasted no more than approximately 60 minutes and was held at a mutual and convenient location that the researcher and study participant agree upon. Each interview was audio taped to insure an accurate transcription as per the informed consent letter.

Once participants were identified and signed informed consent forms secured, a time and place for the interview was agreed upon. Prospective participants were provided with the interview protocol. They were afforded time to reflect upon their responses. As per the informed consent letter, participants were also asked, if available, to provide any artifacts or documents that demonstrated the value mentoring may have had on them during and beyond college.

One semi-structured interview protocol was developed for this study by the researcher and was utilized when conducting the interviews for this study. The questions were designed to gather the perceptions of African American men who graduated from four-year colleges and universities and were formally mentored during their undergraduate college programs, to gain insight, on how being mentored benefited them during and beyond graduating college. For the purposes of confidentiality, each interview participant was identified by a pseudonym, as well any other identifiers. Participants were reminded that they may withdraw at any time from participating in the study, if they so desired, by contacting the researcher via phone, email, or in person. Furthermore, all data are stored in a locked cabinet, in the researcher's home office for three years and then destroyed, pursuant to federal regulations.

Expert Panel

An expert review was implemented to gauge the quality of the interview instrument and to identify any potential research bias. To improve the interview protocol, the researcher interviewed two individuals that met the criteria of potential participants for this study. Using the prospective protocol questions, each individual was asked to answer each question as if he were participating in the main study and to comment on the clarity of the questions. At the end of the interview, each individual provided feedback on the entire experience of being interviewed with the protocol.

Revisions were not needed according to the respondents' feedback and the researchers own experience of using the protocol. The researcher audio recorded each interview session, in order to review, and made necessary revisions to improve the interview protocol. No information from this expert panel was used in the main study and was destroyed after the interview protocol was improved via feedback received.

Interview Protocol

The research questions that are associated with the interview questions are included in the

Research Question/Interview Question Matrix (Appendix B).

1. In general, describe your undergraduate experience.

2. Describe the type of support the University you attended provided African American male undergraduate students.

3. Discuss how your undergraduate degree from the college or university you attended has played a role in your professional career and if being mentored had any influence on your career choices. If so, how?

4. How would you describe the role and significance mentoring had on you at the university or college you attended?

5. Discuss your thoughts on how the university or college you attended prepared you for today's society.

6. How do you envision the roles of formal/informal mentoring at colleges and universities in the future?

7. Explain how you believe being mentored helped you during and beyond college.

8. Discuss your point of view on the educational relevance for African American males attending institutions of higher education, and do you believe it is helping or hindering them in society?

9. Discuss your point of view on the educational relevance of having mentors in institutions of higher education and how it impacts African American male students at colleges and universities?

10. Describe your level of campus engagement and involvement in clubs, organizations, groups, and/or other campus or student life activities and how did doing so help you persist during college?

11. What is the modern day need for formal mentoring programs for African American male students in institutions of higher education today?

12. Is there anything related to the topic of mentoring that you would like to share with me not asked in this interview?

For this qualitative study, an expert panel was used to provide feedback for the interview protocol created by the researcher. Lu and Gatua (2014) stated "the task of an expert panel is to keep the researcher honest by probing for biases, seeking meaning and clarifying the interview questions" (p. 7).

The interview protocol was utilized with two African American men who graduated from four-year universities and are currently professionally employed. Each individual was asked to respond to each question as if he were involved in the main study and also to comment on the clarity of the questions. Both were audio recorded and at the end of the interview, each was asked for feedback on their interview protocol experience.

The expert review was audio recorded in order for the researcher to review, assess, and revise the protocol after the interview was finished. This method helped the researcher improve the interview protocol being use to collect data for this study. No information from this expert review was included in the main study, nor, was any data collected from the review used in the actual study.

Data Collection

Data were gathered using three methods and was triangulated for this qualitative study. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used; and in case this type of interview could take place, a telephone conference interview was established as an alternative method to collect data. The semi-structured interview was developed by the researcher to utilize when conducting the interviews; a review of one relevant artifact from one of the participants was gathered and the researcher's observations, thoughts, and reflections were audio recorded, which helped with data transcription. Field notes were also used to gather as many details about the interviews as possible.

The interview questions were designed to gather the perceptions of six to eight AA males who were mentored during their undergraduate college program, in order to gain insight on how being mentored benefited them during and beyond graduating college. For the purposes of data collection and interpretation, each of the interview participants was identified by a pseudonym. This technique assisted the researcher in protecting participant's identity.

Each interview session was no longer than approximately 60 minutes in length. Probe techniques were used to follow up on any specific areas of interest, concern, and/or uncertainty that needed to be further clarified by the researcher. Member checking was utilized following each interview to ensure transcription written word accuracy for each of the participant's responses. Face-to-face interviews were used for data collection and all interviews were audio-recorded. Each participant's interview was recorded and transcribed immediately following the interview process.

Data Analysis

All data collected in this study were transcribed, read, and coded by the researcher. Identifying specific statements in the transcripts provided information about the perceptions of each participant and helped the researcher organize them and find the patterns related to each interview question. In this study, data analysis consisted of coding the interview transcripts into themes, so that a narrative could be developed. Creswell (2012) refers to "coding aggregation" as the process of identifying and coding categories of information that can be used to discover themes and/or patterns during the interview process. The researcher matched and identified research question with the individual responses of each interview participant. Member checking was utilized following each interview session to ensure transcription accuracy of all the participant responses.

According to Brown's (2013) study, it is crucial to set aside existing biases that might impact the validity of the data in relation to the phenomenon being studied. Coding is the process by which significant words or statements are logged and categorized and speaks of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon. From the coding process, units of information called themes are developed. The themes exist to categorize the participant's experiences with the phenomenon into meaningful units of understanding.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers believe validity and reliability must be addressed in all studies and accuracy, dependability, and credibility of information depend on it (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 1990). In quantitative research, the ability to replicate the results of a study determines reliability. However, in qualitative research, notions of reliability and validity look different. In qualitative studies, the terms quality, rigor, and trustworthiness are seen instead of

validity, and dependability is seen instead of reliability (Davie & Dodd, 2002). Therefore, it is important that the researcher's interpretation or explanations of the research study participants are valid to the reader (Creswell, 2013).

Validity in qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher, as the researcher is the primary instrument. Creswell and Miller (2000) reported determining validity in qualitative research is challenging. The researcher in this study relied on his experience and the available literature to address the issue of validity and reliability. In qualitative research validity has to do with description and explanation, and whether or not the given explanation fits a given description. Engaging multiple methods, such as observation, interviews, and recordings lead to more valid, reliable, and diverse explanations of experiences. To improve the analysis and understanding of the research participants, triangulation was used to provide validity and reliability to the researcher's interpretation of the data collected from this study. Creswell and Miller (2000) showed qualitative researchers can use investigator triangulation to consider the ideas and explanations generated by studying the research participants.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research methodology of this qualitative basic interpretive study and to summarize the methodology process. This method was used because the researcher intended to focus on the research participants' experiences and interpretations of how being mentored impacted them during and beyond college. A significant amount of data, were obtained through different forms including triangulation, interviews, artifacts, field notes, and member checking to assure this qualitative study pulls from multiple sources. With each of the interviews being the primary source of data collection, the researcher was encouraged to develop a well-crafted procedure for securing information inclusive of

questions that were comprehensive and would promote open dialogue among participants of the study. Also, in this chapter Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted through Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The IRB was to assure that this study conducted the use of ethical standards; it helped determine the worthiness of the research and assisted in assuring the protection of privacy for the participants.

Finally, all potential participants were given the option to choose to participate in the study and a commitment to preserving their privacy and confidentiality was provided. They were informed that pseudonyms were used instead of their real names, in an effort to protect their privacy and maintain the reliability of the study's findings. They were also informed that recordings, transcripts, and notes will be maintained in a locked location during and after the study and available only to the researcher. There were no known risks associated with participating in this study. No names or any other identifiers were used in this dissertation research and/or in future publications or presentations. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me by phone, email, or in person; even if the interview was underway the participant could have withdrawn, by simply exiting the interview. If this had occurred, all information provided would have been destroyed immediately.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter represents the findings from interviews conducted by the researcher based on the perceptions of eight professionally-employed African American (AA) males who graduated from four-year colleges and universities. The interviews were conducted in an effort to gain a better understanding of what is needed for AA males to graduate from college, and how being mentored helped them during and beyond college. In addition, challenges to academic success, and solutions for increasing academic success were considered. Through analysis of the data, insight was gained with regards to the various social and academic factors impacting these former graduates. Subsequently, three themes emerged:

1. having a mentor affiliated with the university or college helped participants in this study socially and academically,

2. organizational involvement provided the participants with individuals that had a positive impact on them, and

3. being mentored encourage perseverance through accountability which led to graduation.

The two research questions guiding this study were:

1. What role did the institution that you attend play in creating an educational environment that helped to empower African American males to graduate?

2. To what degree did mentoring have on academic success during and after graduating college?

Participants in this study were requested to respond to interview protocol questions concerning AA male students in higher education who were mentored (See Appendix A).

This study reports participants' perceptions of their experiences while pursuing their undergraduate degree. The emergence of themes through data analysis and factors contributing to the participants' success are discussed.

Demographic Analysis

Eight former AA males who graduated from four-year colleges and universities and were mentored formally and informally during their undergraduate college experience by individuals affiliated at the university or college they attended were included. In this study, seven participants graduated from Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and three participants graduated from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The ages of the participants ranged from 45 to 71 years of age; four participants were in the 45 to 50 age range, three participants in the 51 to 54 age range, and one participant was seventy-one years of age. (Figure 1).

Age of Participants

- 45-50
- 51-54
- Over 55
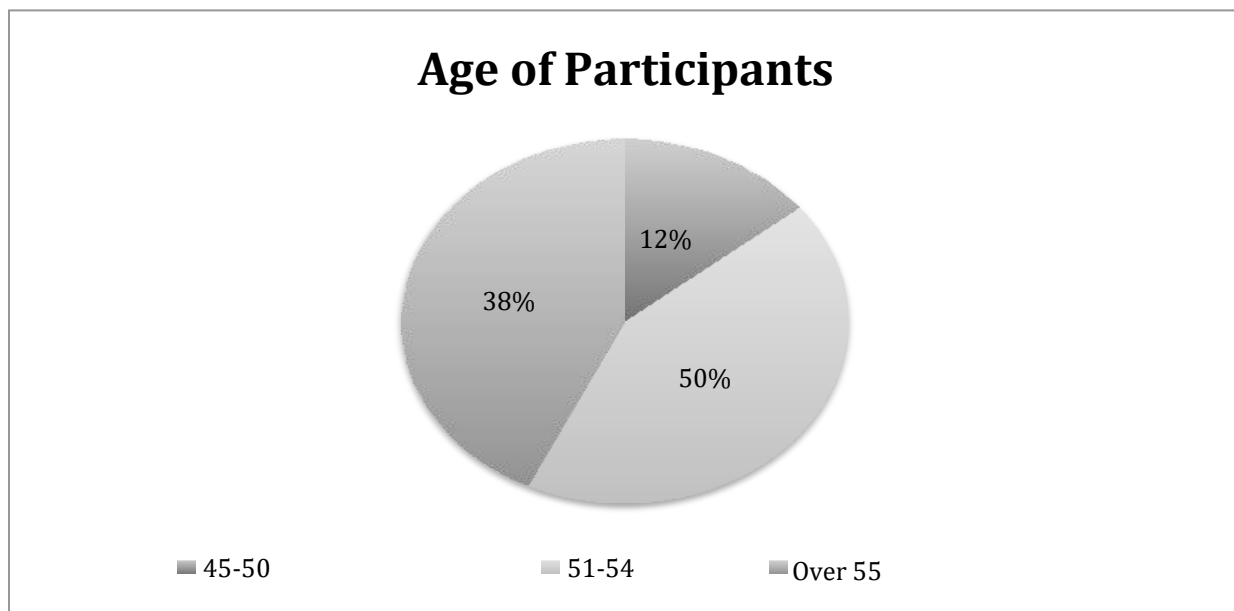
Figure 1. Age of participants.

All participants live in the Greater Pittsburgh Area of Western Pennsylvania. While studying in

college, two participants earned bachelor degrees, five earned master degrees, and one earned a

doctorate degree. While studying in college, these participants' area of study varied: Three

majored in education, and the rest comprised and included Criminal Justice, African American

Studies, Business Marketing, Architecture, City and Urban Planning, Political Science.

Highest Level of Education

12% Doctorate

18% Master's

70% Bachelors

- Bachelors 70%　- Masters 18%　- Doctorate 12%
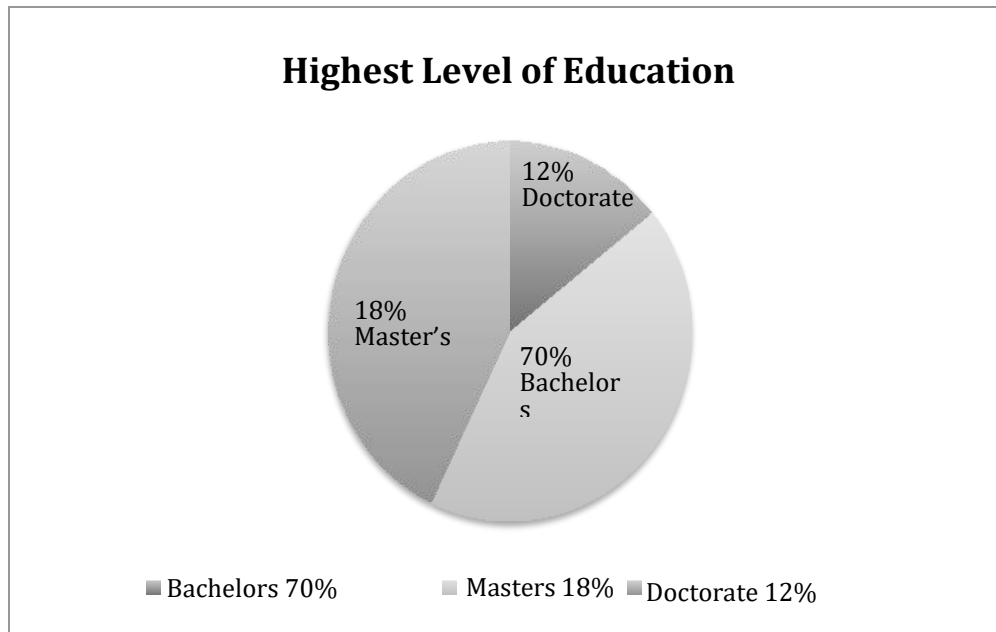
Figure 2. Participants highest level of education.

Undergraduate Major

1st Qtr 8%
2nd Qtr 9%
3rd Qtr 9%
4th Qtr 9%
5th Qtr 9%
6th Qtr 56%
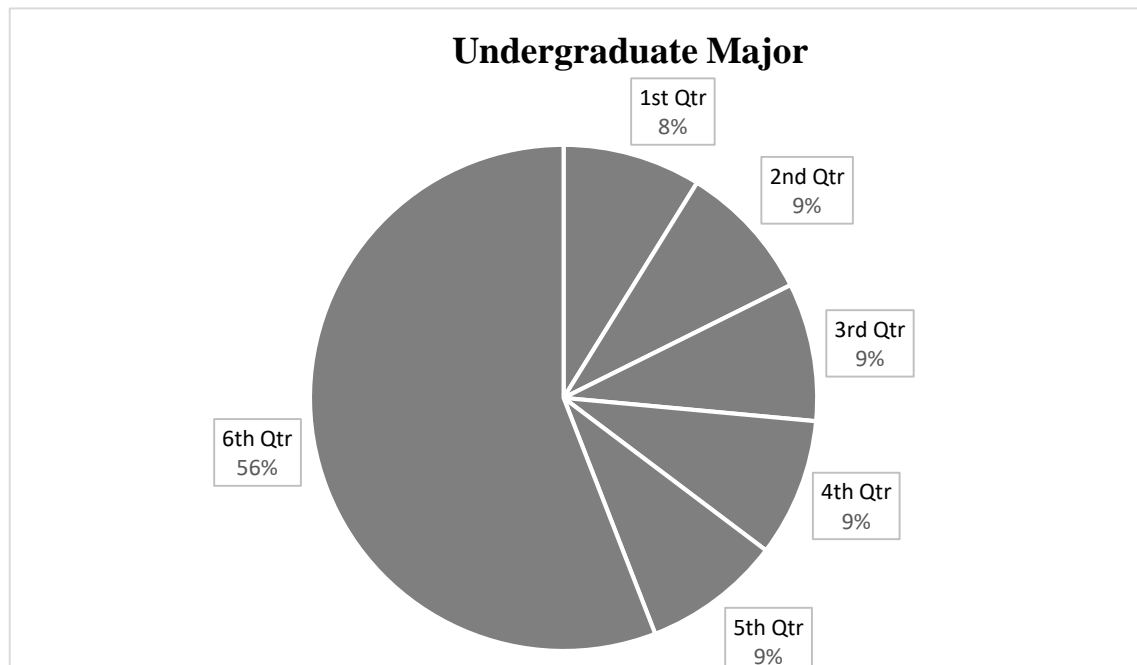
Figure 3. Participants undergraduate major.

Note: 1st Quarter = Education, 2nd Quarter = Political Science, 3rd = Architecture City and Urban Planning, 4th Quarter = Criminal Justice, 5th = Business Marketing, and 6th Quarter = Education.

All participants were mentored during their undergraduate years, some had multiple mentors and two had the same mentor during their undergraduate career. Only one of the participants was raised in a two parent home and the rest were raised by their mother. Also, six of the participants indicated they were members of Black Greek Fraternal organizations, while the other stated they were involved in different clubs that were a part of the college or university they attended.

Table 1

Participant's Years Formally Mentored, Graduate Year and how Many Years for Degree

Completion.

Junior	Jet
Formally Mentored 4 years	Formally Mentored 4 years
Graduated 1989	Graduated 1987
Degree Completed in 4 years	Degree Completed in 4 years
Mike	Osis
Formally Mentored 4 years	Formally Mentored 4 years
Graduated 1993	Graduated 1986
Degree Completed in 4 years	Degree Completed in 4 years
Dee	Xavier
Formally Mentored 4 years	Formally Mentored 4 years
Graduated 1989	Graduated 1989
Degree Completed in 4 years	Degree Completed in 4 years
Rep	Steel
Mentored 4 years	Mentored 4 years
Graduated 1997	Graduated 1968
Degree Completed 4 years	Degree Completed 4 years

All of the participants indicated that they were involved in mentoring programs from kindergarten to higher education and in their professional careers, since leaving college. Currently, two of the participants are professors, one at a community college and the other at a four-year university. The third educator, now retired, was also a high school football continues to mentor African American males weekly. Fourth participant is CEO/President of a nonprofit organization, while the fifth is CEO and Managing Partner of an Acquisition Group. The sixth is a Pastor, seventh a Probation Officer and the final participant is a Pennsylvania State Representative.

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Table 2

Participants Current Professional Position

Participants [pseudonym]	Current Professional Position
Junior	CEO/Managing Partner of Acquisition Group
Jet	Professor at a Four-Year University
Mark	Probation Officer
Osis	CEO/President of Nonprofit Organization
Dee	Professor at a Community College
Steel	High School Teacher/Coach- Retired
Xavier	Senior Pastor at International Ministries
Rep	PA State Representative

One of the participants shared his yearbook that illustrated his undergraduate college experience. All the participants in this study currently participate in some form of mentoring program in their professional and personal lives.

Common Experiences and Themes

After careful review of the interview transcripts of each participant in this study, the researcher identified commonalities and perceptions of the participants about their undergraduate experience. All of the participants expressed how much they appreciated being asked to participant in the study because they wanted to share their experiences. The following sections identify themes that emerged from the interviews with the eight participants in this study. Themes were discovered through analyzing the transcribed audio recordings used to transcribe significant statements made by participants interviewed during this study.

The following sections will begin by exploring how the participants felt about their undergraduate college experiences, whether they were positive or negative, and how they persevered based on their interview responses. This is an investigation concerning the impact mentoring had on the participant's life during and beyond college as well as the specific things

that the participants identified as factors that contributed to their academic success during and after college. The last section contains an assessment of the emergent themes that evolved from the interviews. The emergent themes will include the areas in which the participants explain how being mentored impacted each of them personally and professionally. Each participant will identify the importance and address the need for providing mentoring programs at the college level.

Factors Influencing Student Success

Harper (2012) argued that individuals concerned about the plight of AA men and have had similar experiences, yet, managed to succeed, should be sought to help young Black males educationally. In addition, educators tasked to educate AA males must have a better understanding, commitment, and empathy towards the advancement of this population. Moreover, higher educators must acknowledge the inequalities that exist across the spectrum within education between AA male students and their counterparts if they expect to close the existing educational achievement gap (Harper, 2012).

According to Harper, "Black male undergraduates must be counterbalanced with insights gathered from those who somehow manage to navigate their way to and through higher education, despite all that is stacked against them—low teacher expectations, insufficient academic preparation for college-level work, racist and culturally unresponsive campus environments, and the debilitating consequences of severe underrepresentation, to name a few" (Harper, 2012, p. 3).

Undergraduate Experience

Each participant was asked to describe their undergraduate college experience while in college. The responses varied from negative to positive and the following is how each one responded.

Junior [pseudonym] stated "at the university I attended my undergraduate experience from a social aspect where I met a lot of great people and built a lot of long lasting relationships, so from that standpoint my undergraduate experience was good. However, from a professional standpoint, it was lacking… I really did not receive any guidance at my undergrad university. African Americans were isolated… it just wasn't a good experience for me as far as professional development."

Jet [pseudonym] attended a very large institution and clearly was excited about sharing his undergraduate experience. The neighborhood that he grew up in did not allow him to see many within the neighborhood go to college, and Jet realized that he wanted more out of life than his environment depicted.

I had a wonderful undergraduate experience. I attended the University of Success College Park, and I grew up in New York City with a single mom… for me, it was incredible. Although the University of Success was a Division 1 school, we had a lot of students, forty-five thousand students, but a small population of African American male and female students, but we were very tight. Back then when I was in college, eighty to the mid-eighties, the fraternities and Greek life were very active… and I was also pretty much active among my organization in terms of engaging other students and so forth… so in general, I had a great undergraduate experience. Looking back, I think I could have taken my academics a little bit more seriously. However, like most young kids, you think you know it all and you learn over time. Overall, I really enjoyed it. I am glad I lived on campus, it helped me learn a lot about myself and others, and again coming from New York, growing up in a predominately African American community and going to a predominately White campus opened up my eyes tremendously.

Mike [pseudonym] was one of two former student athletes who participated in this study and because of an athletic scholarship he was able to attend college, free of charge. Although, he attended a predominately White institution, he described his experience from an athlete's perspective and his being a member of a fraternity during his undergraduate years. Therefore, his perspective differed from the participants who were non-athletes in this study.

There are many aspects of my undergraduate experience, both academically and athletically. I was recruited to play football and it helped mold my experience, in addition, to having a friend that I graduated high school with, attending the same college. Also, I was in a fraternity as well. There were a number of different experiences I may have had that your basic undergrad did not, due to that. Based on that, I believe that a lot more was provided for, as far as help and support. Both, as an athlete and fraternity member, there was mentorship. Actually, some of the staff members at the university I attended were members of my fraternity. Overall, there was a lot of opportunity for me to grow because they were invested in me.

Osis' [pseudonym] undergraduate experiences seemed to be filled with several incidents that caused him to transfer from the university he was attending. These took place for him at his first university and ultimately lead him to another university that he reported as not any better.

My undergraduate experience was very challenging, I started off at Eden University and my first set of experiences, they were racially charged. My freshmen year I had experienced several cases of racism from college professors and the university's police department, faculty, and everyone. I was instructed by several professors to drop their course because they said they had never taught a Black student before. I was stopped by campus police for walking and talking with White female students and the police told

me if they saw me interacting with the White female students again that they would break my legs and I had White individuals at the university write 'Nigger' in the dorm which I stayed. So, I was an angry Black man while I was in college because coming out of Diversity High [pseudonym] which was one of many public schools in the inner city of Pittsburgh, I went to school with a diverse population of people. Although we were not best of friends, we respected each other. In some cases, we were good friends and there was a mutual respect for one another and the neighbor. My experiences at Eden University really rocked my academic foundation to its core and it really set me on a journey to really challenge what is equity and inclusion and what does it really mean to be treated with equality and as a result of those experiences my first year of college was tainted.

He added:

I transferred from Eden and I fell into an even worst situation. What I appreciated at Eden University that I didn't appreciate while I was there was the racism was in my face. So it allowed me the opportunity to address it and respond in a way that I knew where people were coming from. I knew whether they wanted me to be in their space or not. Although it was very uncomfortable it was clear and academically I had a 3.8 grade point average. After that experience and a couple of incidents at that university I thought it prudent to transfer somewhere else that was more sociable and applicable to what I felt was a healthy environment, so I transferred to Inclusion University [pseudonym], which was another state university in Pennsylvania. Unbeknownst to me, people were nicer to me, but they were just as racist and it was disarming because people talked to you as if they really cared, but when pressured and pushed in many cases the professor

at Inclusion had heard about me from the professors at Eden, so they had already formed an opinion about me that I had not known… However, it wasn't until another professor told me that they had already heard about some of my activity at Eden and they kind of prejudged me and did not allow me the student to appear fully present. Withstanding, I had several incidents at both the universities, resulting in my having to appear before the judge, judicial and review board, in both cases I was placed on probation with potential termination from the school.

Dee's [pseudonym] experiences were different from the above participant's. He attended a Historically Black College and stated:

> My experience was very instrumental in making me who and what I am today, mainly because I really appreciated attending an HBCU (Historical Black College and University). By attending an HBCU, I was able to sit next to and witness first-hand the achievement of my peers. Everybody in my classes looked like me, had similar backgrounds, and one of the things I really enjoyed was the comradeship and support that I received starting there and I still continue to receive, which I think is one of the duties of an HBCU. Those relationships continue above and beyond graduation, I remain in contact with a lot of people I went to Powell University [pseudonym] with which is great! My experience was good and the only negative experience was the lack of financial support that Powell University had. The lack of support received financially and there were always issues of accreditation and financial problems each year that the other State colleges did not have to worry about. Other than that I really enjoyed attending an HBCU.

Steel [pseudonym], the oldest participant, was very enthusiastic about sharing his

undergraduate experience spoke about some of the famous people he encountered during his

collegiate career. Steel spoke with pride and honor because he was the first in his family to

attend college due to an athletic scholarship he received.

In 1964 I attended Carter G. Woodson College [pseudonym] in Jacksonville Florida, all

Black college still going strong. I was on an athletic scholarship. I had the experience of

participating in sports and receiving an education and my B.S. degree (Bachelors), is in

Physical Education and Health. A great deal of my experience was dealing with a variety

of nationalities, Blacks, Foreigners, and Whites. Also, the south, west, and north around

the globe of all types of students… Dealing with the education part was very interesting

because I had a chance to really see how a Black man could achieve at a Black college

and dealing with other colleges and universities I had the pleasure, experience, and a

blessing to go to other schools like Florida A.M., North Carolina, Savannah Georgia

College, Albany College, and Waco Texas out at Waco College, Bethune-Cookman

University. I can go on and name schools that I have been to participate in the sports and

meet and play against other Black athletes and White athletes… and dealing with my

time I had the pleasure of dealing with football and I use to block for Cannonball Steele

who got drafted by a professional football team, from Carter G. Woodson College. Also,

I had the chance to throw the shotput and discus in college where I had the chance to

meet and greet Mr. Bob Hayes [former Olympic athlete and professional football player]

and Richie Roberts [pseudonym] [former professional world champion bodybuilder] who

became after attending his school Florida A.M. he became world-wide professional body-

builder… There are other athletes I can mention, but dealing with the whole aspect of

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Black colleges and dealing with experience, I think that was very much an eye opener for me coming from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Below is the artifact Steel shared.

Figure 4. Jim "Cannonball" Steele.

Xavier [pseudonym] described his undergraduate experience as "pleasurable" and enlightening while noting that his professors provided him with the support needed at a large university, as the one he attended.

I went to the City University [pseudonym] and I majored in African American studies, so that really enlightened me. Being able to be in a predominately White university, but having most of your classes taught by African American male and female instructors, it was a blessing. Dennis Brutus, who was an inmate with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, Rob Penny famous playwright, and Dr. Vernell Audrey Watson Lillie, Founder

and artistic director of Kuntu Repertory Theatre, were my mentors, so to be at a school like City and to be around so many individuals like; Dr. Larry Glasco, who is was an associate professor in history at City University, focusing on African American history, both locally and globally; there were so many intelligent African American men and women it just enlightened me a lot more."

Rep's college experience was a little different than the other participants. He stated, "It was great, I had a well-rounded experience, I was a little more mature because I came to my undergraduate college career after serving 3 years and couple months in the United States Marine Corps." However, after high school, that summer, Rep attended a small Predominately White College (PWI). There, Rep experienced many levels of racism throughout the institution, which led to him join the Marines.

Summary of Participants' College Experiences

Through examining the audio-recorded transcripts of the one-on-one interviews, the participants' perception of their experiences of their undergraduate college careers were analyzed. Junior considered his to be good, but professionally it lacked guidance from the university. Osis' undergraduate experience appeared to be filled with racial profiling, open and hidden racial discrimination, thereby making his first few years of college challenging. Mike's experience differed from Junior and Osis. As a student athlete, Mike had multiple resources to utilize along with multiple mentors for support socially and academically.

Five of the participants attended universities in Pennsylvania. One of these was an HBCU; three were smaller predominately White universities (PWI) and one major predominately White university with an enrollment of over 34,000 students and one major university out of state with a student enrollment of 30,000 plus. The three participants mentioned

all belong to Black Greek Fraternity organizations affiliated with the universities they attended. Both Dee and Steel attended HBCUs and described their experiences as positive ones based on the institution's structure. Jet and Xavier both attended major universities with a large student enrollment. Both described their undergraduate experience as enlightening, positive, and one of the best experiences they have had in their life. While Rep, described his college experience as positive too.

University Support

Next, participants were asked to describe the type of support the University provided AA male undergraduate students. Participants' responses are identified below.

Junior's response was that the university he attended provided "no support for African American male students."

> Jet, however, expressed, "I noticed that while I was a student at Success there were support systems in place, yet I did not take advantage of a lot of those things we had as I mentioned earlier. Though we had a strong presence of the various Black fraternities and sororities, that was wonderful, I had a few Black male and female professors that were very supportive and there were services, unlike today where there is a heightened tension and awareness around support for African American male students, particularly as it relates to the retention and graduation.
>
> Back then, perhaps it was just that I was not really aware of it, or to seek it… so I sort of stumbled along the way in my journey in my undergraduate experience."
>
> Mike described his undergraduate experience based on receiving an education that was underwritten by an athletic scholarship.

Well I went to a predominantly White university and the Black population was small, so as far as support and programs I can't say that there was any in place. That's why I said my experience was a lot different than everybody else's because I was an athlete, other Black males didn't have what I had as far as support. There were Black guys that I went to school with that ended up dropping out at the end of the first semester because they weren't prepared for school and there wasn't a lot in place to help them out. It wasn't a financial issues these guys just were not prepared academically. They had a program where a lot of the African American students came up over the summertime, but I cannot remember the name of it. The program was supposed to help these students raise up their basic skills so that they would be prepared for college, but I just don't feel that after they came up for the summer there was support for them afterwards.

Osis explained that in both schools there was no source of support directly. He believed that a minority staff person at Eden vouched for him when they were trying to expel him from school after an incident and stated "I think he alluded to the fact that I had a 3.8 grade point average, so I wasn't incompetent and there was something else causing me to act the way I was acting, he basically paved the way for me to stay and finish up my first year because I was already on the verge of being removed from the university."

However, he felt there was not any person or system in place that he knew to go for help, to help him deal with the social constructs in that environment and the academic support that he may have needed that had a cultural context associated with it.

When asked of the individual who spoke… Osis, "was the individual that spoke on your behalf affiliated with the university?" and he replied, "yes."

Dee viewed the question as an oxymoron because the mirror environment and setting of an HBCU mandates and requires a degree of support. "The essence of it is support, it's ongoing and it's not even spoken about because it's just there, it's just present, it's almost like a child who grows up in a home where he has both of his parents. The question of how does it feel to grow up in a single household is foreign to him because he has never experienced that he does not know what that is like. So I always had support at an HBCU because that was just the makeup of the school. That is the reason why they were created to some extent."

Steel shared that one of the main things the students he attended college with had and were required attend to chapel time every Wednesday on campus. Going to the chapel on Wednesdays he stated "showed a big part of ourselves being part of an atmosphere of belief and as an athlete we had to attend chapel every Sunday… that was a part of our education and our experience dealing with a Black college and there was no problem in dealing with the situation of classes because they were very supportive in getting help for all students, not just athletes, if they needed tutoring, extra help, or going to intern for their degree at different schools to teach and it was a pleasure to be there for four years."

Xavier said "Again, this question will be answered positively, but only because my major was African American history. If it was not for my major, I believe that I would not have received any support from the City University. However, if you have a regular degree you are not receiving it, but because of my major I received a lot of support from the other professors."

Jake expressed a response similar to Dee and Steel, "Being that it was a Historical Black College and University they had a program for incoming freshman where I was matched with an upperclassman and a professor in my major who served as mentors or advisors for me.

Therefore, I really got to use them a lot and then from there I built my own network, so there was definitely a support system built in."

Summary of University Support

According to Junior, Osis, and Mike, there was little or no university support of which they were aware. However, Mike had continued support only because the football program was structured to provide academic support for the players. Other AA male students did not have that luxury. According to Mike, some of the guys he started school with dropped out at the end of the first semester because they were not prepared and there wasn't a lot in place to help them out. Jet, believed that there were things in place, but he did not take advantage of them. While Dee, Steel, and Rep were at institutions designed to help African American students succeed. However, Xavier, felt that if he majored in anything other than African American studies his mindset would have been the same as Junior, Osis, and Mike.

<div align="center">

Influenced Career Choices

</div>

Participants were asked to discuss how their undergraduate degree from the college or university they attended had played a role in their professional career and whether being mentored had any influence on their career choices.

Junior explained how his undergraduate experience played no role in his professional career, but that mentoring did play a role, albeit this was from his parents.

According to Junior, mentoring did play a role but it wasn't from his undergraduate experience. Junior stated, "Once I got into the professional world and developed professional relationships with people and got advice from people I figured out what I wanted to do in life and that's how mentoring influenced my career choices."

Jet excitedly said, "Wow, you know I think actually attending the university of Success had a good reputation, I started out in the school of architecture city and urban planning and we had some pretty prominent professors… so that stamp on my resume, in many ways helped me secure my first job working for the Maryland National Park and Planning Commissioning, so that played a significant role in my professional career because it helped me navigate so many things from the hiring process to the interviewing skills and how to conduct yourself as a young man, so many things that our young men need, so I was very fortunate in that regard."

Mike shared what influenced his career choices.

> I'll be honest with you, the first mentor that I had was probably my older brother because it's so crazy growing up in the inner city and watching the gang stuff take over the neighborhoods and it's almost like a lot of the guys that had older brothers in gangs became gang members and my older brother graduated and went into the marines and then became a Pittsburgh Police Officer, so it's crazy that I went into the marines and became a probation officer. So there's no way that I can sit here and tell you that mentorship doesn't influence your decision because my little sister attended college and studied pre-law and then went to law school. Therefore, mentorship is powerful and those examples do influence you and it started early in my life because when I look back I did the same thing my older brother did.

Pressed to describe the impact being mentored had on him at the college level, Mike responded,

> Even at the college level it was huge because when I first came to school I was kicking around majors, I started out as a psychology major and a lot of the guys on the football team were criminal justice majors and I probably lasted … I'll be honest with you I was taking a test and psychology wasn't something I was strongly interested in I had just

picked it because it sounded interesting; not because I did my homework or research, I just picked it because it sounded like something that might be interesting and a lot of the guys on the football team were criminal justice major and I got caught cheating on a test. The dean of the department was actually conducting the test because the professor was out, so once I got caught I threw my hands up and said maybe this isn't for me. So because some of the guys on the team were criminal justice majors I switched over to criminal justice.

This question was tough for Osis due to his freshman experience, yet he explained the support that was and was not provided at the college level.

I would say that it pains me to admit this… the people who mentored me both in high-school and college were White men. They both exhibited an unshakeable faith in me. My high-school teacher convinced me to become part of the governor's school of performing arts which I got selected and in college, my philosophy instructor and he had to really sit down and spend a lot of time with me during my undergraduate experience. Also, there was one African American professor who was an instructor of mine, was very instrumental by being a sounding-board for me, but I don't think he could connect to my urban experience. He was a good mentor on the academic side, in particular around social support, but there are certain nuances of urban experiences that do not translate well academically, but someone has to help bridge that gap. From my experience that didn't happen primarily from the support staff within the school professors. Now, as a result of those experiences it did propel me to want to go in social service area and to provide help and support to systems and people, so that they didn't have my experience. And in that light I've had a number of careers that I've mentored and continue to mentor people and I

know the influence comes from a lot of what I didn't get in my high-school and college

experience from people that look like me.

Dee identified his father as one of his mentors and the question evoked an emotional

reaction. Dee's mentor before and during college was his father, who passed away before he

completed his undergraduate degree.

I was not really quite sure what I wanted to do at the time, I was in school and I knew I

wanted to graduate, but while in college my primary mentor was still my father who

passed away my senior year of college. The mentoring opportunities were always there

when needed but to say I had one specific mentor I could not say that because my status

would change each semester. HBCUs are set-up specifically to help address the needs of

each student, as needed. Based on the situation of the student their academic progress is

monitored and help is provided based on the academic needs of that individual student.

As I progressed, I had multiple mentors throughout my undergrad degree. My advisor

acted as an informal mentor, although they were not called mentors at that time. Another

informal mentor was my dorm director who helped me adjust to my new environment.

Structurally, the HBCUs are designed to do that.

Steel recognized during his undergraduate work and while dealing with other undergraduates, he

could accomplish more, and realized with an undergraduate degree he could pursue a master's

degree in counseling at any other university he wanted to attend. Therefore, after graduating, he

decided to go to City University to pursue a master's degree in counseling., Once there, he had

an opportunity to experience a larger learning environment for his studies, yet, gaining

experience studying with students from multiple backgrounds.

Interacting with groups of students helped prepare him for his professional career after college. He said, "It really paid off because it helped me get a professional job as a teacher." When asked whether he was mentored while he was a student there.

He replied that university had tutors and teachers, and that it was mandatory for teachers to help students if they needed help. "If student's grades were checked out by their advisor for their major they demanded that you go to a certain class and meet with a group for tutoring. Being at a Black college paid off because everyone was sharing, not just to be there but to help one another succeed."

When presenting question to Xavier, did being mentored influence your career choices, he said "Yes, unfortunately at that age a lot of students really don't even know what their purpose or calling is, so I'm at City and I want to go into law and the mentoring occurred through Malcolm X [pseudonym] who was an attorney and that actually influenced my ultimate career choice of being full-time ministry. At the City University my mindset was I took the LSAT [Law School Admission Test] to go on to the University of Duquesne for law, but after Malcolm X introduce me to Pastor DC [pseudonym], who then introduce me to Jesus, my whole career choice changed, but City laid the foundation which allowed me to further my education; as far as influencing my career choice I really did not know what it was at that time."

Rep shared that his undergraduate degree was in political science and believed that he was going to be an administrator working for an elected official. Therefore, his mentor, a professor who taught him, guided him. Rep stated "Dr. Barker [pseudonym] actually led me down this road because he gave me my first real experience working in a governmental office I worked as a university organizer for then congressman Meech Williams [pseudonym]. So it has been a direct influence on what I am doing now."

Summary of How Mentoring Influenced Career Choices

According to all the participants, mentoring was a major influence in their career choices. Professionally, each participant has mentored in some capacity, either formally or informally, and based on their responses it is contributed to being mentored at the college level during their undergraduate years. Although, Junior believed his came after, the fact that his father was a constant presence throughout his undergraduate career as his mentor, directly influenced his career choices after college.

Significance of Mentoring on the Participants

Although, Junior's father was a professor and a constant presence at the university he attended, he believed the lack of mentors for AA male students made it difficult for him and those who looked like him.

There were not any mentors there, other than my parents. I did not have a mentor during undergrad. However, my father happened to be a Professor at the University I attended, so I guess I would say other than my father there was no one else that mentored me at the University that I attended. Let me fast forward… Once in graduate school I worked in the Office of Student Affairs as a Graduate Assistant. There we created mentoring programs designed specifically for African American students and we created programs specifically designed for African American students… I did not realize what I was lacking from a mentoring and professional development experience going to my undergraduate college until attending graduate school at Kaplan State University [pseudonym], so I have a comparison of both schools to draw my experience from and Kaplan State really helped me understand how a school can go out of their way to help develop programs for African American students.

As for Jet, taking part in the study and sharing his experience about a specific person that transformed and redirected his academic focus was humbling and exciting at the same time.

> Wow … that's a very good question because prior to having Mr. Sampson [pseudonym], I was a young guy bright eyed, bushy tail… just trying to figure it out on my own, so I was sort-of hitting some walls, but once I meet Mr. Sampson, he would take me under his wing. He started to share with me his own experiences and he really started giving me some really good tips and then I started taking my academics very seriously. I think that in itself gave me a different perspective and the power of an older man sort-of validating you, gave you that support… it was that additional spark plug that I needed that really got me through my academic journey.

Mike found it difficult to remember all the mentors he had during college, but he was able to share specific moments in which being mentored by coaches, university workers, and peers contributed to his academic and social development which helped him to graduated.

> I'm not going to lie, I graduated undergrad in 1992 and I can't even remember some of the guy's names, but I know one of my fraternity brothers was in charge of academic affairs and he would constantly talk to us and ask us what are our aspirations what did we want to do with our lives and when we chose a major, he would ask why did you chose that major? And if you could not answer that he would talk to you a little more extensively and say man you are not just up here to play football or sports. This is going to be a career thing and after the games and the practices are over what are you going to do as a man to raise your family? So the mentorship was there on that level and it actually put everything in perspective like 'hold on, you're not up here to just play football decide what your future is going to be.'

When asked, whether he prioritized being a Marine or enrolled in college, Mike replied that both were held with high regards because they are both factors in who he is today. Mike was in the delayed entry program. It was the reserves and he had chosen to go into the Marines before he went to college. The program allowed him to attended his first year of college. Mike explained that he went to college, summer-camp and everything, signed up and was in football camp his first summer and then the next summer that he was on his way to Parris Island for active duty.

Osis, referred back to his previous answer, stating that two professors, one White and the other Black, played significant roles in his academic success, but neither could relate to his urban experiences. Once again, "as a result of those experiences it did propel me to want to go into the social service area and provide help and support to systems and people, so that they didn't have my experience. And in that light I've had a number of careers that I've mentored and continue to mentor people and I know the influence comes from a lot of what I didn't get in my high-school and college experience from people that look like me."

For Dee, answering called for a moment of reflection... "Just in hindsight, thinking about the question… all throughout those mentors at different levels… now that I am having a clearer understanding of what being mentored back then meant, they were there, I had many mentors at different levels." Dee found the interesting part about to this was that at different times, his primary mentor was his dorm director, who even after his first two years, continued to maintain contact and monitored his movement as he moved into upperclassmen dorms and then again that was one of the things he liked about the HBCU schools.

Based on the fact that people knew him by name, it was not likely they would see him on campus, calling him out, as if they did not know him. They had been monitoring and

watching him since he was a freshmen and now they were asking him how are doing, how are classes, how are you progressing, and when are you graduating. Dee concluded "These are the things they ask when they are passing you by on campus. So again, academic advisor and dorm director played a significant role, with all of them taking the baton and passing it along at different levels pushing me towards that main objective which is to graduate and helping me out and encouraging me along the way."

Steel stated "being mentored had a big influence on me because I wanted to honestly get my degree and not just play football for four years. After I had a chance to come home my first year for the summer, I went back and did not return home for three full years because I attended summer school. That way I got my degree on time and getting my degree on time was because of discipline and being on task."

Xavier insisted there were a couple people who played a significant role in his undergraduate career.

Two people stand-out, Dr. Vivian Love [pseudonym] who was a phenomenal professor, but she was also a founder of a 'Kuntu Repertory Theatre' and she gave me my first opportunity to perform in plays. Next, was Bob Nichols [pseudonym], Bob was a deep dude because Bob may have had a high-school diploma but he was so good at writing, he was a protégé of Augustus Wallace [pseudonym] and so my love for poetry and African American authors was a result of Bob Nichols. So, to this day even when I minister I get into a play type preaching and that comes from Dr. Vivian Love, so that's over thirty years ago. Even how I preach sometimes, the poetical flow when I preach, I can attribute that to a Bob Nichols and their mentoring, but at that time I did not call it mentoring. However, they both had an impact and pushed me educationally. The

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blessing about taking that particular track was that I had them all four years. I had Dr. Vivian Love this particular African American studies class and in my sophomore year she taught a different one and in my junior year and so on. Therefore, I was able to have three or four Black professors from freshmen to senior year and they were able to monitor my grades and different things like that. However, that was based on my discipline. If I had majored in anything else, I do not believe I would have had that type of support because ninety-five percent of the African American professors at City taught in the Black studies program. You did not have Black professors teaching calculus, world literature, or things like that because all my other classes the electives I had to take were taught by White professors.

For Rep, being mentored was very significant. He stated, "Like I said, I formed a long lasting bond with a lot of my professors in my major there. They helped open my eyes from Dr. Barker to several other men who were men in our department. They connected me when I needed connected, they helped guide me and my choices while I was an undergraduate and we still keep in touch today. So it was very important and a very strong bond was formed between us.

Summary of the Significance of Mentoring

The role and significance of being mentored impacted each participant in a positive way as they spoke and reflected about their mentors with respect and admiration. Junior acknowledged that the university did provide that type of support for him because his father was a university employee. Jet, said he wanted to be just like his mentor and Mike shared that both the marines and college played a significant role in who he is today based on the mentors he had during his undergraduate career. Although, Osis had his difficulties, he acknowledged

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significant professors who help transform his way of thinking. Dee, Steel, and Rep talked about the positive impact HBCUs had on their academic success. Each member described the impact their mentors had on them, the role they played, and the significance of African American male student having a mentor while in college.

University Preparing African American Males for Society

The next task participants were asked to do was to discuss their thoughts on how the university or college they attended prepared them for the real world. Junior said:

It's probably a microcosm of Pennsylvania and as it relates to African Americans, living in Pittsburgh and going to undergrad in Pennsylvania, there was an isolation as it relates to African Americans and everyone else, so it is not a warm environment in Western Pennsylvania for African Americans, in my opinion, and I have lived throughout the country. I have traveled throughout the country and African Americans are embraced far differently, better, in the other cities and areas that I've been exposed to… so again the school, if you had to network with a lot of people you had to take it upon yourself to do it, opposed to people extending an olive branch to you, and from that standpoint to be successful it forced you to be proactive, and I think from that standpoint it helped.

Based on Junior's response, when asked again, "how did it prepare you for today's society?" Junior replied:

I felt that it prepared me to be proactive, outgoing, and forward thinking because there was no openness and we were not embraced as African American men at the university I attended and so you can continue to walk down a path of being isolated your entire life or you in turn have to do things differently to break that cycle. It wasn't until I got older that I realize these are some of the skillsets the intangible personal relationship skillsets

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I need to be successful because they weren't provided at the university, so I guess not

having that there I wanted to be successful. Therefore, it helped me in developing those

personal skillsets from people who don't typically embrace African American males.

Jet on the other hand stated "I think the University of Success at College Park, because it was a

predominantly white school, I was prepared in terms of how to react, engage, and conduct

myself in a predominantly White society. Success College Park was merely a microcosm of the

greater Washington metro area, so I think it really helped me in terms of being able to adapt and

adjust according to my role in society at large, so that was very meaningful and purposeful

experience for me."

Mike shared:

It was like a microcosm of what the real world was going to be for a minority

because the truth of the matter is it didn't dawn on me until after I stopped playing

football because I had a tragedy happen in my family… my mother died my junior

year in college, so at that point football was done. Mentally I wasn't there anymore

and it kind of let me know how life was going to be for this Black male that society

didn't see that same value anymore because I told you part of my whole support

network was the fact that I played football and you know they would provide a lot of

different things like tutoring and everything else for me, but after I stopped playing

football a lot of that went away.

When asked "Did you feel that you were any other student or did you feel like you were like

any other Black male student?"

Mike revealed that he did not feel the playing field was the same. He stated:

I just felt… you know as far as resources go you would see a lot of the other students on

campus that were non-minorities and their families could provide them with the type of

resources they needed to be successful. If they needed help academically they could get

it, but me being a poor kid coming from the city my family couldn't provide me with any

type of support or get me any type of help.Therefore, I really felt at that point I was on

my own to make things happen for myself and how that prepared me for life… that let

me know that a lot of these resources just may not be available to me or… there's another

piece to that if they were available to me I was not a part of the network where I knew

how to access it within the university.

Osis felt that the university he attended never prepared him for the career path he focused

on. He believed it showed him that he was teachable and that he could learn and in that light

he was able to apply the technical proficiency the universities instilled in him academically

to achieve success in the workforce. Osis stated:

When I graduated, my undergraduate degree was in education and I became a

school teacher, but the university did not prepare me for a [public school system].

What I saw and experienced there was never even touched upon in the school setting

and it made it doubly difficult to be effective using incompetent practices that

weren't germane for the social phenomenon that existed in the communities I ended

up working in as a school teacher. To be honest with you, I gained very little from

my academic experience at college that was applicable in my professional work.

When asked of Osis the two individuals that mentored you informally, would you say

through their mentorship it helped elevate you socially, academically, culturally, and

emotionally? His response was "I would say that the two helped me emotionally, to discern that I could make it, and I figure it didn't help me with the other nuances."

Dee believed the university he attended gave him a sense of purpose and direction. He said "It connected and taught me the importance of our people, it taught me the importance of having a support system, and why that is relevant, and it kind of prepared me for the injustices that are Black people are experiencing and what is my role in helping fight against them and how I'm supposed to grab on the heels of other people and provide a platform for them that come after me."

Steel's perception was that an individual needed to be responsible for ones' self. He stated:

Getting prepared really depended on one's self and everything is there at a college or university, classes, professors, and other students might take a chance and want to have too much fun, not do their studies, travel on the weekend and come back on a Wednesday and miss classes, so it was really on the individual the way I looked at it later on in my college years to really stay discipline and obedient and stick with the fundamentals that we were taught as a freshman. In dealing with society, I found myself tutoring, counseling, and guiding the young students and adults and all that paid off because I could have an understanding of where they were coming from and the background from the lessons I had learned. Helping people is the main thing after college because you could pick-up on quite a bit from your mistakes.

Xavier, having had several mentors throughout his undergraduate studies said:

Again, for me it is such a blessing that the discipline I chose because back in 1988 or 1989, I am taking a class taught by Dennis Brutus and to hear him speak about being an inmate on Robben Island, to hear of the radical

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revolutionary mindset and to still see what we are seeing right now, the

Michael Browns and the different injustices, so from an Afrocentric

perspective, City University and their Black studies program prepared me to

be able to handle and understand the mindset of America today, particularly

as a pastor in an urban, inner city environment. Rob Penny and two of my

professors were a part of the 1968 sit-downs after the riots when they chose

to sit-down and shut-down the City University, to make them offer Black

studies and so that mindset of sitting down, protesting to get what they

thought was correct was birthed in me, again, from the Black studies

department only at the City University.

According to Rep, "For me again, I think going to an HBCU was important. When I

first left high school, I actually attend a majority campus, St. Cloud State University, where

I didn't make it a semester. After coming out of the Marine Corps and going to the college I

ended up attending A&T the difference was night and day, so I definitely feel like my

university definitely prepared me for life after.

Formal and Informal Mentoring in Higher Education in the Future

The next question for the participants, from the interview protocol, was determined

how you envisioned the roles of formal and informal mentoring at colleges and universities in

the future?

Junior stated:

Growing up I think from an informal perspective, you have to look at… and I'm

going to focus more on African American… schools like the one I attended and others

don't have a strong population of students. You have to look at these young men and

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women as your guest, when they come into your doors like someone coming to your

house you have to open up the olive branch, you have to be certain that they are

comfortable there because let alone being eighteen and alone off to school there is

another thing… but being off at a school where the university setting does not embrace

African Americans, it's a hard transition for many, so the university has to make itself

more inviting and more welcoming to these students, so that's an informal standpoint

that needs to occur. Now, from a mentoring standpoint… the universities need to

make an attempt to develop mentoring programs for African Americans, whether it's

within their own professors and colleagues at the university, or their external groups

and I will give you an example: I am currently the President of my fraternities

'Scholarship Endowment Fund' of Western Pennsylvania, we are the nonprofit arm of

fraternity. It is a national African American chartered fraternity, we have over a couple

hundred thousand members and we in Western Pennsylvania oversee six schools that

have undergrad members, we've taken it upon ourselves to create a program, a

mentoring program designed to help these young men achieve the tangible and

intangible assets they need, to not only graduate but to get jobs, go to graduate school,

and whatever the source of their desired output is. So the schools could reach out to

the fraternities the alumni fraternities and say we need your assistance on how we can

help us support African Americans on campus, so that's just an example of the

initiative in the steps that the alumni of the fraternity have taken, not the universities.

Moving forward, Jet believed his role as an advisor and a mentor at the university he works

allows him to interact with the young men, athletes/non-athletes and felt it was significant and

wished that he had that during his undergraduate experience. He described what he does as

surgical hands on experience with his mentees, and he thinks that he is able to dig in deeper with the young men and engage them early in their academic experience. For example, many young men come in and he says "here is what I would do if I were you struggling with a course, I would seek tutoring, go here" because very often they don't know and he sense this creates a safe haven for them as young men and maybe in many ways it helps them succeed just knowing they have someone they can talk to and relate to, so he is a major advocate of mentoring African American men and sees how this plays a significant role in terms of the Black male student's experience while in college.

Mike expressed that some of the minority students did not come from affluent families, depressed areas, and were only in college because of an athletic scholarship and did not excel academically. Mike explained:

If they would provide these individuals with someone who will would mentor them… you know just to help them academically and to help them navigate, especially if you are a student coming from the inner city, you throw them in that rural area and I guess if you grew up in the suburbs that would be something different because you're use to a different environment. But when you're growing up in the city an environment is so much different, you are actually adjusting to… I mean before you can even get to the academics you're adjusting to a completely different environment. You need the mentors who will talk to them about it. I am coming from a high-school that was 100 percent Black and then going to a university where you're the minority and you might be two percent of the population… that's a culture shock.

When asked Osis, responded by saying:

 If I had the ability to shape that, I would say that how you can enhance a Black male's experience in a post-secondary environment is to create a mentorship program that both incorporates best practices to work in dominant culture pedagogy and to create a self-cultural support that allows those students to express how they felt emotionally and metaphysically in regards to the experiences they encounter on a day to day bases that may be professional in nature, but impacts them on an interpersonal as a result of what was addressed and not addressed. I think students have to be trained to be more interactive and many of their experiences are evolving experiences their not an event, but their part of the process and school really treats academic trajectory as events and not processes because every semester, students are trying to get a grade. The grade really to me constitutes the event. But the real learning should take place beyond the grade and many students, I know for me in my academic career, I was just trying to get a grade because that was important to get out of school. I never really focused on the learning the applied application that I learned in the classroom. The instructor never illustrated how applicable the knowledge they were giving me was to my environment and what I learned wasn't applicable to where I lived, worked, and played.

Dee began to discuss some of the current and past issues that might be contributing factors to the negative outcomes African American male students are faced with.

 I think now, to be honest with the issues the youth are plagued with today both formally and informally it has to be more hands-on, it has to be more relevant, times have changed the minds have changed, and so in order for it to survive, in order for it to be pertinent it has to be in all these different areas because it's social media and just the information

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passing fast as it does there so many empty areas and pockets where outside negative

influences can impact a person's future, so the informal and formal have to in my opinion

be more cohesive and work together in trying to insure that youth are being mentored and

that they are able to sit through and go through this thing a lot better because there are so

many things thing can get in the way.

When stated, "We are specifically talking about at the college level." Do you believe that these

programs have been implemented or do you believe they need to be implemented? Dee

explained:

I think both, I think they have been implemented, but like some of these things… like

you're talking about a White institution, are there, but the support is not there, and so

any program, if it does not have the backing and support of the faculty, administration,

and all those people it can't really flourish, it can't move forward. They are definitely

there at HBCUs, so they're there, but again without that support they can't provide

what I think they were meant to provide and that is why African American male

students tend to struggle at a predominantly White institution.

Steel envisioned the future of mentoring different from what it currently is. He felt that

because of today's technology, he and other teachers, who have been in the profession for

decades, now have to use technology to connect with people in order for them to respond.

Steele stated, "For youngsters in preschool, first grade and so on… technology is the

language that they are responding to. Therefore, myself, and professors that have been around

for decades have so much to offer, we might be considered old-school, but we can really help

them out with common sense.

Today, many students rely on technology and do not utilize their minds. Some of us older educators are able to help them with the basic fundamental things that are currently being ignored."

Xavier talked of how he would like to see in particular the university that he attended put something in place for those Blacks who do not take African American history as a discipline. The two things that he could see as far as Black students not being able to navigate their way at a university the size of the City University and the university not being able to understanding some distinct needs that African Americans may have in going there.

Xavier stated, "I'd be very interested to see the retention rate with these schools for African American males and how many may come into the university and how many felt lost coming in to a 40,000 plus student university that is predominantly White with no real resources to support them." Therefore, he wanted to see more effort from these universities in recognizing the needs of AA male students, and assist these students because he believes they need guidance.

Rep stated:

Hey look! I use the terminology, 'if it's not broken don't fix it'. If every university had a system like the one I experienced at A&T, I think it would be great. I think you have a student who is a more senior student, a more mature student associate, to help guide a person into the experience of student life. Then, you a faculty member, in the student's chosen profession that is also like a mentor, beyond just an academic mentor, a mentor for questions around what you want to achieve in life. And then surround them with opportunities to grow into their own leadership role, which was what was provided to me at my university, so not only did the mentorship help develop me, but also my leadership

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skills by…. We had organizations that not mandatory, but strongly encouraged by the mentors to help give you a well-rounded experience in college, but it was to get you more socially acclimated in how to do things and build in a group and all that other good stuff, if that is what every university and college put in place I think it would go a long way to helping students be successful academically and develop as leaders.

Summary of Formal and Informal Mentoring in Higher Education in the Future

All participants envisioned the role of formal/informal mentoring as critical for AA male students in higher education. Each contributed his academic success to being mentored. According to Rep, every university should have a system in place like the one he experienced during undergraduate school. He believed that it would be great and suggested that a student who is a more experienced and mature should be put in place to help guide AA males into the experience of student life. Also, faculty can assist these AA males in a chosen profession that is similar to their mentors, creating a relationship beyond academics and preparing them to be successful to achieve in life.

How Being Mentored Supported Participants' Undergraduate Experience

Each participant shared his how being mentored helped them. Junior began by restating, how fortunate he was to have had his father in his life and shared:

 I looked up to my father, respected and revered, coupled with uncles that really took to mentoring me and providing me the things I needed to be a successful African American man, so those mentors which were my family members helped me immensely… so I did not have any other African Americans mentoring me and the school certainly did not provide me with any type of mentoring or help when I attended undergrad other than family members. The school provided me with nothing whatsoever as an AA men.

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Since Junior's father, as a faculty member, was a constant presence at the University he attended, he was asked did it provide you with a resource away from home to motivate and influence you while you attended the college. Junior explained that having his father as a mentor at the same university he was attending, helped shape him into the man he is today.

My father, had a Ph.D., so that interaction with him shaped me into the man I am and constantly navigated me to getting my undergraduate and graduate degrees. If, I did not have him in my life along with my uncles, I don't know what I would have become. African American men, need to develop the intangibles assets needed to become successful. I also believe that it could come not only from African American males but all males or people. If someone embraces you and are really concerned about your development they are your mentor. Unfortunately, my undergraduate university did not provide that. I had my father, who just happened to work at the university I attended. However, let's fast forward to my graduate experience at King State University [pseudonym], where the head of the Minority Affairs became my mentor. Although, administrators on campus became mentors and the school President had become a mentor to me, I had access to them and they really thought enough about me and my well-being to make certain even if I was stressed out about graduate school the encouragement that they provided me helped me to get through and graduate. Again, their interest in me whether they were Black or White, male or female had no effect from a mentoring stand-point.

Jet considered his being mentored during his college experience provided him a solid footing because prior to his mentoring experience his grades were not sufficient and he believed that once he started getting mentored, it gave him someone he could model himself after. Jet

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stated "I wanted to be like him, I wanted to reach towards what he was and that was what really jump started my interest in taking my academics more seriously, so I would say that's what helped me significantly in terms of school."

Afterwards, Jet joined the Marine Corps, which also played a role in him becoming disciplined. He said "that band of brotherhood with young men additionally helped me as well."

According to Mike, his mentoring occurred before college and it was filled with guidance and structure, provided by his parents. Although his parents were divorced, he said his father was a constant presence in his life growing up and he contributed his work ethic to him. This work ethic was passed down from his grandparents, who came from Alabama, in the 'Deep South.'

Eventually, I was living with them and they are a big part of my psychological mindset, my father was there, maybe not 100 percent of the time, but most of the time he was and he taught me my work ethic, so when some of the guys, I went to college with, failed out their first semester, ninety percent of that was the fact that they had not established a sound work ethic. Know that that's not something you're born with, know that that is conditioning, you have to have that conditioned in you. I come from grandparents. My grandmother would have me up at 5:30 am putting her garden together in the backyard, even though we were in the city, the hood, that little section there she took pride in and she instilled that pride in me and look you may have this little concrete block, but this is your block and you work hard to maintain it and take care of it. You don't even think of that as mentorship, but she was building a mentality in me and by doing so part of that mentor process she was building a work ethic in me.

When asked… Mike, looking back, did you he view it as a form of mentoring?

Definitely! Another piece to that is a lot of guys ended up losing scholarships because we would have those two a day practices, morning practices and all my classes were early, like I would have an eight o'clock class, an 8:30 am class, and we might have some morning workout sessions where we have to get up 6:30 am and do some conditioning and you know what, the guys that were used to sleeping in all day, not getting up, struggled and it was a burden on them, but like I said my mentorship started with that. However, I had a football coach in high school that saw something in me and he would take me to the gym and he helped me establish this work ethic… then again, all these people reinforced that work ethic in me, that told me if you want to be in the top echelon you have to work, so he always pushed me to be the best I can be. An example of this would be when I was in high school and had a big football game, I was doing well. I had three quarterback sacks in the first half of the game and my coach came up to me and said I hope you don't think you're doing anything out there you still have another half to go! Right there and then I saw this man had another level and he expected me to tap into mine other level and it motivated me to do better to do more and to never settle. So I have never settled and once I went into the Marines… you could forget it, they're pushing you to your limits. I got that going into my first year of college, so that upped me to a whole new level because life got more serious and then even though once I fell off and wasn't playing football anymore I had discipline beyond what the average person had. The levels that I took it to after I stopped playing football it didn't even matter anymore because I had some discipline instilled in me that probably exceeded what the average person had.

According to Osis, mentoring helped him develop an actual bird's-eye view of what was real and what was not, and how even the mentors he had in college alluded to what college really did. He stated:

> The purpose of college is it makes you trainable and I really did not understand what that meant until after I got out of college. After college I was able to ascend in each of my careers to move from entry level to management at a very quick rubric because college did teach me how to access situations, how to problem solve, and how to use data, but what it didn't do was teach me how to have good interpersonal relations with dominant culture pedagogy. It didn't teach me how to confront racism in a positive way, it didn't teach me how society despite its words don't often practice what it preaches, so it create a dichotomy of what was real and what wasn't and mentors help to clarify and provide a pathway to get beyond the stress of having your world and your foundation rocked to the degree that you either question why you went to school and why is this stuff important, so the mentors that I did have helped me to apply myself differently in the world and they kept me grounded.

Dee considered his mentoring experience during college, as helpful, and beneficial after college.

> What it did was teach me a level of accountability, of now that I've been helped, I've been mentored, and what my obligation are now. I am going to quote someone right now, "You should always have three types of people in your life. First you should have somebody who is pouring into you, which means serving in the role of a mentor or a mentee and second you should always have a person who is your equal, in other words iron sharpens iron we're colleagues we're equal we bounce our heads off of each other,

we mirror one another and third, you should always have somebody you are pouring into, that way the water is continuously being rejuvenated, so I'm being poured into and I am sharing, exchanging, pouring into someone else, and then it's going back and forth, back and forth. It's a motto I teach in my classroom and I believe it is so relevant having three kinds of people as a peer, mentee, and a mentor."

Steel felt being tutored, while in college, helped him because no one prepared him for college. Since he worked in various jobs, in which the remuneration given was at odds and not commensurate with the labor required, he decided to attend college as he saw that one could work in job with more financial benefits. He said "being mentored in college definitely paid off in the future because I look back and say, 'I've done that!' Mind, body and spirit and I've done that and I am still doing it to date, being mentored still helps me out as far as being organized when I have to set programs up."

Xavier believed that having mentors, while pursuing his undergraduate degree, motivated and encouraged him when he wanted to quit. Xavier shared memories of his mentors and the interactions that they would have during his undergraduate program.

Accountability… again, Dr. Vivian Love, and I love this women, she would not just ask me how I was doing in my major, but she wanted to know how I was doing in my poly science classes, my college math classes, and so forth so she took me under her wing… matter a fact she lives right across the street for my church and just took a real role in my life. Bob Nichols, same thing, would see me and I went by X (My name) at that time "Hey X how's things going?" and to have a professor to have an intimate understanding of you so it definitely encouraged me beyond college, it helped shape me. I preach a lot and teach a lot and I have this one phrase 'I'm not a grown man, I'm a growing man' and

having mentors, having mentors, such as: my pastor, Chris Malloy [pseudonym], and certain people in my life allows them to continue to help shape me to become a better person. So mentoring and having that person that can challenge you not to stay stagnant in life, challenge you to grow academically, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and financially has been a blessing.

Rep stated "It gave me wonderful guidance and opportunities to develop myself in the academic sense but more importantly it helped me… the mentors and opportunities they provided me helped me develop as an individual."

Summary of How Mentoring Helped

Once again, each participant agreed that being mentored helped them during and beyond college. Junior felt having his father at the university, continued the nurturing he received before college, as a continuation during college. Although, he did not want to admit it at first, he finally acknowledged the correlation between the university and his father, therefore, confirming he did have a mentor associated with the university. By his father, working as a professor, at the university, he understood the structure and personalities within institution. Similar sentiments rang out from all of the participants. All participants credited having been mentored had a major impact on them graduating college.

Educational Relevance for African American Males Helping or Hindering

Participants were asked to discuss their points of view on the educational relevance of African American males attending institutions of higher education and whether they believed it was helping or hindering them in society. Junior believed it was helping, regardless of the school one attends. He understood obtaining a degree was going to advance an individual far more to be a productive citizen in society than if a person did not have one. Also, that all of your

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experiences shape you positively or negatively; they shape the life of a person and having that degree catapults you to where you need to go.

I asked Junior to expand on his response a little more because statistically, referring to literature that exists, and based on what he has seen, did he think that it is true for AA males who graduate from four-year colleges and universities that AA males have the same opportunities as their counterparts, once they obtained college degrees. His response was:

You will never have the same opportunities as your counterparts because of the color of your skin, coupled with your gender as an African American male. However, having that degree gets you access to other opportunities… I look at myself as an example… I can always go get a job and what we call a good job because of my educational background; not having that degree limits the types of opportunities I could get. Now again, if I am going after a job, an opportunity, and I have the same skillsets as my White counterpart, seems as though they are going to get the look because that's just how it is. They have the relationships and we can go on and on… but if I didn't have a degree I wouldn't get that access, so the degree is paramount. Regardless of the experience positive or negative at the university the degree is paramount, I have to have the degree to be successful, to take care of your family, be a provider, [for African Americans, the margin for error is] very thin, so we don't have a support system to fall back on when we mess-up, we don't have champions of the organizations as corporations, we don't have peers that can get us off our feet and get a job… because of that it is so vital for us to obtain post-secondary degrees, to be employable in today's society.

Jet viewed the educational relevance of African American males attending institutions of higher education, as two-fold and described it as '*A Tale of Two Cities*' and it is only helping them if they are willing to help themselves.

Jet argued, "Not all schools are going to have the resources, nor the desire… let's be realistic." Yet, he suggested that it is helping AA students, if they take the experience and don't throw it away. He shared:

> I just had a conversation with a young man on the basketball team, granting he was on an athletic scholarship, nevertheless I told him 'this is an opportunity for you to take your learning to a higher level that's why it's called higher education' for you to think more critically, for you to look at the future ahead of you. So I think if young men could really understand the meaning and purpose of achieving a higher education and get as much as a great experience out of that I think it's going to help them tremendously. Equally, if they don't take advantage of those experiences and they simply just go through the usual, okay I'm going to just get through it than I think it can hinder them because they did not get all they could of that experience, being it academic, social, or other life experiences that they need to get them through this difficult journey called life.

Mike argued, 'If you don't know history… history repeats itself' when asked if the educational relevance is helping or hindering AA males in higher education. The curricula are set up, especially if, a person talk about your core curricula. Although, he says he gets it, he believes if you are a criminal justice student, you have to know about law, or you want to learn because you have to know about the law, if you are planning a career in that field.

In addition, he stated, "The young males that I work with are lacking self-esteem and the reasons why, I feel, is because a lot of these individuals can't pull it together because there's an identity crisis going on with a lot of your Black males."

When asked, what he meant by an identity crisis;

Mike replied: "What I mean by identity crisis is, I really don't feel that they know their history, I really don't feel that they know anything about themselves as an individual. What I mean is we can talk about American history, but if I can't see myself fitting into this American history then why do I care about this? There has to be a piece because Africans were a big part of American history, but I feel like there should be a little bit more about bringing the different cultures in and making them feel a part of this history."

When asked, based on their contributions?

Exactly, stated Mike.

Do you believe their contributions are being ignored?

Mike explained, "I believe we do touch on African American history, but I believe it's shallow. I think we're only covering the surface of the contributions that African Americans have made in American history."

When you say curricula, are you referring to higher education?

> Absolutely! Because like I said I think there should be more classes offered on African American history, I just feel in general it's a very important piece. When you get out of school, in order for them to be a mentor to African American males they should know more about this history. I mean how are you going to reach one to teach one? Of course it's important that you learn about your major subject your area of study that is an important piece of your self-identity and your self-esteem.

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When asked, who would be best to teach these courses, if offered, African American or European American teachers and who, in your opinion, would be most effective dispensing the information?

Mike stated that he works with high school aged students that do not see teachers that look like them and he went on to say:

It would be an uphill battle for a non-African American because they're looking at it like how are you teaching me African American history and how do you know about African American history and how invested are you in African American history because it's not your culture? So not to say that a Caucasian males or females couldn't teach African American history, but I just think role models are important for African American males and females and they need to see more African American role models in positons as staff and faculty. That gives them something to aspire to. I think a lot of times there's an absence of these people, that are staffed, and are on the payroll for the universities, it kind of reinforces that we don't matter, we really don't matter and they're teaching us this stuff, are they really invested in us because if you're investing in it, why aren't you hiring more African Americans especially, to teach someone something as important as culture stuff and their history?

When asked, if he see this as hindering for African American males in society?

Mike replies:

I considered it to be a big hindrance across the board. Look at a lot of public schools, especially in the Pittsburgh area. They don't see a lot of role models in their culture teaching them or even mentoring them. Like I said it is not like other cultures

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can't mentor African American males, but I mean certain things I see these kids go

through and even on the college level that I went through, people can talk to you

about how you grew up, what you need to do to be successful, but if you didn't go

through the same things I went through… certain things would just be in theory they

would not be actual stuff that you could relate to.

According to Osis, the success rate of Black males graduating from college terrible. He

shared that the graduation rate for AA males is about thirty-five percent.

I think the matrix for success is skewed. A lot of programs focused on helping

Black males in high-school focus on getting them to college, but not many focus on

making sure they graduate from college. It's a more obtainable goal to at least get a

kid to college, but what's more important is the kid's success in college and after

college and their contributions back to mentor and support other kids. In many ways

that's lost in the work because a lot of times people are more focused on the

transaction not transformation, their focus on the grades to get to school just like a

person running an organization might be focused on how many number of kids they

touch make it to college, but the real matrix is how many graduate from college and

come back and get a job in their field and actually mentor another kid. So, to me it's

a very simple equation, you can exponentially grow your impact through a strategy

that looks at reciprocity, but if you don't teach reciprocity through a transformational

venue then you promote transaction indirectly because people are looking to get to

the end of a particular objective. In that light I found that the role of higher education

is hindered because there's more of an emphasis placed on academic performance

than social maturity. I have learned over the years that you can be the smartest

person in the room but if nobody follows you it does not matter and you can't achieve greatness by yourself. You can have individual success but you can't have macro success by yourself. The plethora of issues that confront the Black male in our society requires a systems response and not an individual one.

Dee considers his working in higher education as an advantage and it give him access to African American students' academic records. He finds it interesting, African American male students are sold an idea that if they can make it through college, they are guaranteed an occupation or a career, that's going to sustain them financially. According to Dee, African American male students struggle with writing, reading and math because deficiencies are not addressed, in the early stages of their education. Chapter two, of this study reported how this has caused retention rates to fall, causing African American students to feel discouraged, isolated, while forcing many, to begin their college careers in developmental courses. Dee stated:

It's relevant for the African American male students that aspires and want to go to college career wise. Dr. Omar Jackson [pseudonym], who is a public figure, out of Philadelphia, wants to create a school, in which trades are one of the main focuses. Someone, who wants to have a career in agriculture, is saying 'listen, everyone does not want to pursue a college career' and generate debt. Learn some other trade that you can make money on, that is not tied to these universities, that's going to create a financial debt for you. Higher education teaches you how to work for somebody else, think about it… there are some positions and careers that don't focus on that. The majority of your degrees connected to universities are teaching you how to not support yourself, not to be independent, and teaching you how to work for somebody

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else and you're grabbing your degree, getting all this debt, and now you're putting it

out there and presenting it hoping somebody wants it and is interested in buying that

degree than paying for it.

Steel, who has worked as an educator and mentor for over fifty years, described

education for African American males, as 'hurting' because they took away all the jobs that

Black men, White men, and any other nationality can do. Meaning… shops, electrical

shops, auto shops, machine shops, and all the high-technological things happening with

automobiles, refrigerator.

Steel said:

Even if you are going to put a new street down the economy today is so high-tech

that these programs they took out of the schools across the United States and put

them elsewhere is hurting Black American males and dealing with the process of the

high-tech thing. With a lot of our Black males, there [are] so many things that they

can get their hands into today and I guess it's called play toys… these games they

have makes it where they don't even want to play sports anymore, they don't want to

get scholarships… they honestly need a trade-school if they want to go to a trade

school they have to go out of their area where they are being beat down because

there are no trade-schools around, hardly [any] and a lot of times they can't afford it.

When asked if he believed the educational relevance was helping or hindering AA male

students in higher education, Xavier said,

It is helping and it is hindering. The reason I say that, is you pointed out earlier,

about a formal and informal mentor, and I believe we all need to be educated. I think

part of the… I don't want to call it fraud, our part of the issue is that we are taught

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the number one way of achieving that is through a formal education, which is not true, so you have all these people who have graduated and this and that… the problem is people are graduating with forty to fifty thousand dollars in debt. A lot of people go to college and end up working in a field that does not even line up with their degree. Many people could have made that amount of money or more if they had just been informally educated. So, I believe that if you are called 'I am a man of purpose, calling, and destiny' I believe if you are called in a particular area and you need a formal education you need to get it, but you may be able to fulfill the same calling with a certificate the same calling with this or that it doesn't necessarily have to be a college degree. So it helps in that degree allowing you to make more money the discipline. One of the things I really like about the African American male attending an institution of higher education if he does what is called the three P's we all need a parent, a peer, and a protégé and if the parent is important to you that peer you're equal a protégé that your trying to work, so if its higher education and your able to do the three P's it's great. If it's not I think about a Sam Collins [pseudonym] [Entertainment Mogul], who dropped out of Howard University and look what he became or Miller Frostburg [pseudonym] [Founder of a popular social media site] dropped out of Harvard University, so higher education, if it's part of your calling and it's necessary go for but if it's not it really is hindering a lot of people financially.

Rep believed that there was no way having more education could hinder you.

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However, he did state "I do believe if you have just been exposed to the academic side of education and you are limited in your ability to be as... to be a true difference maker in the broader sense because not only do you need to bring book knowledge but you need to know how you can work with others to achieve goals."

Summary

Each participant discussed if educational relevance is helping or hindering them in society. Participants believed education can help and hinder, but it is up to student to take advantage of all the resources available to them. However, in this study and based on the university or college the participants attended showed that some universities do not offer the same opportunities for African American male students as it does their counterparts. All participants stated that having an education allows African American males a foot in the door, a better chance with a college degree, than without one.

Educational Relevance of Having Mentors in Higher Education

Participants were asked to discuss their points of view on the educational relevance of having mentors in institutions of higher education and how it impacts African American male students at colleges and universities. Junior shared a comparison of his undergraduate experience and graduate experience, stating:

> I think the educational relevance from my personal comparison of doing my graduate
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> work at King State and undergraduate work at the university I attended, having
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> mentors in your life that care about you and want to see you do well helps gives you
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> that push or whatever you need to succeed, that you don't want to let them down
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> because they open your eyes to new opportunities and gives you new ways of doing
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> things. Whatever it is, having that mentor there really helps you succeed, we learn, but

we learn as we grow and having that mentor there helps with the tangible and

intangible skillsets you need to be successful… for African Americans again, if we

don't graduate from college our margin for error shrinks even more, our margin for

success shrinks more and getting that degree is paramount. Having mentors there

helps further the development. I look at some of my friends who are professors or

administrators at colleges and universities and the impact they have on African

American males because they're someone they can relate to… heck I could look at my

father and how he had a positive impact on all types of students who were my friends

because he was a professor there that wanted to reach out and wanted to help, that goes

a long way, so you have to have that mentorship because it's extremely relevant and it

adds tremendous value to not only going to school, but it also helps position you to

progress in life.

Jet thought having a mentor during his undergraduate experience was relevant and significant.

He stated:

I think it's significant, I think that young men need to see other men that look like them

that can share… that they can have some sort of shared and lived experience, so that they

can come back and say hey I did this when I was in college, I shared that I struggled and I

can tell you that it pulls these young men in further and they can say, wow he did it and

so can I. So I think it plays a very important role and it's a significant role and here's the

thing…, what we have to remember is if we don't take care of our young men it's going

to further place a burden on society at large because the society we live in is so largely

dependent on technology and we need young men… not only young men, but we need

individuals that are going to have the prerequisite skills to engage at a very high level and

so if we are not doing that, if we are not adequately preparing our young men not only academically, but socially, otherwise then we are setting ourselves up for failure and I think the benefits to society at large we are not going to have productive citizens and we are going to have a very diverse heterogeneous workforce that is going to be contributing tremendously to the overall gross stigmatic problems of this great nation. So it is beholden of us to take accountability to ensure the success of all groups, we cannot have a single group in that demographic being Black males lagging behind because it's going to have a domino effect on everybody and everything else.

Mike discussed how being mentored cannot only help academically, but how it can also help socially and culturally. Mike explained,

The educational relevance for mentorship… I think realistically when a kid is mentored on a college level that is huge because decisions are made on a college level and academically, just think about what I said earlier… I changed my whole major, based off guys that I saw as mentors. Also, I was mentored by individuals I looked up to and that is one of the things mentorship is all about, so it is a huge factor. The reason that I am in the field I am now, is based off the mentorship I had during college. Basically, that molded my whole career path. People who are on the fence or borderline definitely need mentoring because it could be the difference between continuing the educational process, or dropping out of school.

Osis argued that being mentored in higher education provides a "framework for real nexus for growth" and viable network of people who confer an advantage to other individuals. Osis went on to say:

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The power of networks, influence your outcome. If you know of a family whose father or mother owns a business and they've been your friend ever since grade school and you go to college for accounting, a son goes home and tells his dad; 'Al just graduated from college with an accounting degree you should give him a look.' Al is going to most likely get a look and a job. Black people don't have those kind of contacts, so we go to school and get all these degrees and we read the papers and look online… that's not to say that these other groups don't have that same challenge, but at the decision making level there's networks that ultimately in many instances that make the decisions if a person is going to be employed or unemployed. So, having mentors that have networks really help inform and educate students about where they should be putting their interest at. It's critically important at undergraduate schools, had I known that I should be attending some of the other fraternity functions so that I could make my network broader, enjoying other non-popular sports team to broaden my network I probably would be at a different place in my life because I know from history that a lot of my friends who are doing well talk frequently about high-school and college relationships that allowed them to leverage networks to get to where they are.

Mentors help college students understand, how college is a pathway to a network, and how networks are a pathway to securing your future students might look totally different at school and the purpose of school.

Based on Osis response when asked "it is funny that your responses are leading into the next question but I must pause for a minute because you mentioned the need for African American mentors at the college and university level.

In saying that, previously you mentioned being mentored by White men, do you believe that it is more important to have an African American male, versus a White male as a mentor, or just to having a mentor is most important?"

Osis replied:

I would answer that questioned differently, and say that I think it's important to have both. The White mentor will in many cases give you a world view that you wouldn't get from a Black mentor because the world primarily is dominated by White heterosexual, Protestant, and wealthy White men, so I have had a lot of help and support from White men who take my ideas and disposition and really help me cultivate a different way of expressing myself, but I don't think Black men are in position to really shed light on this topic. The difference, I think a young Black student needs in having a Black mentor is I need to see another Black male achieving greatness in the same venue I'm in to know that it's real. I need to have upfront conversations with a Black male who in my opinion can resonate with my experiences in a way that gives context differently as it does with a White male. I've had mentors of both persuasions, with my White mentors we could not have 100 percent real conversations because when I started talking about my personal struggle, like my household they just could not relate to those experiences. They just told me I had to work my way through it. Those are responses, but they didn't resonate with the fact that I needed to be nurtured and supported differently than the tough love approach. Black mentor needs to be both vigilant and personable about the academic pursuit of the student, as well as insuring the cultural context and experience prepares him, for the success in the world they are into and I think that it is easier received when the person that you are receiving it from has had a similar experience.

Dee shared his opinion, stating:

The reality in my opinion I'd say but I can't document it, so I would be guessing, for ninety percent of African American males they won't make it without a mentor. It's just impossible because this much I do know, I know that the retention rate for African American males is the lowest amongst all the racial ethnic groups I know that. I also know that we have a [mentoring] program at [community college] that's called the Men of Merritt and the primary purpose of that program is to improve and increase retention. Also, it's designed to teach them a sense of community, in other words they are supposed to do some things outside of the community, but with that level of accountability what it does is, what we have seen is an increase in their grades, the fact that someone is asking and inquiring how are your grades. Also, asking how are things outside of school, how's your home life, and how's your work situation, I personally believe we are making an impact that in previous years whatever they dealt with they would have either stopped coming to school or just given up. Now we are able to hold on and retain them, so I think it is very relevant and without mentors a lot of our African American male students who are at the highest risk of dropping out will continue to drop-out. I think out of every ten, African American males, that attend college, only four graduate from college I believe the latest statistic is, so we're talking about sixty percent we're losing and one of the things I believe can be critical in keeping them there and for a lack of a better word is up in their you know what.

Steel believed that up until now Black males have been positioned beneath their White counterparts, mentally damage, and academically, socially ostracized, often they do not graduate from high school, do not attend trade schools, and there were few trade-schools

around for them to attend. They tried the armed forces, but could not pass the drug test and other obstacles. However, Steel also stated, "It's not a loss for them because there is always hope, but they have to have other resources. These men need not just a Black man they need a White man, foreign man, an honest man who is not going to be playing games with anybody's mind. They need somebody who is going to be honest and guide them and stick with them and try to help get them to a better education."

Xavier confirmed that it was his mentors who taught him accountability, motivation, and inspiration.

There's an old saying that 'you can only be what you see.' So to see Dr. Lenny Belko [pseudonym], to see Dr. Darrell Bruce [pseudonym], to see Bob Nichols, to see Dr. Larry Bell [pseudonym], to see these African American men who had achieved academically. These are people who were a part of the Black studies department, so Sala would come in, and see Blake Millions [pseudonym], to see these men that were known in the City of Pittsburgh that have achieved things politically, academically, and a lawyer whatever, it motivated me to believe I could think outside of the box. Growing up, all I had seen was drug dealers and things like that. In college, I had seen men that had achieved by using their minds and not their hands as far as on the street. One hundred years ago, the battle between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Dubois, Booker T. was saying let's learn to use are hands (In the agriculture sense), he was saying it because he did not want to scare the White man and then you had W.E.B. Dubois, first Black graduated with a professional degree from Harvard talking about the talented ten. I believe you need both of them but if you are a Booker T., you're being pushed to go to higher education you're missing it; if you are W.E.B., you're called to

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use the intellect part to advance yourself to go to higher education, but if you are called

to be a Black wielder, a Black plumber, a Black farmer, a Black truck driver that's

where we need to learn how to differentiate and where we are to send our young Black

males.

Rep used his first collegiate experience as an example to explain how he felt about the

educational relevance of having a mentor during college. He revealed that he had a not so

pleasant experience at a PWI and there was no real support or mentorship. According to him, he

was not successful because it was not a supportive environment. "When I went to one that had

strong mentorship, I was able to flourish. I graduated magna cum laude and I was able to really

grow into who I was as a person and a man." Rep continued, "I think it's absolutely necessary

and vital to have strong mentorship, I think you see the correlation; if you have strong

mentorship on the campus, you will have stronger academic performance."

When asked, at the predominately White institution, was there anyone who stepped up to try and

encourage you?

> At that [my] institution, I played sports. So, here I was coming right out of high school, I
>
> was in a program called *INROADS*. *INROADS*, was all about getting African American
>
> prepared and on college campuses. So I [came] right out of HS and I was playing
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> football, so you would have thought they would have a support system...it was a Division
>
> III College, so it wasn't a big college but St. Cloud State [pseudonym] is known for
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> hockey for real. There were three African Americans on the yard when I was there in the
>
> summer month. *INROADS*, puts you in the school during the summer so you can get all
>
> your stuff out the way before other freshman come. While I was there three African
>
> Americans there were, none in administrative roles, no professors. There was no one who

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took an interest in me from an academic perspective. Now there were coaches who

wanted to make sure I was doing my coursework to make sure I was going to be eligible.

But there was no relationship. Matter-a-fact I roomed with one of the other African

Americans who were there for basketball and if it wasn't for him giving me some

encouragement just to stick through some of the stuff, I would have left… I made it

halfway through the summer semester before I left, I would have left weeks in advance

but I was trying to stick it out for him because we would kind of feed off each other, and

he was a freshman too so he wasn't connected, but we were both there to rely on one

another, but it wasn't enough for me because I was like 'Hey I'm leaving!'

Summary

According to these AA men, having mentors or programs geared towards helping

African American males graduate college are extremely relevant and needed based on the

participants in this study. Each participant continues to describe how impactful having a mentor

was during their undergraduate years.

Campus Involvement

The participants were asked to describe their level of engagement and involvement

in clubs, organizations, groups, and or other campus or student life activities; and how

participation in these aid one to persevere and graduate college.

Junior's involvement on campus, during his undergraduate career, led him to join a

fraternity. After joining, he was voted in as president of the organization, his role as a leader

exposed him to how the fraternity operated. As a leader, he had to do planning for community

service. It also exposed him to the perception that others had of him. Whether it was his peers

or the administrators, it helped guide him. Junior stated:

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As the president, whatever I did or did not do could impact the fraternity, in a positively or negatively and it could impact the perceived perception of all African American students… so being involved in organizations, I think clubs and etc… is vital to organization particularly to African American students. Getting back to my undergraduate experience the school really didn't embrace my opinion and student in Black organizations on campus… we were kind of off in a corner and kind of isolated from everyone else on campus and in my opinion this goes back to how the school perceived African Americans overall… in spite of that being active in my organization it developed those intangible skills of leadership and what you needed to be successful in your career.

Jet said, when asked:

My first year I was a walk-on on the men's track team, I ran in high school, I was a very good athlete and obviously at a division one you have to step your game up… but I was able to quickly bond with several of the men and women on the team. Additionally, I was involved in the Marine Corps as well the Semper Fi (Semper Fidelis-Motto of the United States Marine Corps) society. I was also engaged with many of the various fraternities on campus at university I attended, as well as some of the things like Black student union that really helped me because at the end of the day I had a brotherhood as well as a shared experience with other Black men and women that really quite frankly compelled me to this day that I keep in touch with several of my Black male and female colleagues from college and we are friends for life and I think that helped me endure that journey.

Mark, like Jet and Junior, was also involved in a sport and a fraternity on campus. According to Mark, he gravitated towards what was familiar to him, so that's why he ended up pledging a fraternity. He explained:

> I saw it was an African American organization and it was something that I related to, as far as engagement, there wasn't a lot of engagement other than playing football, if it wasn't for me playing football I probably would not have been actively involved on campus, as far as clubs and everything. It just didn't fit. I mean… I couldn't relate, I didn't know the chess club, or some of these other things that were going on campus. It was not something that I grew up around or actually had anything in common with. So, fraternal wise that was big, it actually pulled me in to other things on campus, like the Greek weekend, in which the fraternity participated with all the other Greek organization. Also, the community service projects, became a big part of my involvement with organizations on campus, but outside of that I don't know if I even would have been active doing anything on camps if it wasn't for that.

Osis described his organizational involvement on campus, as fortunate and unfortunate. When asked to explain, Osis stated:

> I had the fortunate, unfortunate opportunity to pledge a fraternity my freshmen year, which usually is not allowed. However, I received special permission by the fraternity. It was a life altering experience in many ways. One because I was totally ignorant of the pledge process, I didn't have any idea what it was, except for undergraduate school there was a Black brother who was African, actually he was Nigerian and he and I just hit it off. He was a mentor to me, yet we never talked about school, it was more social.

Osis explained that has pledge experience, was extremely difficult. It challenged his sense of self, manhood, and scholarship, perseverance, resiliency, and his network. It also stripped him of his pride and ego, only to rebuild him up, to be a man of distinction and valor and to serve a greater good that was beyond self. He said the experience 'shaped him' into the man he is today.

> I don't know if I would be where I am now if it wasn't for that strength to persevere because that pledge experience was that journey for thirteen weeks, it changed my life. It changed my relationship with Black men; it changed my relationship with myself by teaching me what I was capable of and it gave me a sense of strength and well-being that college didn't give me. That Black Greek institution did and it allowed me to flourish and cultivate different networks and relationships that I still have to this day. I've been in a fraternity for thirty-three years and I am still in contact with the individual I join the fraternity with. However, I really did not understand the power of the fraternity until I got older, so it's another formal network in college that could be of greater impact if there was a different level of maturity at the fraternity level.

When asked, if he considered that as a form of peer mentoring, Osis said,

> It could be, particularly if you have brothers and sisters in the organizations that often come back after they have graduated to attend functions. What would be interesting if those universities and fraternities and sororities when those graduate students came back would partake in Greek-life they would actually hold a seminar where they would talk about networks and what it is like to be out and how to use the fraternity and sorority to push your organizations to network your agenda, I never

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had anyone talk to me other than to say I have a good job or I'm still out here

looking. But there is something that can be leveraged at the fraternity level that could

really shift and empower the fraternity to be much more of a powerful influence in a

person's life besides the Greek experience.

Dee considered his experience interesting because he attended an HBCU and institutionally

things such as campus involvement, are integrated into campus life. He stated;

The social connects… is almost ingrained, everybody is involved in something,

everybody, it is almost a must, so because of the closeness and connectedness and

the cohesion that occurred you are involved in several different clubs, organization,

and again I started on student government, I worked for the radio station… I was a

volunteer referee for intramural sports, it's a laundry list of things, I even won a

community service award. Again everybody is involved in somethings and the

interesting part is it's just an additional way to build bonds and relationships that are

just ongoing.

Steel shared many of his artifacts, such as fraternity and athletic memorabilia and stories of

playing with and against some of history's greatest football players. However, he also

reflected on some of the things that society often ignored.

From experience I have seen a lot of default, not just from student athletes, but

students not having discipline when it came to self-accountability, as far as drugs,

getting out of shape for sports and not being able to maintain their scholarships,

attendance for class, having babies [Black males], and being threatened by parents in

the towns of the colleges they are attending. All those things are going to be there

they are not going to end and it is something the African American male is going to

experience along with other ethnicities… mistakes are going to happen. However, it gets to a point where you have to ask where [are] the parents and where is the discipline, from the parent's home to the child, to the young adult going to school and carrying that discipline with them… that's the key right there. I have to say for myself, my mother died when I was born, my dad worked in the steel-mill and he died when I was young and what I had to do was bear down and say I don't want to live this way, I don't want to live in a negative, bad way in life I have to do better, so my determination was to be disciplined: don't smoke, don't drink or go out to the clubs and get in trouble and not to have any children while I was in college. It really depends on the individual and their ways, but they need that family background or someone to guide them when they need help.

Xavier shared his experience of participating with the Kuntu Repertory Theater during his sophomore year of college. He said,

I did not pledge any fraternity during college. The group that I belonged to my sophomore year was the Kuntu Repertory Theater and we did plays at a number of universities within the state of Pennsylvania. That for a lack of better words I was like an athlete, so… like I played on a team, so being a part of Kuntu Repertory Theater I played on a team and it made me want to stay a part of the university I graduated from.

According to Rep, he spent most of his time working in his mentor's office, home, or in organizations in which he was involved, Rep said:

I was involved with the political science society. We started a model United Nations organization. My professor, who became my mentor, we always had open sessions

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where students could come in, or his circle of kids who he was mentoring could come in. He would have us in his home with wine and food and we did informal relationship stuff. Where he, or other professors there, we could talk to them about what was happening, they could give us advice about careers choices, about opportunities that were coming up, that was very important so I was involved in many things through that and I would have been, if it wasn't for the student mentor I had when I first got on campus, who basically gave me the insight to say this is how you want to seek out... 'What do you want to accomplish?' Okay this is who you have to maneuver, here are the people that can help you, so I had that student mentor who was first helping me and then I had caring faculty member who was willing ... as long as you were willing to go seek them they were willing to impart information to you, so that was vital.

Summary of Campus Involvement

Six of the eight participants were members of fraternities during their college experience. All participants were involved in organizations and events held at the universities they attended. Each expressed how their organizational involvement contributed to their academic, cultural, and social development at the universities they graduated. Participants described how professors, peers, coaches, and outside influences contributed to persistence in college.

Mentoring Programs in Higher Education for AA Males

Participants were asked, if they believed there was a need for mentoring programs for African American males in higher education and the responses were similar each other and the previous section.

Junior strongly believed there was an extremely high need. He stated, "I share with you what my fraternity is doing on an alumni level to reach back to our undergraduate African American male members of the fraternity… African American males need mentors to be successful, we don't have relationships… the understanding, a lot of us our first time college bound students and a lot of us don't have money, there are a lot of different things going on in our lives and being mentored helps guide us through that and again, if that African American male does not get that college degree it's a much harder journey through life, but he can make greater strides with a college degree than without one."

Jet suggested that there needs to be a multitier approach for mentoring African American males at the college level. Using the university that he works at as an example, he said:

> An example of this would be at the university where I work, I spoke to our university President and told him that we have to have an integrated approach in which we have mentors, African American male mentors mentoring Black male students, but we cannot be exclusive we have to be inclusive because African American males students should not only work with Black men and they are going to work with all types of people, Asians, East Indian, Hispanic, women, and transgender so we have to be very versatile in our thoughts, but yet I think that at its core we need to have Black men engage and show best practices to our young Black men, so that they can continue to carry that torch. So that's my philosophy in terms of the modern day approach. Let's face it; our young men are dating women of color, they're dating European women, they're dating women from various backgrounds, and we can't just mentor them in an incubator.

Mike response was:

> For me it's that you're having more African American males, but I don't even think
> society is looking at this but if you go into these households because I do that every
> day, there's an absence of the African American father, so at the end of the day these
> kids are growing up and they don't have that African American male role model to
> teach them certain aspect to manhood period. Yet, a big part of that whole thing is your
> decision making process, so are you viewing life through the eyes of a women? I guess
> the deep part about it is the African American households are led by a woman, but it's
> a whole different perspective if you're getting that perspective from a male. So once
> they hit college the decisions they're making career wise and everything else is kind of
> skewed and I can't speak because I don't have any statistical data… you know on what
> actually happens to these individuals once they get to college, but I know for me I had
> a lot of male role models in my life and that's why I made the decisions that I made and
> that is why I am still self-sustaining.

When asked about going in to homes daily, in and out of the courts, where decisions are made,
for a large majority of these Black males, literature illustrates this pipeline to prisons… Mike
said:

> Absolutely and I think that's crazy because I am a juvenile probation officer, so the crazy
> thing about it is I see them from the time that they start to fall and how it's a continual
> spiral downward and I think a lot of that is their whole perception of manhood is skewed
> and part of that comes from mentorship. If you don't know how to be a man, you
> navigate and try to figure it out. Therefore, a lot of these kids hit the streets because these
> are the only male role models they may experience or come across. Even if they beat the

odds and make it to college… let's take a look the individuals that do make it to college and they come from these environments, a lot of them fail at the collegiate level because they still have this mentality of this skewed reality of what a man is and they'll go to school and get into confrontations, fist fight and they'll get thrown out because they really don't know how to conduct themselves in this environment. How did I know how to conduct myself when I went to school? Because I had role models that told me this is how a man acts and conducts himself and once I got on campus, I had guys who were on the football team like, 'hey dude if you're going to last up here this is how you have to conduct yourself this is how you have to act.' So for the individual who has none of that those are the guys that came up there with me that failed out the first semester.

When asked, why was it different for you, despite coming from the inner city, public schooling and in the midst of 'the hood?' Mike shared how he would laugh, at what he received from public schools because he was receiving something different from the other Black males he was around. Mike said "I would laugh, and the reason I would laugh, is because of what I got, when I was in those public schools, it was something a lot different from what the guys around me were getting, I would go into some of my friend's home, like I said, and their dad was in jail. There wasn't a male role model there, grandma was raising these kids. Basically, they were raising themselves."

When asked, but you stated that your father was not in the home… Mike explained that his father worked a lot, he was in the home, but he also had a grandfather who was present in his life. He went on to say:

I had football coaches, and I had mentors in and outside of the home that constantly reinforced what a productive man looks like. I had an older brother and I looked up to

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him, I am the man I am today because of these individuals. You have to have those role

models in those pivotal years of your life, or you're going to try to figure it out for

yourself. When you leave kids to their own devices they're not going to make the right

decisions. I wasn't left to my own devices, I had people saying no, you are going to do

this or you need to do that and they kind of guided me through this whole process.

Therefore, by the time I got to college, I already knew the direction in which I was

headed.

According to Mike, African American male college students are 'quote unquote' adults. They

still have a lot of development that needs to take place at that level. In every job there has to be

trainings.

Just training in general, on how to work with the Black male because it's a different

type of student you're dealing with especially if they're coming from different

environments and not coming from rural environments. Really when I think of teaching

I don't think that word mentorship comes with your current situation on these

universities and campuses. I never really had anyone talk about mentorship, they talked

about higher education, your credits, classes, and things that you're going to need and

the crazy thing about it is you're developing lives and you need to care about the

population that you're working with. When I look at other cultures there were a lot of

other students that came to college better prepared than me because of maybe the

environment they came from and everything else. They had more resources.

Mike believed that the majority of African American males start out on the same playing field.

However, the reality is the playing field is not equal. Mike continued:

What if an individual is coming up and he has a deficit because the high school he

attended wasn't as academically sound as some of the other schools? He's coming to

that college or university at a deficit and there needs to be some more support provided

for this individual and I guess the question is, are the universities willing to provide

that support? If you come from an affluent area, you're not getting the same education

that a kid from the inner city is getting, I don't believe that. I think that if you come

from a private school, that's even on a higher level of academic involvement.

Based on Mike's current occupation, he sees it daily and he bases it on his experiences.

Using his high school experience playing football, Mike stated:

As a former athlete that came from one of many, inner-city public schools, I had one

coach, the head coach, who coached offense. This consisted of the quarterback, tight-

ends, running backs and he's trying to coach the entire offense. I had a defensive coach

trying to coach the whole defense. When I got to college I had other guys coming from

many different prestigious high schools where they had a coaching staff equivalent to a

college coaching staff. They had a coach for every position offensively and defensively.

My equation to that academically is that it is pretty much the same level. There were so

many more resources that they had, so when they got to college they were better prepare

based on the resources they had previously to coming, which was more than I had.

African American males are entering higher education at deficits, in certain areas. What

are colleges and universities doing to provide these African American males with the

supports needed, to become more productive and just as successful, as their

counterparts?

Dee argued that having a mentor, is now more relevant than ever before. He said:

> Looking at the social climate in the country, the need for African Americans to have a space to express the discontent, concerns, and their questions, there's more need. Imagine on a college campus, you being at this institution of higher learning, all these people around you, yet you are feeling alone and you are feeling alone because I don't have anybody to talk to, I don't have anybody to help me to understand and why this group over here are accepted and treated differently than I am and so a lot of African American students are going to college experience a lonely experience because they don't have nobody to talk to. In order to retain them these things have to be put in place because especially with the climate that it is the purpose for college is prepare the students to go out into the workforce and to be a more productive citizen in society. But if I am going through college and I have this feeling of isolation and loneliness what kind of person am I going to be when I get out, am I going to be disconnected and discontent, so it's definitely more relevant than it has ever been before."

Osis felt differently based on his upbringing and stated "what I think is needed today does not exist because at worst as a child growing up in an underprivileged environment, I was a latchkey kid."

When asked, what does latchkey mean, Osis said, a latchkey kid was a kid who had to take care of themselves while his or her parents worked. In his case, it was his mother who worked because his father was not living in the family home. Osis stated that he had to get up own his own because his mother had to work and after school, he would come home to an empty house because of that. According to Osis, the streets were his teacher.

I grew up in a community with a lot of pride that both had challenges and opportunity. I can remember on several occasions when known drug lords, pimps, and street thugs knew me. I played football, basketball, and I ran track, so they knew who I was and anytime I thought about doing something illegal or bad, a drug dealer would pull me to the side and tell me 'you don't want to do this young buck,' I hear that you're good in school and you don't want to be like me, do you don't be like me because my life is not glorious.

It was those things that stuck with him and he would always say, 'I got love for the hood' because the hood had always been good to him. Although, his father was not in prison, he wasn't in the home, and his mother wasn't home because she had to work. Osis said:

Today's mentor, have to be superman or superwoman. They have to be somebody who can rise above the common man or woman's challenges, they have to be a beacon of light and I think that's why mentoring today is so difficult for people who want to help. They're running into kids who, on the surface, look like they're ready, but their maturity level is not there. I think mentoring today has to really look at the development and maturity of a kid and not the physical maturity of the kid. The kid might be of age and performs okay or well academically, we all know that you're a big fish in a little pond in high school, but when you get to college you're a little fish in a big pond. The social networks and supports you had previous to college don't look the same in college. All these different challenges, that I call external locus of control, have a potential negative impact on a student.

Mentors at this college level have to be capable of recognizing those challenges and in some way broker or provide services, to help a family whose student they are mentoring get stable, so that their investment in his education is sustained by insuring they're making an investment in the family, and many mentors are not trying to be social-workers.

Steel imparted that today schools need to hire retired teachers for a few hours a day and have them formally mentor African American males not just in conversation, but also in their academics, at these universities and colleges. He believes, "college and universities, need all kinds of people, and it needs to be mandatory to go to their classes to get a clearer understanding on the student's work ethic."

Xavier argued:

It should be in every college or university, for HBCUs it is part of the institutional structure, but every university from your Pitts, to your Penn States and to your IUP's, they should have something, that is specific and for students all across the spectrum. You should have an African American male or female, appointed by the university, that's working full-time and that is all he or she does. If this is implemented academically, retention rates could increase for African American male students.

Rep shared that he had been away from higher education and he was not aware of what the universities provided for African American males. He stated:

What I might be talking about might be outdated, but they might have something even better. Really, I just don't know yet, I have not been involved with it so I don't know that I can give you a real answer to this question. However, the only thing I can tell you is I know when you take students from the inner cities, who are probably the first or

second person in their families to go to college and who probably don't have a lot of

means… I know strong positive mentorship both from other mature students and faculty

members are absolutely important.

Participants Final Thoughts on Mentoring

Lastly, when participants were asked, are there any final thoughts on mentoring at the

college level that they would like to share, not asked in this interview? Each of the participants

expressed their pleasure to have participated in the study. Below are some of the participants'

responses to the final question.

Mike added:

When it comes to having mentors at the college level, for African American males, it's

a critical topic because I think we covered a lot of things in this interview but I think

one of the main and critical things for this whole concept is that there probably needs

to be programs set in place to compensate because if we're really talking about the

success of all students… I don't think you can be a teacher and not have any type of

training or background in how to mentor certain students because everybody is not

going to be the same… It's almost like the Marines, you go to Parris Island and you

got people coming from all over the country and areas and everybody has different

needs , so you have a universities that are pulling people in from all different

backgrounds, all different settings, so there is no cookie cutting program or curriculum

that will cover the need of every student coming in, and in order for you to know what

those needs are there has to be so mentorship coming in to actually help these

individuals find out what they need and how they can be successful because I think the

goal when it's all said and done should be the success of your students. That is a

reflection of the university. When the kids leave my institution are they being successful, are they getting good jobs, or are they falling further off and not really achieving the goals that they set out to?

When referring to literature, reporting that African American male students are underachieving academically, Mike was asked what he thought of the universities they're attending. Mike stated:

The true litmus test or the gauging tool that we can use to show if they are actually achieving is the graduation rate. I don't know what the graduation rate is at some of the universities or the statistics, or what the job placement is. However, you can graduate but how many of these schools have prepared these students once they graduate to find a job? And a part of that is mentorship, I know that a lot of fraternities have and I do it at the graduate level, actually trying to reach back and talk to some of the kids that are undergrads about the field that they are in… if they are a criminal justice major, I have them come talk to me, so that I can actually talk to them about what it takes to get a job or maybe even connect them with the right people, so that they are able to be successful. For me I don't know… that's a question I really don't have a lot of answers for because I really don't know statistically what that looks like as far as the graduation rates once they get to school or job placement rates once they get out, but I do think that's an important thing that universities need to look at because that's a reflection on them, if a lot of your students are graduating and they are not achieving, or not finding jobs. I think that's a part of preparation, so mentoring is a huge piece to that, just putting them in an academic curriculum and then having them fend for themselves… I mean if the skill level is there, or there is a deficit somewhere, as a university you should probably

provide a little bit more mentorship so that we can make sure that these individuals have

that came from a background that did not supply what they needed by making sure they

have it while attending your institution because you are invested in them.

When provided with statistics that under fifty percent of African American males that start out

as freshmen in college do not complete college according to literature… Mike stated: "A lot of

the guys that I started college with were either gone after the first semester or they were placed

on academic probation and then after the first year they were gone."

Dee discussed how it was interesting to talk about his undergraduate educational process. He

stated:

At the HBCU I attended, all or most of my professors were African American. I

probably had maybe one or two White professors and they were like an anomaly; it was

like 'wow a White professor', all the others were just Black and you were kind of use to

that. However, I got my Master's degree and I went to the other side of the spectrum, I

attended a predominantly White university that is predominantly an all-female school.

My classmates pretty much were all-White females and all of my instructors were White

females and so it is interesting that in different places there's these different pockets of

segregation, so you have all these people in the program, two more Blacks other than

myself surrounded by all these White females in these classes and so, but they're not

being taught to be separate from other groups, I'm sitting there observing this. When I

attended an HBCU, it taught us how to be proud of your Blackness and it also taught me

to be able to cross across the aisle to integrate and to communicate and have a great

relationship with people across the aisle. These things I believe are just so needed and

are so relevant, especially when you have African Americans at colleges and universities

who are in the position to help other African Americans because sometimes I believe

they get in these positions and there are not willing to be that parent or peer. They are

kind of like hands off. I got mine I am not here to guide you our mentor you and there is

also a need on that level to not ignore or forget about the ones who are underneath them.

According to Steel, being a human-being along with being Black, all the interview protocol

questions brought his thoughts out. He believed this study was needed and needed to be read.

He went on to say:

> We look at so many news outlets and current events, happening today, around the
>
> world and all this negative stuff. The shooting of people and the injustices that Black
>
> men are dealing with throughout the United States, to add anything on, the person who
>
> wrote this, put this together need to be an overseer for programs like this in colleges
>
> and universities to draw people in to help tutor and prepare these African American
>
> males while they are in college to help them graduate.

The only thing Xavier wanted to add was the three P's. African American males attending

institutions of higher education need the three P's (parent, peer, protégé). Xavier said we all

need a parent, a peer, and a protégé and in the parent, important to you, that peer you're equal,

and a protégé that your trying to work with. So, if its higher education and your able to do the

three P's it's great. Xavier stated:

> Actually no, I would just conclude with again with what I call the three P's, we all
>
> need that there throughout life and that parent needs to be in different areas meaning
>
> you can have a person in your life that is a financial parent, meaning you have a pastor
>
> that's helping you spiritually and you have another person that's motivating you
>
> physically, and another person motivating you academically, it's not that you're going

to find that one person who has the capacity to help all the major areas of your life and so I believe that we need to learn to go out and as African American males we don't do that a lot. You learn that at your HBCU's, you learn that in your fraternities that the average Black man is not use to going out asking someone for a lack of better words to mentor, coach, parent… whatever that is we need that. Again, unless it an HBCU and you tap into a fraternity, your average college Black male on campus does not have that mindset of needing a protégé. In the Jewish community it's ingrained they know that. They all know that we must pour into another one to make him great. You only get that in certain segments of the African American community. HBCU's and your fraternities and sororities push that, but how many African American males on your average campus is a part of that? And so particularly in your predominately White universities, like your Pitt, Penn State, IUP, Clarion, and your Gannon that is where they lack and you are not going to get that.

When asked, do you have any idea why that happens? Xavier replied that it was a mindset that as an undergraduate, if you removed Black studies he would not have been exposed to it. Xavier said, "Remove the HBCUs and most of your education growing up is taught by White professors, remove my Black studies and I had one Black teacher from K-12 which was Dean Chancellor [pseudonym] and at Gannon University, I did not have one Black teacher, outside of the undergraduate university's Black studies department."

Based on this, removing Black studies Xavier would have gone through both, his master's and doctorate program with one African American professor in each.

If you were to remove Black studies as my discipline in my undergraduate studies I would have only had two African American educators throughout my educational

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career. If I only had one Black male, what are the chances I'm going to get mentored or someone speaking it to me? But you throw me into that discipline of Black studies now I got your Dr. Brutus's, you throw him at a Cheney University, so you put all the Blacks who are at the university that I graduated from, if they don't take a Black studies program their like me they came up through school and saw very few Black male role models.

Summary

This chapter presented eight professionally employed African American males who graduated from four year institutions and were mentored. Each participant discussed their experience of having been mentored and how it impacted them during and beyond college. Subsequently, three themes emerged: (1) having a mentor affiliated with the university or college helped socially and academically, (2) organizational groups that had mentorship involvement, and (3) being mentored encouraged perseverance through accountability which leads to graduation. Each will be discussed in the final chapter based on the findings of this study. Each participant's thoughts were collected through interview accounts, which were descriptive of their undergraduate college experience as it relates to having been mentored. In addition, this chapter revealed that being mentored had a significant impact, not only on the academic achievements of these AA men, but also on them personally and socially.

All eight participants acknowledged that being mentored contributed to completing their bachelor's degree. Furthermore, the participants noted that if they did not have the opportunity of being mentored while in college, they probably would not have graduated. The findings here inform the conclusions and recommendations presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter five examines the research questions introduced in this study, summation of the interviews with eight former African American males who graduated from four-year institutions presented in Chapter Four. This chapter also considers the relationship between the theoretical foundations and how they relate to the findings from the participant's interviewed in this study. This chapter examined the social science theories used in this study, the two research questions guiding the study, and the three themes that emerged in chapter four, the conclusions and implications of this study, recommendations for African American male mentoring programs, and recommendations for future studies.

The substance of the themes, findings, and interpretations that inform the conclusions and recommendations are presented in this chapter.

Emergent Themes

The three themes that emerged from chapter four were: (1) having a mentor affiliated with the university or college helped socially and academically, (2) organizational groups that had mentorship involvement, and (3) being mentored encouraged perseverance through accountability which leads to graduation.

Theme #1. Having a Mentor Affiliated with the Institution Helped Participants to Graduate

The participants of the study identified that having a mentor affiliated with the institution they attended was a positive experience that influenced them during and beyond college. Mentoring contributed significantly to their academic, social, personally and in their professional development. During the interviews, the participants frequently spoke highly of their mentors as

they reflected on their experiences and support their mentors provided. Some with pride and others with emotion, they described experiences they had during their undergraduate years in college.

Jacobi (1991) stated, "mentor and mentee and mentoring could include any one of these four key components: 1) it offers emotional and or psychological support, 2) it is a relationship focused on achievement, 3) there is role modeling, and 4) there is an unequivocal relationship with the mentee" (p. 513). These four components aligned with all of the participants, specifically Jet, who said he wanted to be just like his mentor.

According to Strayhorn and Terrell (2007), "mentoring facilitates academic and social involvement. Therefore, mentoring may influence an individual's growth and development, to the degree that this assumption is valid, mentoring can directly or indirectly influence an individual's objectives and, subsequently, determination and perseverance" (p. 73). Throughout chapter four, participants shared experiences of this. Mentors have provided the tools for the eight participants in this study.

Dee shared that having a mentor throughout college gave him the opportunity after college, to mentor students who were experiencing similar challenges that he once faced during college. Although, it was at different times and years, both Junior and Osis, were mentored by the same mentor. Each identified that having a mentor helped them adjust academically and socially during their undergraduate experience. Xavier contributed his academic success to all the mentors he had throughout his undergraduate program, but stated that if it was not for his course of study, he does not believe he would have graduated because the university did not have mentoring programs targeted at helping AA males.

According to Rep, it gave him guidance along with opportunities, to develop himself academically, but also gave him the help he needed to develop as a man. Recalling some of the artifacts shared by Steel and how he took pride in the memorabilia, from the 1960's through 2015, was humbling, encouraging, and offered hope for a population that remains underrepresented. For the participants in this study, having been mentored at the college level definitely paid off. To date, all participants utilize their experiences from being mentored to help other AA males, young and old academically, socially, and culturally.

Theme #2. Organizational involvement

All participants were involved in organizations and activities associated with the college or universities they attended. Each participant felt getting involved with campus clubs and organizations that centered their focus on the interests of AA students provided them a sense of belonging and being a part of the college or university they attended. The support found in these organizations helped create an environment within the campus environment that, by the participant interpretation, was not for some, institutional structured to meet their specific needs. These organizations included historically Black Greek letter fraternities and clubs specifically for AA involvement.

Participants shared that getting involved in these organizations helped close an existing gap that was much-needed, in order for them to make it through their four-year degree. By being affiliated with these different organizations, the participants remained engaged throughout college and beyond. According to most of the participants, they remain connected to their fraternal organizations to this day. Some of the participants shared that getting involved on campus helped with establishing peer-mentor relationships as well because some of the fraternity members became their mentors and individual club members from the different campus

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organizations. The peer-mentor relationship was regarded as valuable as it provided each participant an opportunity to bond and communicate with someone within their generation who had likely experienced some of the same obstacles the participants were currently facing. Cuyjet (2006) suggested that peer support was necessary for AA men to develop the motivation vital to persevere regarding degree completion on a PWI campus.

This study revealed the importance of Black Greek fraternities and their involvement with African American males on college campus throughout the United States. These organizations play a critical role, in retaining African American males in higher education. The participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed that their involvement with a mentor is why they are all mentoring other African American males today.

Theme # 3. Being Mentored Encourage Perseverance Through Accountability Which Leads to Graduation

Despite the issues of structural inequalities such as stereotypes, prejudice, bias, and social isolation encountered by some of the participants, each held themselves accountable and considered their mentors a major factor, for persevering towards graduation. The theme of accountability in this study comes from the participants' determination to continue their undergraduate coursework despite the issues mentioned. Accountability to mentors had a major impact on the participants' academic success. All participants saw the completion of their degree as proof that mentors are vital at the college level and that the commitments made by their mentor, to support each of them was not pointless. Robinson (2014) discovered that mentoring had a positive impact on AA males in higher education.

Understanding the role of accountability in any mentoring relationship is essential in this research. Previous literature spoke specifically to the role of accountability in the AA male student's success, it did make connections between the recognition that African American male students benefit not only academically, but socially also. According to Robinson's (2014) study, mentoring inspired AA men to become more socially responsible. It showed that AA men who receive mentoring remained in college, their self-esteem improved, and they stood a better chance at matriculating through college.

The researcher noted in this study's literature review that Robinson's (2014) study addressed some of the same institutional inequalities that participants in this study experienced at PWIs. It also reported similar finding to participants in this study who attended HBCUs. According to Robinson (2014), AA male students experienced racial battle fatigue and suffered from identity and self-esteem issues. AAs and AA men who encounter chronic exposure to racial discrimination became frustrated, angry, exhausted, and emotionally withdrawn. Cuyjet (2006) concluded that AA male students struggle with countless non-academic issues on PWI campuses including conflicts with low self-esteem and self-confidence, and suggested it is important to create opportunities where motivation can be fostered in order for them to persevere.

This research reinforced these conclusions based on the participants' responses, to the interview protocol questions and the mentoring experiences described in this study. All participants spoke of the role the mentors played in helping them build their self- confidence and learned to identify resources to support their academic success.

Examination of the Research Questions

Research Question # 1: What Role Did Mentoring Play in Creating an Educational Environment that Helped Empower African American Males to Graduate?

The first research question studied the participant's perception of mentoring and how it helped them graduate college. More specifically, the factors that contributed to their academic success were examined.

Perceptions of Institution

The participants in this study shared their undergraduate experiences. Five attended Predominately White Institutions (PWI's) with few African American students on campus. The remaining three attended Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) where the majority of students were African American. Participants, who graduated from PWIs, did not believe the institution represented African American male students well academically, socially, or culturally causing some to feel socially unaccepted not only within the university environment, but also throughout the larger community.

As a result of these feelings and the lack of other African American students on campus, participants described feeling alone and less able to relate to their White counterparts. Furthermore, there was fear of being rejected, which primarily kept some participants from establishing social interactions on campus. According to two of the participants, these feelings and experiences are what led to them to transfer to another university, while another participant witnessed some of his friends leaving because of a lack of support socially, academically, culturally, and financially.

However most of the participants who attend PWIs were involved in organizations that were considered African American organizations that were affiliated with the university they

attended, in addition to having a mentor affiliated with the university in some capacity. Participants who attended HBCUs were involved in various organizations affiliated with the university they attended too. These organizations helped the participants socially, academically, and culturally during their undergraduate career, as well as having been mentored by affiliates of the college or university they attended.

The participants who attend PWIs for their Bachelor's degree stated the institutions were structured, to help them graduate, which was completely different from some of the other participants. African American students appeared to struggle with making connections within the larger community due to a lack of familiarity with the community. This kept African American male students from reaching out to White individuals on campus and in the community. Often, their White counterparts did not look to adopt or present an opportunity to engage the African American students, due to limited experiences with African American men. However, some participants were prepared academically for college based on their life experiences, but it did not prepare them for the battles with the feelings of isolation and discrimination.

Mentors, proved to be beneficial for the participants, creating opportunities that helped them persist and successfully manage their battles with isolation while attending college. Some of the participants reported there was no university support that they were aware of, but they found support through those that they identified with the university. According to one participant, if it was not for his course of study, he probably would not have finished college because all his mentors during his undergraduate studies were his professors. Another participant agreed that if it was not for the individuals that mentored him and the environment in which he grew up, he would not have continued during his undergraduate career. However, he stated, "there were things in place but I did not take advantage of them."

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Participants who attended HBCUs, where the institutions were structured to help African American students succeed found all that they needed to navigate their way through college. Each found the college environment, as a family away from home. According to Tinto, (1993) it is more likely for students to graduate if the institution's mission is to provide quality education to all students. Swail's (2003) study revealed similarities in student goals and institutional mission is facilitated by academic and social components. Integrating the two, student persistence and the campus community helps in creating institutional commitment.

Finally, the participants all maintained that mentorship gave them the support that was needed in environments that were not familiar to some of them. All of the participants said they were influenced particularly by their mentor. Five of the participants indicated that their mentors had a direct influence and impact on their academic and social development. Three participants stressed that the structure of the college they attended provided an environment surrounded by individuals who looked like them and that could relate to their life experiences before college because they came from similar backgrounds.

Furthermore, based on the age demographic some participants could not associate the term 'mentoring' with what they were receiving during undergraduate studies. They would often refer to their mentors as role models, but as time transpired in the interviews, they referred to them as mentors. All eight participants believed that mentors are needed at the college level for male AA students based on the study.

Research Question # 2: To What Degree Did Mentoring Have on Your Academic Success During and After Graduating College?

The second research question examined the eight participants' perceptions of how being mentored has impacted their life beyond college. Participants were also asked to explain how they believe being mentored helped them during and beyond college.

Impact of Mentoring Beyond College

All of the participants agreed that having a mentor during college prepared them for life beyond college. Junior shared that he had his father in his life that he respected and revered, coupled with uncles that took to mentoring him and providing him the things needed to be a successful Black man. Those mentors helped him immensely. Also, his father was a constant presence at the university he attended and allowed the nurturing he received before college and a continuation during college.

Although, he did not want to admit it at first, he finally acknowledged the correlation between the university and his father, therefore, confirming he did have a mentor associated with the university. In his own words he described the impact of having his father, who was a professor at the university he attended as a mentor. Furthermore, his father held a Ph.D., making him more than qualified to help guide Junior, so that interaction with him shaped him into the man that he currently is.

As one of two college professors in this study, many, Black male students, seek Jet with academic, social, and cultural concerns. Based on his experiences and the advice that he received from his mentors during his undergraduate years has helped his mentees succeed. According to Jet, AA male students knowing they have someone they can talk to and relate to, makes him a major advocate of mentoring at the college level.

With Mike, he felt guidance and structure began early on in his life and contributes it to his parents and grandparents. Although, he did not view it as mentorship, he could now acknowledge it as that because the work ethic instilled in him at an early age prepared him for college and beyond. Mike's brother, coaches and the Marine Corps conditioned him to catapult to another level.

Having mentors helped Osis beyond college by clarifying and creating a pathway beyond the stress of having his world and foundation rocked, to a degree that he questioned why he attended college and why education, was so important. Mentors helped him apply himself differently in society and kept him grounded. College made him trainable and able to ascend from where he began to his current position, however, a major part of that was based on the influence his college mentors had on him. In addition, he learned how to access situations, problem-solve, and use data, yet, it did not teach him how to have good interpersonal relationships with dominant culture pedagogy, or confront racism in a positive way. Furthermore, it did not prepare him, for society not practicing what it preaches. Notwithstanding, creating, a dichotomy of what is real and what is not.

For the three participants who attended HBCUs, they identified mentors as major influences during and beyond college. Mentorship taught accountability to all three, now, each are committed in helping others, in their chosen professions. One described mentoring, as a continuous process where the mentor and mentee pour into each other, and they are sharing and exchanging and pouring into someone else. This exchange goes back and forth and is the dictum taught by Dee, in his classroom.

The oldest of all the participants in this study worked various job growing up and noticed how family members and friend's families struggled to put food on the tables, for their families. These experiences led and made him want more and to do better. Therefore, he looked at education as a way out of poverty and he saw a career in his future, due to education. He saw that one could work in a job with more financial benefits and it benefited him because no one prepared him for college. He said, "Being mentored in college definitely paid off and I am mentoring others today."

Another participant found that having mentors influenced him beyond college because they had an intimate understanding of him, it encouraged him, and it helped shape him. His occupation allows him to reach a large group, as he preaches and teaches a lot while sharing, 'I am not a grown man I am a growing man' and having had mentors, in his life allows him to continue to help shape themselves. Therefore, mentors challenged him and kept him from being stagnant in life, challenging him to grow academically, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and financially.

Lastly, Rep received guidance and opportunities to develop academically, but more importantly it helped him in several areas of his life beyond college. The mentors and opportunities provided him the helped he needed to develop as an individual. His current position as a State Representative all began during his undergraduate career. It was his mentor who helped inspire him towards politics and allowing him to pursue a career in politics.

Each participant mentioned how mentoring impacted them beyond college and how it helped shape their lives after college which corresponded with Brown (2013) who found the participants identified countless experiences where they were influenced by their college mentors. In addition, mentoring's impact reaches well beyond college and into their professional lives.

Based on the participants in this study, it is determined that AA men who are mentored while working to obtain their undergraduate degrees, have an abundance of appreciation for mentors' and programs that care and support throughout their college careers. Their gratitude is so significant they acknowledge their mentors, not only by completing their degrees, but also by continuing to mentor the next generation of AA males. While describing appreciation for family, friends, coaches, and others, participants' recognized their mentors' as important to their degree achievement. The importance they place on their mentor-mentee relationship is priceless; as alumni, they identify the worth of offering the same opportunities for current and future AA males with similar challenges. Participants continue the mentoring process by becoming mentors, to other AA students that have and face similar challenges.

The findings of this research suggest that the participants felt knowledgeable, experienced, and confident in their professional careers, as a result of having been mentored during their collegiate career. Moreover, having accepted their mentor's confidence in them, the participants develop confidence in themselves. This increase in self-confidence was identified through their academic success and eventually, in their professional careers.

This study sought to examine three theoretical foundations and their correlation to eight former AA males who were mentored at the college level. Sedlacek's (2011) using non-cognitive variables in assessing readiness in higher education, Tinto's (1975) student integration model, and Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering.

Sedlacek's (2011) Using Non-Cognitive Variables in Assessing Readiness

Sedlacek (2011) identified con-cognitive variables that impact the participants in this study. Listed and explained below are eight non-cognitive variables that influenced the success of the participants in this study.

> *Positive Self-Concept* – Individuals who are confident, determined, and have a solid foundation and tend to exhibit a strong personality. For AA males it is important to have these characteristics in order to achieve at each level in education. Fortitude, is required specifically, for AA males who come from diverse cultural settings and experiences that differ from other students and faculty members they may encounter in college.

> *Realistic self-appraisal* – Realistic self-appraisal is an individual's ability to measure their strengths and weaknesses and accepts help in developing themselves to do better. African American males have to have positive self-confidence to achieve academically, socially, and culturally. In addition, nontraditional individuals who have strong feelings of self-worth, character, and self-determination and independence tend to be successful to in life (Sedlacek, 2011).

> *Understands and Knows How to Handle Racism* – The flourishing nontraditional student is a pragmatist and has had personal experience with the racial injustices that

African American encounter and knows how to deal with it. They are committed to fighting for equality and justice and are not angry towards society because they find alternative solutions. Whether, it is Institutional racism, sexism, or any form of discrimination, the primary concern is handling the policies procedures and barriers, intentional or not, that interfere with the development of people (Sedlacek, 2011).

Long-Range Goals – Many AA males who have long-range goals tend to graduate from college. AA male counterparts tend to do better because traditionally things have been positioned for them to succeed. Therefore, nontraditional students have to become acclimated to the educational environment in order to produce positive outcomes as their counterparts. Basically, Students of color often experience culture shock when they arrive at Predominately White Institutions of higher education and their adjusting to the environment takes time. AA students who are better prepared show evidence of doing better in college than those who are not (Sedlacek, 2011).

Strong Support – Students who come from families where family members attended college often do well because of the strong educational family foundation. However, for nontraditional students it is often a relative, friend, or someone who attended college. Many students of color do not have immediate access to someone to support them when it comes to academic support (Sedlacek, 2011).

Leadership – Most successful African American students have had positive influences in their life that played a major role in their academic success. While the ones who did not, found other ways to display their leadership, whether it was through sports, volunteer work in the community, or through church.

Many White have friends and family that showed them the ropes and provided them with a lot of references, when it came to filling out applications for college (Sedlacek, 2011).

Community – It is important for AA male students to have individuals within the community that they can identify with and receive support to help them academically. According to Sedlacek (2011) students that are involved and engaged with the community tend to adjust socially and culturally, while helping to produce positive outcomes for them educationally in college.

Nontraditional Knowledge Acquired – AA males are more inclined to matriculate by utilizing resources beyond the educational system. Many AA males learn through others, or their own life experiences. The culture and environment, in which they grew up served as their classroom and teacher. Understanding, the background of African Americans can play a vital role in their academic success. Sometimes nontraditional students demonstrate a better understanding of the educational system than those who are considered traditional students (Sedlacek, 2011, pp. 6-10).

Each of these non-cognitive variables have been tested and validated to be predictors of persistence in higher education for AA men (Sedlacek, 2011).

Throughout the interviews, all of the participants stressed the importance of having a mentor, programs targeted at helping AA male students academically, and organizations that provide mentorship relationships. Understanding the roles of each individual, having a mentor during college created a sense of meaning that each participant in this study, used to help motivate them.

Jet reflected upon the importance of having a mentor and told the researcher how much he wanted to be like him and increased his interest, in taking his academics more seriously.

Another participant indicated that mentoring was not only an integral part of his growing-up, but it was also instrumental in his undergraduate career, due to his father's affiliation with the university he attended. Once he began his graduate experience, he was mentor by the head of minority affairs. Being mentored at this level allowed him an opportunity to interact with administrators and prepared who run and operate an international business globally. He strongly believes that there is a high need for mentoring at the college level.

Some participants indicated as a result of having been mentored, during their undergraduate career, motivated them to help other Black males after they graduated college in their professional careers. Mentoring gave them the necessary tools needed to assist others African American males, who were experiencing things similar to what the participants had experienced in the past. Mentors had helped them apply themselves differently, in a world that did not treat them equally and it kept each grounded.

Each participant described how mentoring impacted them during and beyond their undergraduate college career. All of the participants shared their experiences, gave examples, and acknowledged how mentors and mentoring programs for African American males should be implemented at the college level. Mentoring has been one of the key components in many AA males being successful, whether it is academics, athletics, or employment opportunities, due to the shared experiences between the mentor and mentee.

Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model

Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model focuses on student integration into the institution academically and socially. Integration, in turn, is influenced by pre-college characteristics and goals, interactions with peers and faculty, and out of classroom factors. More specifically, Tinto (1975) examined the impact of academic integration and social integration in college and how both were indicators for academic success for AA males. All of the participants in this study indicated that their involvement in mentoring, organizational and campus involvement directly impacted their ability to persist throughout and beyond college.

Some of the participants who attended PWI experienced feelings of isolation in the beginning of their academic careers. This was directly linked to low numbers of African American students enrolled at their campus and the institutional culture of the campus. However, it was through mentoring and organizational involvement that many of the participants sustained their journey toward social integration. As each participant continued during their undergraduate programs they began to integrate into the university or college they attended. Others who attended HBCUs felt welcome and as if they were among family, due to the institutional structure, campus climate, and seeing many individuals that looked like them.

Tinto's (1975) student integration model started conversation across the country on undergraduate retention (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Also, researchers and practitioners have used this model for over 30 years. Although it has been revised, supported, and critiqued it has influenced undergraduate retention and graduation. For the participants, in this study, their involvement with mentors helped them to develop psychologically; allowing them to better overcome some of the barriers that they faced while pursuing their degree.

Participants in this study developed mentor relationships with campus faculty, staff, alumni, and organizations on campus. However, prior to forming these mentor and mentee relationships the students themselves managed their efforts with social integration by taking an interest in student groups on campus that focused on the African American student experience. These efforts lead to mentor relationships between the participants and the campus faculty, staff, alumni, and organizations on campus. Although mentors were not directly responsible for the management of the participant's social integration, their relationships with the participants provided them with the necessary tools needed to persevere during their undergraduate career.

As evident and as a result through the analysis, the participants indicated that they were encouraged to pursued similar careers socially and professionally as their mentors, such as joining a fraternity, going into teaching, politics, business, and ministry. However, all of the participants became mentors to other AA males. The impact of mentoring at the college level was relevant for these participants. The findings enhance Tinto's (1975) theory of student integration. Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering will be the third and final theoretical foundation examined.

Schlossberg's Theory of Marginality and Mattering

Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering was the final theoretical foundation examined in this study. Schlossberg (1989) studied transitions and learned that every time people move to a new environment, change jobs, or go off to college, these events affect them and produces feelings of marginality and mattering. Linares and Munoz (2011) suggested mattering and marginality holds characteristics of relational confirmation that centers around an individual's needs, such as attention, feeling wanted and welcomed, while connecting with others. According to Schlossberg (1989) students of color felt as though they

mattered because of their involvement on campus and being a part of organizational activities associated with the university or college they attend. Each participant, communicated throughout this study experiences that related to Schlossberg's theory.

All but one of the participants were first generational college graduates. The findings in chapter four detailed each participant's shared experiences in their own words and clearly resonated in the one on one interviews in this study.

Conclusions

The findings of this research provide an analysis of mentoring at the college level. Each participant can share similar experiences as well as having experiences that differ from each other. Specific aspects of having a mentors and mentoring programs at the college level should continue to be explored as well as examining the importance of AA organizations and activities for AA students at colleges and universities across the country. It is important to see how colleges and universities propel AA male students towards graduation.

An investigation of some of the factors that encouraged mentoring AA male students at four-year colleges and universities transpired, but more research need to take place, to investigate all factors. This study specifically examined the perceptions of professionally-employed, AA male college graduates who were mentored formally and informally during their undergraduate years regarding the impact mentoring had on completing their degrees and their success in life since graduation. The results of this study are encouraging as they show that AA male college students who have mentoring relationships with university affiliates benefit academically, socially, and culturally.

These results will provide insight to the reader, first-hand knowledge on how institutions of higher education can help AA males graduate from college and can support growing research

in this area. In order to help AA males in higher education, it is vital to identify with the many obstacles the AA male is confronted with daily, yet one must also be cognizant of the causes for his success and begin to re-think the way success is evaluated (Robinson, 2014).

In addition, all of the participants revealed that their involvement with a mentor prepared them for life after college. Findings showed examining the participants' mentoring relationships during their Baccalaureate program, that additional examinations need to occur with other former AA males who have graduated from four-year colleges and universities, who live in different regions other than Western Pennsylvania.

Moreover, this study brings to light the importance of mentors and the role that mentors play at the college level for AA males to graduate. This study found that there were a number of benefits directly linked to having a mentor for the participants involved in this research. As a result of these benefits, colleges and universities need to be more proactive in assisting AA male students in their pursuit in degree obtainment.

The results from this study, supports the review of literature in this study. However, it provides first-hand transparency of information needed to help administrators and other leaders affiliated with higher education. Colleges and universities, specifically, PWIs, need to develop an orientation program solely for AA male students, in which both students and families can attend, celebrate, and connect with other new students.

Developing this would assist AA male students in establishing relationships with the AA community before their first year and give them an opportunity to connect with a potential mentor for support. Also, organizations and clubs affiliated with the university and community organizations should be encouraged to attend and to provide support. By providing support, these organizations will have an opportunity to recruit new members. All university officials and their

individual academic departments should also be present, regardless of their ethnic background, as a means support for the incoming AA male students.

This is an important finding for college campuses because it will create opportunities to increase cultural awareness, social integration, and understanding towards a population that continues to be underrepresented academically, socially, and culturally. Furthermore, it will give the AA male students a sense of inclusion and hope. Chapter four identified eight African American men, who beat the odds, growing up in inner cities that did not give them a positive outlook on life educationally.

Each participant shared their perspective on what mentoring meant to them. For decades, AA males, young and old have been discriminated against, based on the color of their skin and not afforded the same opportunities as they counterparts. Yet, they were told that they have the same opportunities as anyone else. Based on literature, statistics and research report otherwise. However, little has been done at the college level to help this population of students. Through in-depth one-on-one interviews, this study captured these participants' truth, as it pertains to how they were able to graduate college.

Chapter two revealed several studies that showed African American males have been discriminated again on multiple occasions and different levels throughout history. In efforts to address this problem, this study will help educators, administrators, government and most of all African American males see there is hope, by creating mentoring programs at the college level for African American males.

Implications

This study supports limited research on AA men in higher education and the factors that lead to their graduating from four-year colleges. Like some of the studies mentioned in Chapter

Two, this study discovered that expectations, asking for help, nurturing, having like-minded friends, campus involvement such as a Black Greek fraternities, but most of all having a mentor led to the participants' completion of their undergraduate degree. This study, as did Robinson's (2013) study, highlighted is how mentoring is impacted by the eight non-cognitive variables. Mentoring was found to indirectly lead to degree obtainment of AA men in higher education.

Results from this study suggest various implications for educators, administrators, and student affairs professionals in higher education. The results reveal the importance of having mentors at the college level along with guidance from teachers, family, and other mentors well before a student enters higher education. Having a mentor in higher education not only contributed to the development of AA male students during college, it also impacted them after college in their professional careers.

As supported in this study, AA males who were mentored during their undergraduate career, identified mentoring as a one of the variables, but there were also non-cognitive variables that helped them graduate. Perseverance and long term goals, strong support, community involvement, leadership experiences, and knowledge acquired in a field help AA students develop academically, socially, and culturally.

This study established that the colleges and universities that have the most success graduating AA males are the ones that have programs geared towards that targeted population and are institutionally structured for that purpose. Examples of such support should include: AA male initiative programs that aid mentors in networking with other AA males who are mentors, and AA males seen as leaders in business, education, and other aspects of the workforce. These individuals can help provide opportunities for AA men in multiple areas of society and help increase AA male student retention throughout higher education.

Therefore, it cannot be assumed that mentoring by itself creates and environment for AA males to graduate college, however, it can be implied that a relationship does exist between the two. Mentors allow participants to learn through their experiences and they helped cultivate an environment that makes African American males feel safe, included, and appreciated while providing them with an opportunity to learn from someone who understands their situation. Based on the levels of mentorship acquired by the participants in this study, implementing mentoring programs within a college or university, degree attainment among AA male students will be achieved.

Recommendations for College and University Administrators

Mentors, whether formal or informal, represent a strong presence in the perseverance of AA males' retention in higher education. Many AA males need mentors to be successful. Quite a few, maybe first time college-bound students and do not have money, nor do they have any idea of what to expect once they arrive on campus. There are many different things taking place in their lives, such as poverty, abandonment, isolation and being mentored helps guide them through the challenges they face.

If the AA male college student does not obtain a college degree, it is a much harder journey in life without one. However, he has a better chance at obtaining employment and can make greater strides with a college degree.

Therefore, colleges and universities administrators and important staff should consider the following when investigating the needs of AA male undergraduates' attending their institutions:

1. Mentoring program for African American male students today in higher education should be a multi-tiered approach. Colleges and universities have to have an

integrated approach in which AA males have mentors, AA mentors mentoring Black male students, but we cannot be exclusive African Americans have to be inclusive because AA male students should not only work with Black men, they are going to have to work with all types of people, Asians, East Indian, Hispanic, women, and transgender individuals, so we have to be very versatile in our thoughts. Black men in positions of authority in higher education along with college and university administrators, faculty and staff, need to engage and show best practices to our young Black men, so that they can graduate.

2. Training of trainers (TOT) and workshops, to improve cultural awareness and understanding of administrators, faculty, staff and community can create a sense of belonging with AA male students. Colleges and universities training their workforce in this area may improve AA male's wellbeing and lead to an increase in graduation rates. Also, increasing faculty of color, hiring some of the AA male students who majored in areas that the university could utilize as employee, may help with marketing potential for the institution.

3. Executing mentoring programs that specifically support AA males can increase the retention and enrollment of this population, while decreasing feelings of social isolation that currently exist based on studies identified in this current study. These programs should be introduced during orientation and required for all AA male students their freshman year. These programs should offer AA male students, who successfully complete their freshman year an opportunity to become mentors to the next group of incoming freshman. Capturing their input and involvement could validate their experience and keep them engaged on campus.

4. Different mentor relationships in this study revealed the impact and benefits of having a mentor for the participants of this study. Programs and organizations committee to providing AA male students help outside the classroom may increase opportunities for informal mentor relationship development. Regarded as respected characteristics, mentors are identified as being transparent, supportive, and accessible, shared opportunities such as these may provide AA male students access to faculty and staff socially, encouraging the potential mentoring relationships and identifying the benefits. Joining and participating in the programs delivers a clear message of support to this population, and contributes to their desire for an accessible mentor.

There is an opportunity to create an environment that promotes equality, inclusion, and integration opposed to having inadequately prepared young AA males, who are not academically, socially and culturally equipped to enter society. The benefits to society at large will not be constructive. Therefore, higher educational leaders need to take responsibility to ensure the success of all groups. Higher education cannot have a particular group, being AA males, lagging behind because it is going to have a negative effect on everybody and everything else.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study examined the perceptions of eight AA men who hold a four-year degree and are professionally employed, while investigating the impact of being mentored, had on them during and beyond graduating college. AA men need a nurturing and inclusive learning environment as well as continuous support and guidance, preferably, someone they hold in high regard, in order to graduate college. The information from this study seized the heartfelt lived

experiences of eight AA men who were mentored and graduated from four-year colleges and universities. The following are future recommendations for continued research:

1. Conduct a study on the experiences of AA men who graduated from both PWIs and HBCUs in four years, but were not mentored. This will provide insight on how men who were not mentored managed their undergraduate careers successfully on a campus with low and high African American representation.

2. Conduct research on the reasons why African American men who attend PWIs and HBCUs do not finish. The information gathered from this study may offer solutions in assisting universities overseeing areas within higher education failing to support this population of students, conceivably causing them to leave indefinitely.

3. Additional research should be conducted to gain a deeper understanding on the unconscious role that structural and institutional inequality may continue to play at colleges and universities across the United States. This will assist the administration with identifying the less than obvious inequalities that exist in higher education and that have a major impact on the struggles and challenges that AA male students encounter academically, socially, and culturally in their pursuit to graduate college.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of professionally-employed African American (AA) male college graduates who were mentored during their undergraduate years regarding the impact mentoring had on completing their degrees and their success in life since graduation. The findings of this study established that participation in formal or informal

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mentoring programs help AA males graduate college. Also, this study found that the experiences and benefits participants gained from being mentored had a positive impact on the participant's, while exploring how those mentor and mentee relationships have translated into and enhanced each participant's life after college.

The mentor and mentee relationship experience during the participant's undergraduate program allowed each of the participants in this study to utilize those experiences in their professional careers, which is encouraging for colleges and universities. As a result of this study, institutions of higher education that are experiencing low AA male enrollment, retention, and graduation rates should look at not only this study but also educational leaders, campus activities, and other organizations affiliated with colleges or universities that are passionate about the success of AA males entering institutions of higher education. These individuals and organizations can be used in helping facilitate mentors at the college level to encourage, motivate, and help increase the graduation success rate of AA male students throughout institution of higher education around the country.

All the participants in this study acknowledged that having a mentor played a vital part during and after their undergraduate education. This study revealed that for African American men who attend PWIs, gaining a mentor had a large impact on their ability to complete their undergraduate coursework. Furthermore, this study established that the support these eight participants received from a mentor led to heightened academic confidence that developed through peer-mentor relationships.

According to the participants, a trusting relationship, a strong sense of accountability to the mentor developed, and degree completion along with becoming a mentor after graduation for each in their professional careers is evidence that having a mentor helps AA males graduate

college. Reflecting on the interviews in this study provided the researcher an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of mentoring at the college level, through the lived experiences of eight Black men who attended colleges and universities for their bachelor's degrees. The researcher remembered a statement made by one of the participants that stresses the immeasurable significance of being mentored so well.

> I think the educational relevance from my personal comparison of doing my graduate work at Kaplan State and undergraduate work at the University I attended, having mentors in your life that care about you and want to see you do well helps gives you that push or whatever you need to succeed, that you don't want to let them down because they open your eyes to new opportunities and gives you new ways of doing things. Whatever it is, having that mentor there really helps you succeed, we learn, but we learn as we grow and having that mentor there helps with the tangible and intangible skillsets you need to be successful… for African Americans again, if we don't graduate from college our margin for error shrinks even more, our margin for success shrinks more and getting that degree is paramount. Having mentors there helps further the development.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. In general, describe your undergraduate experience.

2. Describe the type of support the University you attended provided African American male undergraduate students.

3. Discuss how your undergraduate degree from the college or university you attended has played a role in your professional career and if being mentored had any influence on your career choices. If so, how?

4. How would you describe the role and significance mentoring had on you at the university or college you attended?

5. Discuss your thoughts on how the university or college you attended prepared you for today's society.

6. How do you envision the roles of formal/informal mentoring at colleges and universities in the future?

7. Explain how you believe being mentored helped you during and beyond college.

8. Discuss your point of view on the educational relevance for African American males attending institutions of higher education, and do you believe it is helping or hindering them in society?

9. Discuss your point of view on the educational relevance of having mentors in institutions of higher education and how it impacts African American male students at colleges and universities?

10. Describe your level of campus engagement and involvement in clubs, organizations, groups, and/or other campus or student life activities and how did doing so help you persist during college?

11. What is the modern day need for formal mentoring programs for African American male students in institutions of higher education today?

12. Is there anything related to the topic of mentoring that you would like to share with me not asked in this interview?

Appendix B

Research Question/Interview Question Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Statements/Questions
1. What role did the institution play in creating an educational environment that helped empower African American males to graduate?	1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 10
2. To what degree did mentoring during college years have on African American males after graduation?	3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12