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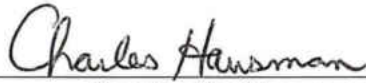
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AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES, MENTORSHIP, AND UNIVERSITY SUCCESS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

By

Taurean Douglas

Dissertation Approved:



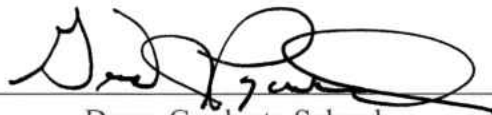
Dr. Charles Hausman, Chair



Dr. Wardell Johnson, Advisory Committee



Dr. Barbara Shoemaker, Advisory Committee



Dean, Graduate School

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AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES, MENTORSHIP, AND UNIVERSITY SUCCESS:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

By

Taurean Douglas

Master of Arts

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

2009

Bachelor of Arts

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

2007

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
May, 2017

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and her sacrifice to support me through this journey. I also dedicate it to my mother, siblings, and my three nephews who I thank for their love and support. Thank you to my son for inspiring me to see this journey through to the end. You have truly made the dark days brighter. This dissertation is respectfully dedicated to the youth who march onward and upward towards the light.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to give praises to God for this opportunity and blessing me with the spirit to endure and complete this doctoral program. To my wife Tiesha I thank you for all of your support and sacrifice to make this road easier for me. This process would have been impossible without you and I love you for it. Thank you to my son Tauras as you are my daily motivation to be greater. Looking forward to giving you my undivided attention. Thank you to my family and friends for all of your support whether it was encouragement or prayers it was greatly appreciated.

I want to thank my dissertation chair Dr. Charles Hausman for all of your guidance and expertise through this process. You assisted me through patience and unwavering dedication and I appreciate it. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Wardell Johnson, and Dr. Barbara Shoemaker for your insight and support to complete my dissertation.

Thank you to my research participants for assisting me and making this research meaningful. I respect you brothers and wish you all the best in any endeavor you pursue in the future. Thank you to my coworkers at the University of Kentucky for all of your support and encouragement along the way. You all were so supportive and understanding and I thank you for it.

This dissertation is in memory of my fallen cohort member Dr. Kimberly Merritt. Your spirit served as an influential guiding force to see us through to the end and “make it plain”. Rest in power.

ABSTRACT

This study examined black males who successfully graduated from a university in south central Kentucky and their perception of mentorship. Interviews were conducted in an attempt to get the lived experiences of five black males who became first generation college graduates. The researcher used purposeful convenience sampling to select black male graduates who had experienced mentoring. Face to face interviews were conducted and the transcripts were analyzed for themes. The findings suggest that mentoring played a significant role in helping the research participants navigate college and successfully graduate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	4
National Conversation on Black Males.....	5
Retention	7
Research Questions	10
Theoretical Approach and Design.....	11
Significance of the Study	12
Definition of Terms.....	13
II. Review of the Literature	15
Introduction	15
Persistence.....	16
Educational Attainment of Black Males	17
Social Network and Family.....	18
High Expectations	20
Black Masculinity	21
Deficit and Theoretical Perspectives of the Black Family	23
Structural functional model:	24
Emergent Model:	25
Single Parent Homes	25
Black Males Raised in Absent Father Homes.....	27
Role Modeling.....	27
Legacy of Slavery.....	28
Institutional racism.....	28
Societal racism	29
Criminalization.....	31
Theoretical Framework	32

Mentorship	33
Black Male Mentoring	36
Formal vs. Informal Mentoring.....	38
Mentoring Effects.....	39
Mentoring Programs.....	41
III. Methodology.....	44
Research Design and Design Appropriateness.....	45
Research Questions	47
Theoretical Framework.....	48
Principles of Qualitative Research	49
Phenomenological Study or Phenomenology	49
Researcher’s Role.....	51
Participants	51
Invitation to Participate	52
Phone Survey.....	54
Setting.....	54
Interviews	55
Data Collection.....	56
Data Analysis	58
Trustworthiness and Validity	59
Delimitations	61
Limitations	61
Chapter Summary.....	62
IV. Data Analysis and Results.....	64
Research Questions	64
Data Collection Procedures.....	65
Background of the Participants	66
Data Analysis	68
Emergent Themes.....	69

Theme1: The Role of a Mentor	70
Critical guidance to development	70
Confidence and Encouragement.....	72
Theme 2: Role Models	73
Dependable and authentic.....	74
Personal Success.....	75
Theme 3: Transfer of Knowledge	77
Additional Findings.....	79
Significance of Theme 1	80
Significance of Theme 2	81
Significance of Theme 3	81
Chapter Summary.....	82
V. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations	84
Research Questions	84
Interpretation of Findings.....	85
Discussion of Themes	87
Theme 1: The Role of a Mentor	87
Theme 2: Role Models	88
Theme 3 Transfer of Knowledge.....	90
Limitations	91
Recommendations and Research Implications.....	92
Future Research Recommendations	94
Conclusion.....	95
References.....	96
Appendices.....	103
A: Letter to Participants	104
B: Interview Questions.....	106
C: Interview Script for Study	109
D: Interview Questions.....	111
E: Informed Consent	113

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Based on your grades it is not likely that you will qualify for any scholarship. You may want to rethink if college is for you. (High School Guidance Counselor, 2002).

This piece of lived experience speaks to one of the personal motivating factors that encouraged this researcher to begin and complete college. Though the researcher was an average student in high school, completing his studies with a grade point average in the area of a 2.7, he did go on to get a small local scholarship that aided in his education. A simple conversation about college and scholarship opportunities could have discouraged him and sent his life down a different path but he refused to let it. Many students who graduate high school with less than a 3.0 grade point average (B average) go on to college to find academic success. In a study by the University of Chicago (2014) consortium on school research they found that students who graduated high school with less than a 3.0 grade point average had a 47% graduation rate versus the 57% of students who had a high school grade point average of a 3.0 or higher.

However, if the advice of the guidance counselor had been heeded, the researcher would never have applied for the scholarship, let alone been so confident about pursuing higher education. As a first-generation college student from a small city in western Kentucky, the researcher and his twin brother always had the goal of going to college. It was never known how college would be afforded or what it required. They just always knew we were going to go to college mainly due to the encouragement and guidance of

our first mentor, our mother. The researcher, being an average student, never knew what set him and his brother apart from peers. Several friends, who he knew, attended college on full academic scholarships, only to return home after a semester or two. What was the difference that spurred the researcher onto graduation? As an average student, what made him different? These life experiences and the lack of stories from black males, serve as part of the motivation to conduct this qualitative research study. For the purpose of the dissertation the researcher will use black and African American interchangeably in an attempt to encompass males who self-identify as one or both.

Statement of the Problem

African American males attend and successfully compete college at a far lesser rate than other groups. Statistics centered on black male achievement have mainly been framed through a negative lens (Bush & Bush, 2010). Cuyjet (2006) suggests that many factors hinder African American male success such as predisposition to college, academic achievement, and interpersonal relationships. Zell (2011) suggest that African American males also may not succeed academically due to institutions not being committed to diversity and lack of support services like mentoring initiatives. African American male success in the classroom is not only important to the college or university, but to the foundation of the African American community.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), African American males have a 33.1% national college graduation rate. Their graduation rate significantly trails the 54.5% rate of Caucasian males. Above battling to get to the graduation stage, African American males must also fight the pressure of overcoming stereotypes and forced

societal norms. A classic example is the fact that more black men are in prison than in college (which has also been perpetuated for years by the black community). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2012), however, refutes this common statement that is often used to visualize the depressing state of African American men in America. In a study conducted by Knapp et al (2010), they state that there are 1.2 million black men enrolled in higher education institutions compared to 841,000 men incarcerated. Though more African American men are represented in the criminal justice system than their counterparts, the notion that more are in jail compared to college is false.

Black men are a seemingly underrepresented population of an already underrepresented group in the higher education landscape. Countless negative statistics that use sweeping generalizations about the group make an already uphill climb even more difficult. The widening of the education gap between black males and other populations can have implications for the future earning power of black males and their representation on the national level. Black males who endure and successfully reach graduation in spite of overcoming societal and environmental factors that suggest they wouldn't deserve praise for completion. Harper (2006) stated that 67% of black males who enter college do not continue on to graduation within a six year time frame (p.14). Engle and Tinto (2008) state that around 34% of first-generation college students earned four year degrees within a six year window (Lundberg et al., 2007; Forbus, Newbold & Mehta, 2011). Therefore, since college graduation rates are significantly lower for black males, is there something we can learn from the motivations of African American males who successfully graduate? Many colleges have created programs or initiatives to address the low graduation percentages of black males on their college campus in an

attempt to aid them in completing a credential. Considering that black males are incarcerated at a rate that is six times that of white males (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012), black males disproportionately represent a small section of college graduates on the national scale. Additionally, over 83% of all black college students attend predominantly white institutions (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, Whitmore, & Miller, 2006). Four years after enrollment at four year institutions, scholars suggest that around 50% of white men and women will drop out, compared with 57% of black women and 69% of black men. (Keels, 2013 p. 310). According to Tinto (1993), the majority of student drop outs occur at the end of a student's freshman year of college.

An important purpose of this study is to add honest discourse from the perspective of black male graduates in an effort to overcome the "deficit model" that is commonly used in literature. Harper et al. (2004) and Palmer and Young (2008) both conducted studies that suggest positive relationships have a positive impact on the academic success of black males. To a large degree, it is important to tell the stories of individuals that, in spite of having the odds against them, successfully complete college. This study examines black male graduates who refused to be defined by statistics, stereotypes, and forced predispositions. This study will attempt to provide greater insight into this issue while also understanding their motivation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American males and their perception of mentoring. Through interviews, this study gave the research participants the opportunity to share their personal stories on mentoring and

how it impacted and influenced them to graduate college at a predominantly white institution.

National Conversation on Black Males

The achievement gap that exist between black and white students in America is staggering for all levels of education. Morales (2010) states that several factors contribute to this educational gap in achievement such as under preparedness, health disparities, economic hardships, and racial identity. But the Committee for Economic Development (2005) suggests that a more educated population tends to have higher incomes and contribute more into the local economy, making black males an important investment for society. A more educated black male population can contribute to a more solidified ethnic identity for many black males on predominantly white campuses across the country.

At an institution where black males are underrepresented, and in trying to learn how to navigate the college system and become acclimated to college life, the experience can feel very isolating (Vuong et al., 2010). To be a black male on the campus of a predominantly white institution is to be someone who is unique yet able to relate to shared experiences.

Black males often get into the habit of masking portions of their identity (covering) or adapting to a cultural practice in the African American community known as “code switching” (Hill, 2009). An individual knowledge of their racial identity, coupled with a supportive campus climate, can create a confident black student who is prepared to be successful in a space that does not readily identify with them.

Additionally, black males who attend predominantly white institutions are likely to encounter faculty and professional staff that do not look like them (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Bell (2014) suggests that teachers and staff who work with black males in the classroom may lack the capability and disposition to work with them effectively. On top of already feeling culturally isolated in the campus community, the classroom can provide similar challenges.

In understanding that black males are capable of being academically successful, literature suggest that those who do perform well, place value on different things. It is important for institutions of higher education to note that the emphasis placed on things like community and spirituality could play a significant role in educational persistence (Cuyjet, 2006; Stebleton & Soria, 2012).

The black male graduates used in the study all attended a mid-sized, predominantly white institution in south central Kentucky. For the fall 2013 cohort year, the institution recorded a total enrollment of 20,456 students (CPE Database, 2014). For the black male undergraduate student population, the same cohort year reported an enrollment total of 875 black males. Six year graduation rates for this institution in 2013 was 50.3%, while the black male graduation rate for the same year was 35.6% (CPE Database, 2014).

Retention

When considering the role of the institution in the success of black male college students it is difficult not to discuss retention and its significance. Several retention models exist but in Bean and Eaton's (2000) model, they suggest that the retention process starts with "entry characteristics that the student possesses upon entering the university". They go on to claim that a student brings with them a foundation of a positive or negative educational history. And in considering a student's background, the researchers acknowledge that students also bring with them other attributes, such as self-efficacy, coping skills, and motivation (Bean and Eaton, 2000). Lastly, Bean and Eaton also declare that students who are "integrated" into the campus develop a more positive viewpoint of the institution and their experience.

So suggesting early interaction and acclimation to the campus environment could be one of the keys to persistence for black males (Martinez et al., 2012). Bean and Eaton also suggest several traits under their "entry characteristics" that are valuable to student success upon entering the university setting. According to this model, black males could benefit from significant focus on environmental interactions. It is also crucial for black males to comprehend early on that the campus environment will likely be different from any other that they have ever experienced. Social interactions are traits attributed to the environmental interaction category in their model of retention (Bean and Eaton, 2000). Through social interactions and the level and type of support received, African American students are more likely to create a connection with the institution.

As mentioned earlier, a large percentage of black male college students arrive at institutions of higher education from low-income, first-generation backgrounds.

According to some scholars, students from first-generation backgrounds report lower levels of self-efficacy than students whose families have prior generations of college graduates (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Newbold & Mehta, 2011). Their perspective limits their view on college and their access to tools needed to succeed. Padgett et al. (2012) suggest that due to this limited view, first-generation college students often lack academic preparedness for the rigor of college level studies. Padgett et al. also suggests that students from more privileged backgrounds, who are more often Caucasian, inherit a knowledge base of the college process at an early age. Through this lens, she claims that students with this inherited knowledge are not raised wondering if they will attend college or not. Instead, they wonder which college they will attend. It is with this notion that causes black males to arrive at predominantly white institutions underprepared and lacking the perspective of success. Through the assimilation process, black males enter a phase of adjustment in this new environment. A level of cultural stripping occurs in order to become successfully acclimated to this new environment. Harper et al., created the term “onlyness” to describe this isolating feeling that many black males experience on the campus of predominantly white institutions (Harper et al., 2011). Harper et al., describes it as the emotional obligation of successfully navigating a space where few peers or role models are from their same ethnic group. Through this feeling of isolation, black males may experience tokenism, stereotypes, and microaggressions.

Pratt & Skaggs (1989) suggests that the educational background of the parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds is very influential in their children’s attainment of higher education. In the same vein as mentorship, peer group influence can play a critical part in the success of black males in college. Coyl et al. (2004) states that peer

group support can affect a student's retention. Scholars also suggest that the level of achievement that members of the peer group reach, along with how motivating the members are, serves as a factor in enhancing black male student retention (Sage & Kindermann, 1999; Kowalski, 1999). Understanding the development of resistance and academic toughness is crucial to increasing the academic success of black males.

Levinson (1978) and Kram (1983) are responsible for some of the earliest mentor related research revolving around career and personal development. Levinson discussed how mentoring helps youth transition into adults while Kram researched the mentoring life cycle as it relates to careers. Mentoring has been researched in various disciplines and has changed overtime to include peer mentoring, virtual mentoring, and e (email) mentoring. Sinclair (2003) suggest that mentoring has proven success in employment and personal development. Mentorship or mentorship programs are supportive relationships or programs that have a positive impact and promote success (Sorrentino, 2007; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kahveci et al., 2006). Mentoring is a best practice that has proven to be impactful on student outcomes. Mentoring on every level includes family, faculty, staff, and peers (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Researchers (Baker, 2007; Dubertz & Turley, 2001) that mentoring impacts all parties involved and that the mentoring experience enhances college completion rates.

Mentoring and programs framed around it aim to retain students and increase graduation rates. Hoffman & Wallach (2005) suggest that students who participate in mentoring programs or relationships exhibit higher levels of motivation and self-confidence. Harper (2006) suggest that African American males can attain success at four year institutions when the appropriate support is in place to assist with acclimation to the

new environment and navigating the college landscape. Zell (2011) states that mentoring African American males has shown to boost self-confidence while creating more comfort in communicating with administrators. Sorrentino (2007) suggest that students who participate in mentoring relationships report higher grade point averages and the acquisition of new skills as a benefit of their relationship.

Research Questions

In an attempt to explore the various facets of mentoring relationships, the following question was used to guide this study: How do black male graduates perceive that mentoring influenced their college completion?

Additionally, the study will seek to better understand what factors contribute to African American male degree completion at predominantly white institutions. The following sub questions also emerged to guide the study:

- 1) How do black male graduates perceive that formal or informal mentorship influenced their college experience?
- 2) What kind of mentoring was most prevalent in their experience with mentoring?
- 3) How do the research participants believe mentoring benefited their overall college experience?
- 4) Was mentoring significant to their academic journey in a unique way because they were at a predominantly white institution?
- 5) What do black male graduates recommend to institutions of higher education for addressing the success of black males?

In answering these questions, the study will closely examine how black male graduates successfully completed a degree program at a public four year institution. In doing so, it will attempt to discover whether or not mentorship contributed to the study participants successfully completing college, to provide a valuable framework for recognizing how black males develop experience mentorship.

Theoretical Approach and Design

Phenomenology allows the researcher to examine the research from an unbiased perspective. Phenomenological studies attempt to find meaning in a given phenomenon. Through this perspective the researcher will attempt to gain information about the research participants lived experience as it relates to mentoring. Phenomenology attempts to comprehend the experiences that occur between humans (Moustakas, 1994; Aspers, 2004). The researcher framed this study through the lens of social constructivism in that this perspective attempts to focus on interactions within an individual's environment while attempting to make meaning of them (Cresswell & Clark, 2007).

An interview format was appropriate for this study in that it allowed for first-hand accounts of the mentoring experience and a majority of the existing literature assessed mentoring from a quantitative perspective. The study will follow five black male graduates from a predominantly white institution. A convenience sample format was used to choose the research participants for the study.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it has the potential to add to the structural influence of black male college students who decide to pursue their education at predominantly white institutions. Mentorship provides black male students with an opportunity to get connected with the campus and assistance in establishing relationships. It also has the potential to increase the awareness and understanding of the roles institutions play in the success of African American males. This study may also suggest implications that add to the retention model for black males along with thoughts for the future success of this population across the country. When a black male steps foot onto the campus of a predominantly white institution some of the resources that influence college success are overt while others are not. As discussed earlier, self-efficacy and mentorship are both factors that positively influence black male student success. Through the premise of this qualitative study, the researcher will presume that by meeting the needs of black males at predominately white institutions, it will, in turn, break the cycle of low graduation rates for black males.

Unlike many mentorship related studies that are quantitative in nature and rely on surveys, this qualitative study will depict the firsthand accounts of black male graduates. A qualitative study will allow the researcher to gain understanding of how the subjects develop and if mentorship or other factors play a significant role in them successfully graduating. This study is critical in that it can add to the emerging literature of black “self-help” and gain the perspective of the individuals who live it while also understanding how they support their academic growth and success. This study has value to student success and understanding of motivational factors for black male success. This

qualitative study will attempt to evaluate, from the students, how mentorship is a critical component to their academic success.

Definition of Terms

Black or African American: a student of black or African American descent. For the study, black students born in the United States of America.

First-Generation Student: a college student whose parents or guardians did not earn a college degree.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): a college or university where more than 50% of the student population is Caucasian.

Mentor: a person who oversees the personal and professional growth of another person through support and guidance.

Mentee: an individual who receives support and guidance, typically from a senior individual who invest in the mentees development.

Mentorship (mentoring): receiving the advice or counsel of an older and more experienced individual.

Retention: the process of retaining or assisting a student in persisting from one academic year (or semester) to the next.

Self-efficacy: the belief that one can succeed in specific task they aim to accomplish.

Single-parent home: residence where one parent or guardian serves as the primary provider.

Success: a term used to portray a goal accomplished by black males who successfully graduate from predominantly white four year institutions (for the purpose of this study).

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between success and mentorship and the impact it has on black male college graduates from single parent homes. This qualitative study is based on interviews of black males who successfully completed college and documents their first-hand accounts of mentorship. The question guiding this study is what are black males' perceptions of the role played by mentoring in their motivation to graduate from college?

In a report by the Schott Foundation (2015), they estimate that in the 2012-2013 academic year, black males had a 59% high school graduation rate, which trailed Latino and white males. In this very same report, the estimated graduation rate for black males in the state of Kentucky was 66.9% (Schott Foundation, 2015). Black males trail their ethnic counterparts nationally and on the state level. In postsecondary education, black males don't perform significantly better, with a national graduation rate of 33.1% compared to white males at 54.5% (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The average freshman graduation rate for black male high school students in the state of Kentucky is 61.9%, trailing the national average of 69.1% for cohort year 09-10 (Stillwell & Sable, 2013). In postsecondary, the six year graduation completion rate for black males pursuing higher education in the state of Kentucky is a staggering 35.6% (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2011).

Persistence

The experiences that students have in college have been found to be significant their completion of college, as opposed to quantitative measures (grades, test scores, etc.) from high school (Donovan, 1984). Literature on persistence suggests that a student's capacity to be successful in college heavily relates to how they adjust to the institution both socially and intellectually (Eunyoung & Hargrove, 2013; Petty, 2014; Moore, 2001). Students who feel they fit into the institution and experience a complete integration into the campus environment are more likely to graduate (Strayhorn, 2008; Baker, 2008). It is not clear why some African American males are able to successfully integrate into the campus of predominantly white institutions and others are not, however, successful social and academic integration are critical to overall success.

As first-generation students assimilate into the campus environment, they can experience some level of conflict between their background and the university culture (Tinto, 1987). A student's background has the potential to affect their educational persistence. Literature suggests that first-generation students experience a decreased level of emphasis on higher education (Somer, Woodhouse & Cofer, 2004; McConnell, 2000). The concept of family, or extended family for many African American first-generation students is an important encouraging factor. Several scholars suggest that a student's persistence can be connected to their academic success in college (McConnell, 2000; Warburton et al., 2001).

Educational Attainment of Black Males

The education of black males is an important investment that the country cannot afford not to make. A black male student's success at a predominantly white institution will depend on that student's ability to acquire resources and develop networks that can help them navigate the college setting (Becker, Krodel, & Tucker, 2009). Black male college graduates from single parent homes are more likely to be first-generation college students that lack the cultural knowledge of how to successfully move through the higher education setting (Becker, Krodel, & Tucker, 2009; Cuyet, 2006). Households in a lower socioeconomic class headed by single parents are more likely to be female led (Buchmann & Diprete, 2006).

Education for many African Americans is viewed as an opportunity for improvement. American society, historically, has displayed much indifference and discrimination toward the education of African American children. The black family has had a history of triumph but an even longer and more enduring history of struggle in America. The story of the black family in America began in the early 1600's through the forced migration of Africans from their homeland through slavery. Several scholars (Frazier, 1948; Vandiver et al., 2006) correctly affirm that the destruction of the black family unit began during slavery. This was a time period when husbands were taken from their wives and children were separated from their mothers, and many were never given the opportunity to see each other again.

Well before the land mark decision of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which deemed black life "separate but equal" (Scott, 2007), slavery created the foundation for single parent homes which were predominantly headed by women in the black community (Vandiver

et al., 2006). From this foundation of interdependency, it was made difficult for black families to get ahead economically with one primary income; this still remains a significant hindrance today.

In thinking about a useful concept like social capital, it most popularly refers to the network of resources that are accessible through network development (Baker, 2000; Putnam, 1993). The investment in college aged African American men as social capital can significantly increase their individual buying power and progress, and it can also assist in culturally enriching the black community (Baker, 2000). Through enhancing their social capital, black male graduates are able to increase their networks along with their economic mobility.

What often goes undiscussed, however, is America's tumultuous past concerning its love hate relationship with the African American male. With intent and consideration for the achievement gap that continues to widen, one must note the foundations of such disparities that date back to the pre-civil rights era. The great republic known as America is one that, from its very inception, supported the hopes and dreams of the white middle class (Wilder, 2013). Dating back to slavery, when formal education was not a choice for blacks in America, they often learned from a "gracious" owner or at the hand of an educated slave in secret. In recent years, it has also come to light that many institutions of higher education have a troubled past in regard to slavery.

Social Network and Family

According to Baber (2012), African American students at predominantly white institutions are more likely to foster a higher perception of racial hostility on campus. It

is through these experiences that black males can develop a feeling of conflict when analyzing their personal life versus their “campus persona”. Black males often times experience a feeling of living a duality or hybrid identity. In W.E.B Dubois (1994) classic book *The Souls of Black Folk*, he referred to this identity as “double consciousness.” Dubois writes:

“The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, –a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, –an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Dubois, 1994, p.2).

It is within this double consciousness that every black male at a predominantly white institution has to negotiate. Through self-reflection, one has to consider who they will be as an individual and also who they will be amongst the majority. In negotiating one’s public and private self, black males often have to navigate their identity in the African American communities. The black male’s campus identity often times shifts when they return to their home communities (Cuyjet, 2006; Floyd, 1996). It is a process that appears to be never ending in the ongoing search for identity and semblance in the personal journey of black men in higher education. In the midst of being underrepresented and alienated, black males are tasked with enduring and increasing their personal self-efficacy.

In Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) earlier work, they discussed a concept they referred to as the "burden of acting white," which is relatable for many black male students who attend PWI's. In their research, they discussed the cultural and psychological pressure that black male students face at predominantly white institutions. Fordham and Ogbu discussed a connection or relationship that black males developed on college campuses. They used the term "fictive kinship" to explain the social and behavioral bonds created at institutions to serve as a brotherhood for black males. It is through this kinship that social circles are created to form a supportive community. At the heart of this research lies the foundation of racial identity and academic achievement for black males in higher education.

High Expectations

Institutions that foster a tradition of "high expectations" for its students encounter a greater level of academic success (Barley, Apthrop & Goodwin, 2007). Schools can serve as a protective factor for students against family and societal stress (Rutter, 1979). In studies on high expectations, along with supportive environments, Dennis et al.(2005) were able to find significance in the role that expectations and motivation played to college age students. In their longitudinal study, they followed 100 minority students who were undergraduates at a university. They were able to find that family, as well as personal expectations, were important influencers over time to the students in the study. The study went on to show that the minority students reported that personal motivation to succeed may have actually been a more critical influence to be successful in college. As

important as it is to be to be a positive representation for one's family, the study participants found their intrinsic motivation to be a higher expectation.

Black Masculinity

From conception, black males encounter many obstacles to prove they can be a part of society while leading a productive life. Though we can attribute many of their modern struggles to familial structure, issues such as education and employment play a significant part in their advancement as well (Bryant, 2000). Black males on predominantly white campuses across the country encounter the burden of trying to prove their worth while dispelling stereotypes that plague the black community. According to Ryan and Ryan (2005), black males encounter "stereotype threats" on campus while trying to overcome negative assertions about them and black male culture in general. Stereotype threat proclaims that environmental situations can lead a person into confirming negative stereotypes about their ethnic group (Ryan and Ryan, 2005). Stereotype threat can influence an individual's performance and their personal outlook. Attempting to dismiss stereotypes and perform at a high level academically while evading negative cast labels of black male achievement at the university level can be discouraging for some.

Through this lens of negativity, many black males arrive on college campuses with the weight of altering the vision of how the dominant culture views black males. Hip hop or rap, which is a small subsection of black culture in the U.S., is often associated with black males and how they conduct themselves. The image of the baggy pants, weed smoking, gold grilled, black male is a negative image that is perpetuated in

the mainstream media. Love (2013) suggests that many of the labels associated with the black male population because of some negative images in hip hop are dangerous. Love also suggest that black males need a safe space to be able to digest and analyze messages that are made about them while having the freedom to redefine that message (Love, 2013).

Several scholars have studied college aged black males (Harper, 2004; Martin and Harris, 2006) in an effort to gain insight into how they view masculinity as it relates to their young adult life. The scholars suggest that campus administrators have to aid black males in solving their “identity crisis” upon arriving on campus. Harris et al. (2011) discuss black male masculinity and the veil of toughness and learned aggressiveness that black males believe they have to put on when they get to college. Though masculinity by no means should just be viewed through hegemonic ideals, black male masculinity tends to lend itself to those narrow terms.

Harris et al. (2011) also discuss that many black males experience “gender conflicts” during the process of socializing themselves to the university setting. In their qualitative study they found that black male research participants related being emotionless with masculinity (Harris et al., 2011). The participants in the same study also viewed feminine qualities or characteristics as traits that were not masculine. The discarding of any thoughts or behaviors black males don’t perceive to be manly appear to be more of a social construct used to appear tougher than normal. Furthermore, black males in this same study reported experiencing microaggressions that were filled with racial overtones that used references like “ghetto” or “thug,” which is a term that is used often in the media to describe black males. The scholar Islom (2007) claims that

masculinity for black males in mainstream society is built around aggression and lack of success. He also suggests that black male images of themselves are externally created and constructed by factors like the media (Islom, 2007).

Deficit and Theoretical Perspectives of the Black Family

Since the early 1800's the African American family has been described in many ways. Sociologist and psychologist alike have focused some attention on how black families assimilate into the dominant culture (Moynihan, 1965; Hill, 2009). Scholars have also attempted to apply both theoretical frameworks and models to the black family in an attempt to understand which is more relevant (Moynihan, 1965; Hill, 2009; Foley, 1997).

Some perspectives view the black family from a deficit model. This model of thinking attempts to explain the inferiority complex, along with the deficiencies and failures, of blacks (Valencia, 1997). There are at least three models used to describe deficit thinking: (a) culture of poverty, (b) cultural environment deficit, and (c) genetic pathology (Valencia, 1997; Olivos, 2006; Foley, 1997). The culture of poverty model suggests that the existence of poverty creates ways of life that can be viewed as dependent upon the community that one is a part of, while passing on values that are viewed as negative, lazy, and violent (Foley, 1997). The cultural environment deficit model suggests that there are subcultures that openly reject participation with the dominant culture in society (Pearl, 1997). And lastly, the genetic pathology model (or culturally deviant model) proposes that intellectual superiority is innate in the dominant culture (Valencia, 1997; Olivos, 2006; Fine et al., 1987). This model endorses a very

basic and negative assumption about the black family in that the black family is in a state of chaos (Moynihan, 1965). This model never takes into account the fact that black lives have historically been judged through a lens of whiteness to assess its value and accepted norms.

More often than not, African American contributions to society have been undervalued. All of these models, to some degree, imply that subcultures (black culture) are the lower class of society, devoid of exposure to true culture and skills. In literature, deficit thinking, deficit approach, or deficit models all have impacted how African Americans are viewed. To lay a more progressive groundwork since minimal research exist on a relevant perspective, two older models that could aid in the advancement of a more positive outlook on the black family are the structural functional model and the emergent model.

Structural functional model:

This models attempts to provide a more functional framework to explain life for African American families in the American society. Allen (1978) suggests that the model was rooted in historical studies while also recognizing that it should be open to skepticism because of its portrayal of black families as dysfunctional. Through this model, Fine et al. (1987) recognize the importance of community and extended family networks in black communities, which make their family structure a positively unique one.

Emergent Model:

The emergent model, which is validated by many researchers, suggests that African Americans' behavior and culture is mainly influenced by their African heritage. The emergent model acknowledges that there are differences between black and white families and that culture for both groups is a major influence. Fine et al. (1987) suggest that African Americans should be viewed independently from the dominant culture due in part to their historical and individual differences.

Single Parent Homes

*"And my father living in Memphis now, he can't come this way
Over some minor charges and child support that just wasn't paid
Damn, boo-hoo, sad story, black American dad story
Know that I'm your sister's kid but
It still don't explain the love that you have for me"*

-Aubrey "Drake" Graham

The lyrics above are from a song by popular hip hop artist Drake in which he chronicles a piece of his adolescence growing up in Toronto, Canada without his father present. In the song, Drake commends his uncle for serving as a surrogate and filling that void through mentorship and love. He also depicts the story of many African American children growing up in a single parent homes.

According to scholars (Hamilton et al., 2010; Debell, 2008) 69% of African American males in grades K-12 have been raised in single parent (fatherless) homes. The African American community has seen the statistic as high as 72%, which also represents the percentage of black women who have children outside of marriage (Hamilton et al.,

2010). Of the young men raised in single parent homes headed by a matriarch, an estimated half will not form a legitimate relationship with their father due to several factors like desertion or incarceration (Kaba, 2008). The image of “absenteeism” as it relates to black fathers in the lives of their children has almost become an accepted notion in the African American community. Additionally, researchers DeBell and Ellis(2008; 2003) have discovered that a significant percentage of black males who enter juvenile detention centers, drop out of high school, become teenage fathers, or commit violent offenses were raised in fatherless homes.

Scholars have also discovered that many successful black male graduates from single parent homes credit the strong relationship with their mothers as a contributing factor to their success (Carson, 2004). Researchers Wilson and Henriksen (2012) along with DeBell (2008) also suggested that black males who established strong and supportive relationships with their mothers report feeling more encouraged to pursue endeavors that previously seemed impossible. The researchers’ participants reported they recognized the work and diligence their mother put in to ensure their success. This important relationship influenced their growth as a person.

In Martin and Martin’s (1980) chronicling of the definition of the word family in the black community, extended family was found to be significant to the community. This included uncles, aunts, grandparents, ministers, and teachers as the community or “village” that had a hand in shaping a child. According to Dilworth-Anderson (2001), the extended family serves as the support network to influence growth and development in young black men who are attempting to overcome societal odds.

Black Males Raised in Absent Father Homes

Kissman (2001) suggest that an astounding half of black males who are raised in homes without fathers will not develop a significant relationship with them in their lifetime due to factors such as prison, rejection, or divorce. Various life altering circumstances appear to contribute to the growing rate of fatherless homes in the black community. Several scholars suggest that lower education rates, poverty, child birth outside of marriage, and early age delinquency are all contributing factors to the trend of absenteeism in the black community (Baskerville, 2004, Kissman, 2001). Scholar DeBell (2008) suggests that academic achievement for the black community has served as a vehicle to attain a better life and status. Academic achievement can be negatively influenced from the effects of absenteeism. Black males not serving as the foundation in their homes can create a lifetime of implications that effect generations moving forward (Baskerville, 2004). Overcoming societal pressures and norms to achieve are compounded with the breakdown of the black family structure. It is within the black family structure that attributes such as self-esteem, confidence, and drive are generated (Bryant, 2000).

Role Modeling

The purpose of a role model or mentor is to provide a positive example for a protégé. DeBell (2008) and Carson (2004) suggest that absent fathers have an impact on the entire family structure and not just the black males involved. Fatherless homes leave not only the children but the women involved to become more resilient and independent. The absentee fathers leave a generation of children to look to their mothers for support

and commitment, hoping she can be a positive role model and not repeat the cycle. The success of black males raised in single parent homes are the key to improving the future of the black family structure through their success. The success of such black men depends on their level of preparedness, which depends heavily on their personal relationship development.

Legacy of Slavery

From slavery, racism was birthed in the belief that a racial group has superior characteristics which can justify the ill treatment of others who are deemed not to have them (Carter, 2007). Racism is a lived experience which is often experienced by ethnic populations who are identified as minority groups. Racism deals with the systematic oppression of a lesser population by the majority group (Bell, 2005). Several forms of racism exist that have affected the black family over time, whether overtly or unnoticed. Two of the most significant forms of racism black families have encountered are institutional (systematic) and societal racism.

Institutional racism

Institutional racism takes place through the implementation of policies and procedures that are entrenched in institutions that are established (Henry & Tator, 2006; Feagin & McKinney, 2003). These practices are detrimental because they are guidelines created by the dominant group and in many cases highlight the differences of minorities (Feagin & McKinney, 2003). This form of racism in many regards creates the rules of how African Americans interact inside the walls of these established institutions.

Societal racism

Societal racism occurs when norms of the dominant culture are established as the standard, lending preference to one ethnic group and not another (Henry & Tator; Feagin & McKinney, 2003). Societal racism takes place when the dominant group's vision of how societal and social structures are defined (Feagin & McKinney, 2003). Often, the values of the dominant group are used to justify society's actions while continuing to perpetuate a culture of subordination of minority groups. The most critical piece of societal racism is its passing down through lineage and cropping up through each generation. This passing down of racist attitudes can create a feeling of marginalization, causing unappreciated and underutilized talent by the dominant culture.

Scholar Craig Wilder (2013) documents in his book *Ebony and Ivy* the connection several U.S. colleges have to the slave trade. Wilder states that slavery was deeply embedded in many institutions, from public land grant institutions to Ivy league colleges (Wilder, 2013). From the Jim Crow era through the civil rights movement of the 1960's, there have been disproportionate gaps in the income and education of black men compared to their white counterparts (Becker, Krodel, & Tucker, 2009).

In the process of adjusting and adapting to a college system that was not originally created to service them, black males at predominantly white institutions may encounter feelings of oppression and an environment that is not always inclusive. Valenzuela and Addington (2006) discuss the Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism Institute and how they created four features of racism that chronicle the shared experience of African Americans at institutions of higher education (Becker et al., 2009). One of the features under the four features of racism is race matters, and it states:

“Race matters. Compared with many countries in the world, the history of the United States is short. Though laws have been passed to change racial, economic, political, and social injustices, including segregation, racial identity still makes a difference, still “invoking mythological moral and intellectual superiority and inferiority” (Becker et al., 2009, p. 11).

The purpose of this literature review is to explore mentorship and its role in the academic persistence of black male graduates at four year institutions. Baskerville (2004) proclaims that single parent homes in the black community continues to be a social issue that plagues the group. Several scholars, such as Frazier and Moynihan (1948; 1965), suggest that the “single parent home syndrome” in the black community can be dated back to slavery, when the structure of matriarchy began to become more common. Regardless, a significant amount of households in the black community today are headed by one parent (usually a woman). In assessing the success of black males from single parent homes who have prevailed and successfully matriculated to graduation, it is important to identify themes that contributed to their success. It is important to document the lived experience of black males in relation to mentorship, education and family support as it relates to their journey to college graduation. Documenting firsthand accounts and experiences from black male graduates from these backgrounds are important to gaining valuable insight to their perspective which could add to retention research for this population.

Criminalization

Black males who grow up in single parent homes, particularly homes that are headed by single mothers, display an increased likelihood of criminal activity (Debell, 2008). Scholars suggest that there are links between a child's behaviors and their fathers presence in their life (Debell, 2008). There is no evidence, however, that the parent has to live in the residence to have an active presence in the child's life. Though the absence of a father in the home cannot serve as the sole contributor to delinquent behavior in adolescents, it can serve as a catalyst for children who do choose to use destructive behavior as a source of attention.

Dumas and Laughlin (2001) suggest that family structure has the power to motivate or manipulate a student's behavior. Cuyjet (2006) suggests that many African American males feel a burden or undue pressure to be different from their white peers in that they do not have the opportunity to make the same mistakes. From a young age, many black males are taught that they may be prosecuted more severely than their white male counterpart for similar offenses. Cuyjet also asserts that black males have to overcome the pressure of representing their entire race in the classroom at predominantly white institutions. This commonly takes place in the form of stereotypes known as microaggressions, which Sue (2010) defines as common exchanges that send a disparaging message to the receiver based on the group they belong to. Microaggressions can be filled with racial overtones that reference "ghetto" or "thug" which is a term that has been used a lot in the media to describe black males. Enquiring if the tall black male on campus is an athlete or suggesting that one is familiar with a popular black musician because of their race is a form of a microaggression. Considering that the males in the study too were

reared in single parent homes, they also faced similar choices and elected to follow more constructive paths.

Theoretical Framework

The study was generated through a social constructivism framework. Social constructivism fit into the parameters of the study perfectly in that this perspective explored how people not only construct reality but how they explain their perception of this reality (Patton, 2002). Through social constructivism, we undergo major influence through the groups we belong to, whether social or cultural. From the social constructivism lens, we are all objects on a never ending quest to make meaning of the world (Patton, 2002). Social constructivism asserts that learning takes place in the shared interactions between an individual and their environment. On another end, constructivism suggests that learning is not autonomous and cannot occur separately from social interaction. Social constructivism also suggests that knowledge can be composed through collaboration.

A phenomenological design was a rational choice for this study because it attempts to link the lived experiences of the individual (Moustakas, 1994). Levering (2006) states that the phenomenological design allows researchers to examine individuals in a manner that will allow them to create rich description while limiting bias.

Mentorship

Mentorship has the power and capacity to create an effective change in an individual's life. Mentoring programs have a proven history of serving as an instrument to promote formal and informal interaction between staff and students (LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). According to Harper (2006), many colleges have established black male mentoring programs (initiatives) as a means of encouraging or retaining this population. In thinking about mentorship and its positive impact on black male retention, research suggests that mentor to protégé relationships can make an impact amongst black males successfully matriculating to graduation. Mentorship models of the 1980's focused on mentorship in the workplace and the mentor/protégé relationship.

Mentoring is defined as a process in which one teaches or gives help to a person who is less experienced than they are (Merriam, 2009). Mentorship provides a connection that encourages growth between two individuals with one guiding the other. Often times mentoring relationships prove to be mutually beneficial in that the mentor learns just as much from the mentee. Kram (1985) was instrumental in establishing mentoring in regard to a workplace model, and from there, it has manifested into different forms. In Kram's research, she charted psychosocial and career mentoring. Psychosocial mentoring was more general in nature and revolved around friendship and counseling, while career focused on promotion and sponsorship. Daloz (1986) described mentors in their role as "guides" and suggested that mentors serve in a role to lead mentees on a journey. Daloz thought that mutual trust was critical in order for meaning to be made in the mentor/mentee relationship.

Levinson et al. (1978) suggested in their research that the character of the mentoring relationship was what was important to the purpose it served. Levinson et al. discuss how the fundamentals of mentoring is one of the key experiences in young adulthood. Byrne (1991) identifies three categories of mentoring and they are as follows:

- 1) Traditional Mentoring- Oldest form of mentorship. Senior person leads and guides protégé through life or career.
- 2) Professional Mentoring- A process or program often promoted by upper management for a company to encourage the development of junior employees.
- 3) Formal Mentoring- A program that extends the mentoring experience to a targeted group or population.

Varney (2009) also suggests that mentoring is a practice that focuses on the nurture and care of the mentee. For black males who are also first-generation college students, having individuals in place to show them how to navigate the higher education system is critical to their success.

Wright and McCreary (1997) suggest that African American males respond best to resources that recognize that they are unique and offer a varying perspective than the majority at a predominantly white institution. Academic persistence in many instances can be directly connected to absence of a support system at the institution. The study has established that mentoring can positively impact black males academically. Wright and McCreary (1997) go on to suggest in their research that several college campuses have programs in place to address persistence and the academic success of black males. There does appear to be some level of disconnect with many of the programs that are in place.

Many of the programs fail to accurately target black males and address the problems that may concern them on a predominantly white university campus (Robertson and Mason, 2008; Jones and Michelle, 2006). Jones and Michelle (2006) suggest on the other hand that many African American males who enter college expect to matriculate with little to no support.

The scholar Varney (2009) states that mentorship is a relationship that deepens overtime. Mentorship, to a very large degree, is a very important investment in future generations. Mentorship consists of various phases or cycles that each relationship will ultimately experience (Rose, 2003). For black males who attend predominantly white institutions, it is particularly key to have guidance in navigating a space where the overwhelming majority of people do not look like them. Mentorship and mentors offer valuable advice on how to persist and endure through the academy. According to Cheatham (2009) mentors serve in a dual capacity because they are responsible for the diffusion of knowledge but they are also responsible for guiding their mentee. A mentor and mentee relationship should be one that is caring and supportive, and also one that promotes the success of the mentee.

Connection and understanding offers great value to the potential growth that can occur through mentorship. Boyd et al., (2009) asserts that mentoring can have a positive effect on the development of a strong psychological outlook for a developing male. Researchers have even suggested that implementing an afro-centric message or curriculum into mentorship based programs or interactions can assist in deeper understanding of African American males (Boyd et al, 2009). Dubois et al. (2011) states that mentorship is grounded in interpersonal relationships and that it is important for

mentors to understand the skill of relationship building. Through relationship building, mentors help create and sustain dedicated relationships.

Dabbagh et al. (2012) suggest that there are six critical practices that are essential to creating a positive mentor/mentee outcome: (a) training, (b) commitment to building the relationship, (c) respect for the protégés background, (d) trust and respect, (e) shared interest and activities, and (f) support.

Black Male Mentoring

There is not much literature that exist surrounding African American males and their experience in mentoring programs, but it has been suggested from scholars that mentoring has significant benefits to the development of African American males. Scholars Jacobi (1991) and Howard-Hamilton (1997) suggest that mentoring can be looked at as retention model for universities. In addition to retention, mentoring assist in helping African American males adjust and acclimate to the university culture (Lee, 1999). LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs (1997) suggest that mentoring is critical to contributing to the support African American males be successful on the university level. The structure of black male mentoring programs seems to differ across the board based on need. Black male mentor initiatives come in various models from learning communities, counseling based focus groups, and ethnic focused mentorship (Cuyjet, 2006; Harris, 1999; Wright & McCreary, 1997). The needs of each type of program or initiative are tailored towards the target population but all aim to help African American males.

At predominantly white institutions, LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs (1997) state that mentor programs have had great success in creating university connection through mentorship programs. Johnson and Huwe (2003) stated that students involved in mentoring had an easier time of expanding their personal and professional network due to connections made by their mentor.

The scholar Lee (1999) performed a study on mentoring relationships and examined a university transition program for under prepared students (which is a category many African American male college students fall into). It was through focus groups that the researcher was able to determine that the students who participated reported higher levels of optimism about their future and reported that mentorship (no matter the color of the mentor) was an important success factor to their development. Though the transition program was not a mentor program it had the same mentoring effects. The scholar Sorrentino (2006) conducted a similar study on a mentoring program at a university and discovered that the students who participated in the program reported an increase in their grade point average versus when they started the mentoring program.

Mentoring programs for many institutions primarily serve as a means of retention for the African American male student population. The goal of retention initiatives like mentoring programs are to provide the target population with the resources to make a successful social and academic transition to the campus community. Redmond (1990) stated that mentoring can enhance a student's feeling of acclimation and involvement. Scholar Torres (2003) suggest that retention programs have a better chance at success when seen as a vital part of the institutions mission. Initiatives aimed at the success of black males have a better chance of being successful when the institution is committed

and invested in the success of the initiative. Torres further clarified that institutions that address the retention of diverse student populations from institutional effort from upper division administrators down to staff have the best chance at success.

Formal vs. Informal Mentoring

At the university level there appears to be two common types of mentoring that takes place and that is formal and informal mentoring programs or interactions. The formal mentoring takes place in the form of targeted programming or matching while informal mentoring appears to be more naturally occurring. Formal mentoring programs appear to be a really effective model for reaching and engaging black men on college campuses. Though there are distinct differences between formal and informal mentoring the varying styles of mentorship have the same objective in reaching the mentee. A formal mentoring relationship typically takes place through a mentoring program or initiative and may even take place at a designated time and place. Formal mentoring can also take place at public venues like a community center or a library (Freeman, 1999). Formal mentor programs typically have goals for the mentor and mentee relationship that are created by the mentorship program.

Informal (also referred to as natural mentoring) mentoring relationships are typically developed by a shared interest between the mentor and the mentee (Ensher et al.,2002). Informal mentoring relationships do not have the constraints of a formal mentor program or initiative. The relationships occur more naturally based off of commonalities (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007). Through an informal mentoring relationship the nature of the relationship will depend upon the participants as well as

how long the relationship will last. Several older studies have suggested that personal connections or similarities like race or gender can be significant in the development of mentoring relationships (Ensher and Murphy, 1997; Feldman et al., 1999).

Mentoring Effects

The scholars Campbell and Campbell (1997) conducted a lengthy study to gauge the effects of mentoring programs on minority students and their academic performance. The researchers were able to investigate the positive outcome of mentoring on the minority student's grade point average. The researchers were able to create two groups, one with students who had a faculty member as a mentor and one with students that did not. The outcome from this controlled study suggested that students who had mentors reported higher grades and overall satisfaction with their performance. The scholars were able to find that the students experienced considerable success through mentorship (Campbell and Campbell, 1997). Through the connection made in a mentor-protégé style relationship, the mentees were commonly able to increase their knowledge in specific areas while growing more confident in their ability. The effects of mentoring have the potential to be life altering. The bond that is created through the exchange of ideas and information can positively affect, not only the protégé in the relationship, but also the mentor. When both sides discover, both commonalities and shared passions, the experience can be mutually rewarding.

Mentorship has significantly enhanced the success rate of African American males at four year institutions (LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). Through mentorship, African American males have the opportunity to build upon their character along with

enhancing their personal skill set. Through mentorship, the scholars Lavant, Anderson, and Tiggs (1997) referenced the mentorship process as an intervention strategy. This strategy, if implemented, has the power to assist black males in getting acclimated to the institution early, increasing the chance that they will stay at the university.

Mentorship also assists in building assurance in black college males that they are at institutions for a purpose and they can ultimately be successful (Crisp and Cruz, 2009; Blackwell, 1989). Through formal and informal modes of interaction, black males have the opportunity to connect with individuals that can aid them in navigating the college landscape and continuing their personal development. Additionally, black males are more likely to be first-generation college students than white males (Somers, Woodhouse & Cofer, 2004). Mentoring offers first-generation black male college student's critical guidance and perspective from a frame of reference that their parent or guardian might not have been able to provide. Without any prior knowledge of how to successfully make it through college, mentorship can positively effects change in this student population. One of the biggest issues that African American males face is the flawed perception of "weakness" as it relates to educational success (Harper, 2006). Harper discusses that many African American males in higher education carry a perception from earlier days of study that being smart or academically successful is a "white" characteristic. Such an approach is chronicled in literature and referenced as "cool posing" as it relates to black male masculinity at institutions of higher education (Harris et al., 2011). In an effort to reverse this ideology, it is important that mentors enact a psychological change in black males when they arrive on a university campus.

Mentoring Programs

Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) found that African American students viewed mentoring relationships more favorably when the interaction was formal and academic in nature. Stromei (2000) found that mentoring programs at many institutions were capable of reaching black males who were deemed at risk. Blackwell (1989) suggests that African American males in college who did not have role models found the college experience more difficult. Through mentoring programs, protégés receive valuable information on the college experience and are better able to connect the social and academic component.

Stromei (2000) suggests that mentoring programs intentionally designed for this population can aid in promoting a healthy educational environment. Mentoring models like the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), which has chapters at institutions all across the country assist black male participants in the academic and social transition to the campus. Mentoring programs like the Call Me Mister program at Eastern Kentucky University (one of many colleges) bring together a group of men in a cohort setting who are interested in being future educators. Institutional programs such as the black male rap session at the University of Louisville, which attempts to bring African American men together in the name of unity, provide relevant dialogue around many of the issues they face (Cuyjet, 2006). Another formal mentoring program is the minority achievers program at Indiana University, which attempts to connect black males to peer mentor leaders (Harper, 2006).

Black males appear to benefit from formal mentoring programs that are designed to aid in enhancing their growth. Mentoring programs for black males are not only a

great way for them to become more socially connected to the campus community, but also connected with campus administrators. Black Men at Western (BMW) is another student organization housed at Western Kentucky University that promotes African American male success. This organization attempts to provide guidance and mentorship through programming and networking opportunities. The African American Male Learning Community at the University of West Georgia also attempts to be a resource to black males that helps them in overcoming some of the challenges they may face on campus. The initiative attempts to develop leadership and encourage the males to be leaders in the campus community. The University of Kentucky has a similar program in the Black and Latino Male Initiative (BLMI), which encourages the growth of black males through networking, programming, and forums that are culturally and professionally related.

Gordon et al. (2009) conducted a study that contained a sample of 61 black males who were middle school age. The scholars attempted to focus on "culturally informed" mentoring strategies to determine if the style of programming was effective. The study aimed to reveal if an afro-centric mentoring program could have a positive influence on the racial identity of the black males in the study. The researchers were able to find that emphasis on ethnic and cultural identity positively impacted the young men in the study.

In summary, black males appear to have developed incredible coping skills that allow them to internalize the hardships of life and reflect on the experiences positively. Their ability to take negative experiences and use them for success speaks to their knack for overcoming hardships. Mentorship is an important process that aids in the growth of

black men at predominantly white institutions. Mentorship also serves as a protective factor in their acclimation to the university, along with their academic retention. The literature on mentorship proclaims that academic and social support enables black males to make successful transitions to universities.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter presents a thorough account of methods to be utilized in this study which include the theoretical framework, research questions, participant details, and the research setting. The data collection process along with the data analysis methods used closes out this chapter. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of African American male graduates from a public four-year institution in Kentucky, and specifically the impact of mentoring on their academic success. The researcher aimed to understand if mentoring played a significant role in the social and academic support of black male graduates at a predominantly white institution.

Literature suggests that mentorship is important to the development of people (Linehan & Scullion, 2008); therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the mentoring experiences of black male graduates whether formal or informal through their college years. Through this study, the researcher attempted to identify what role mentorship played for the research participants in their degree completion at a predominantly white institution, specifically, how mentorship fostered academic success, influenced decisions to attend, provided support while in college, and fostered other influences related to their successful degree completion.

Viewing these experiences through a social constructivist lens, the focus of this study was to discover the impact of mentorship and determine if the experience was critical to their successful degree completion. Considering the low graduation rate of African American males at colleges and universities, the researcher wanted to discover

who the participants were and how they identified success as a student at a predominantly white institution. Each of the participants in the study described their life and discussed their mentorship experience and how it shaped their development (Moustakas, 1994). The research included first-generation, black males who successfully graduated from a four year predominantly white institution in Kentucky.

Research Design and Design Appropriateness

Wood (2011) states that extensive interest has been placed on African American male success at the two and four year level. The issue of retention and academic success for this population has garnered significant national attention. The intent of this research is to examine to what extent mentorship positively influenced black males to graduate from college. The purpose of this research was to examine what role mentorship had in fostering academic success and the eventual degree completion of black males who attend predominantly white institutions. The intent of this qualitative study was to investigate the perception of black male college graduates and their first-hand accounts of mentoring and its impact on their academic success.

The goal of the study was to produce research that was descriptive and expressed the lived experiences of black male graduates in relation to mentorship. In the case of this study, a phenomenological research design on the research of Moustaka's (1994) method was chosen. The study utilized a social constructivist lens, in which the interactions and connections that take place between a mentor and a mentee create meaning (Smircich, 1983).

Mentorship provides a connection that encourages growth between two individuals with one guiding the other. Often times, mentoring relationships prove to be mutually beneficial in that the mentor learns just as much from the mentee. Qualitative research takes the researcher into the field which allows them to interact with participants (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research also has several emergent properties which allow for qualities to emerge (Cresswell, 2003). The researcher served as the primary person for collecting data and analyzing it. The primary focus of the research centered on creating meaning of how black male graduates perceive mentoring as it relates to their educational success. Merriam (2009) discusses that the focus of qualitative research is to make meaning; she also states that the “researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis.” As the instrument in this study, the researcher attempted to learn how black male graduates perceive mentorship and its connection to their journey to graduation. The objective was achieved through in-depth interviews with the participants. This study drew on data from interviews with black males who graduated from a predominantly white four year degree granting institution.

The study utilized qualitative methodology in an attempt to gain insight into the stories of the study participants and investigate their motivation for success. A semi structured interview approach to data collection was appropriate in that much of the current mentorship research revolving around black males assesses it from a quantitative perspective which can significantly constrain the experience and the statements of the research participants. The study was established on the experiences of the participants and provided valuable first-hand accounts into the study area.

Research Questions

The research examined the impact of mentorship experiences on black male graduates. The overarching question guiding this research was: How do black male graduates perceive that mentoring influenced their college completion? The main research question was supplemented by five sub-questions in an attempt to add more depth to the research study.

- 1) How do black male graduates perceive that formal or informal mentorship influenced their college experience?
- 2) What kind of mentoring was most prevalent in their experience with mentoring?
- 3) How do the research participants believe mentoring benefited their overall college experience?
- 4) Was mentoring significant to their academic journey in a unique way because they were at a predominantly white institution?
- 5) What do black male graduates recommend to institutions of higher education for addressing the success of black males?

The research questions were formulated to examine the experiences of the research participants as it relates to the phenomena. Additionally, the research seeks to disaggregate the mentoring experiences to better understand which are perceived to have been the most impactful on the college experience and academic success. Finally, the research seeks to understand what recommendations mentees suggest to postsecondary institutions working with black males from first-generation backgrounds.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation study was structured through the lens of social constructivism. Through this theoretical framework, many connections were able to be made. Social constructivism was appropriate for this study because it suggests that reality cannot be independent of the individuals involved, while also suggesting that humans not only engage with subjects in the world, but also attempt to find meaning in them (Crotty, 1998). The life we view as “reality” is often times significantly influenced by the social or cultural groups we belong to; it is through our connection to social groups that our reality and identities are shaped. Through this viewpoint, the researcher used the social constructivism framework in an attempt to investigate the elements that shaped each participant’s personal identity.

Social constructivism attempts to focus on a person’s interaction with their environment, along with that individual’s interaction within their group(s) (Creswell & Clark, 2007). This viewpoint also attempts to connect the interactions that are made between subjects in an effort to find meaning in these interactions (Patton, 2002). Social constructivism also affects how learners develop, as well as how they acquire knowledge. Fosnot (2005) suggests that social constructivism presents a dual between reality and symbolism, attempting to make meaning through communication. This viewpoint attempts to describe the experiences of individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon.

The researcher does not offering a quick solution for retaining black males at four year institutions or easy steps to assist black males in personal development. The purpose of the information generated from analyzing black males and mentorship is to

identify what concepts were perceived as important success factors. In this research study, the connection between mentorship and graduation will be explored through the phenomenological design.

Principles of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research allows the researcher to ask participants questions while collecting and analyzing rich data (Cresswell, 2008). Qualitative research allows for the researcher to examine research participant's attitudes and behaviors (Cresswell, 2008). Qualitative research seeks to explore phenomena in depth while gaining insight from the research participant (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research has more flexibility in its use of instruments and allows for more semi-structured and informal methods than quantitative research (Cresswell, 2008).

The analytical objectives of the majority of qualitative research are to describe variation, describe relationships, explain individual experiences, and clarify group norms (Cresswell, 2008). Much of the study design for qualitative research can be adjusted based on what is learned prior. These characteristics supported the selection of a qualitative methodology for this study.

Phenomenological Study or Phenomenology

Empirical phenomenological research is one of the approaches in the human sciences that aims to capture, describe, and understand the experiences that take place between humans (Moustakas 1994; Aspers, 2004). Levering (2006) suggest that phenomenology allows a researcher to examine the experience while deserting personal

bias. Phenomenological studies aim to find understanding of a given phenomenon. The concept focuses on providing a thorough description of the phenomenon from the viewpoint of those who experienced it. Bednall (2006) describes phenomenological research via two criteria:

- 1) The human experience can be assessed through the detailed experience of participants, and
- 2) Establishing the truth.

Moustakas (1994) suggest that phenomenological studies seek to describe the lived experiences rather than an analysis of that experience. Bednall (2006) asserts that phenomenological work seeks to recognize what is unchanging in regard to the phenomenon that is being explored. A strength of phenomenological research is that it allows a researcher to study the “human experience” in a descriptive nature (Smith, 2008).

Armstrong (2010) discussed phenomenology in depth in regard to its advantages and disadvantages. Armstrong suggests that phenomenological research allows for processes to be reviewed over time and for significant meaning to be found in research. Armstrong (2010) also suggested that phenomenological work contributes to the foundational development of new theories. As for disadvantages, Armstrong suggest that gathering data can be a labor intensive process and the interpretation of the data can make for a difficult process. Phenomenology relies primarily on inductive reasoning in that the researcher creates patterns out of the data based on the respondent’s experience (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2008). Phenomenological research is very interpretive in nature as it is based on events or occurrences.

Researcher's Role

The researcher played the role of a researcher and a learner as well. In this process, the researcher was responsible for data collection, data analysis, and findings. In the role of researcher, the researcher had the opportunity to learn more about what drives black male graduates to reach the graduation stage. As Lichtman (2010) states, the researcher serves the role of the conduit in the research process because he or she gathers the information and attempts to make meaning from it. Merriam (2009) describes qualitative researchers as people who are interested in finding meaning in peoples worlds and gaining understanding from their experiences. This is what drove me to complete this study as an African American male with an advanced degree who was interested in learning more about the role of mentoring on the academic success of first-generation, African American males, a group who has been traditionally underserved.

Participants

Cresswell (2005) defines a population as a target group of individuals with similar characteristics. The target population is defined as black male graduates from a predominantly white institution in Kentucky. Moustakas (1994) suggest that for a phenomenological study that the established criteria should include research participants who have first-hand experience with the phenomenon and grant permission to participate in the interview process, as well permission to record and publish the results. Decision rules for the selection of research participants in this study included ethnicity, age, participation in mentoring, first-generation status, and four year degree attainment.

With further exploration into their perspective and experiences, the researcher hoped to offer recommendations towards black male achievement and reducing the achievement gap. African American males who successfully graduated from a PWI in Kentucky were asked to volunteer for the study. A condition of their participation was based upon whether they had experienced mentorship. Participation in the study was voluntary. The participants in the study ranged in age from 21-25. The researcher limited participation in the study to black male graduates who graduated within the last three years. With this limiting factor, the goal was to create more consistency with their experience with their experience still being fresh in mind. The researcher identified study participants based off of recommendations from campus contacts and also personal connections with graduates who fit the study parameters.

The researcher began with eight males he wanted to interview for the study. Communication was sent out to all of the males and only six of them responded (two elected not to participate). From there the researcher found that after closer examination that one of the males did not meet the parameters of the study in that he was not from a first-generation background. From there the researcher was able to settle on the remaining five male participants and that they could contribute significantly to the study.

Invitation to Participate

Purposeful convenience sampling was used to attempt to generate a participant pool to provide a rich and detailed perspective (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Patton, 2001). Patton (2001) states that the goal of a “purposeful sample is to capture major variations rather than to identify a common core (p. 240).” Purposeful sampling also allowed the

researcher to dig into the lived experiences of black male graduates while using semi structured interviews (one-on-one interview protocol) to gain understanding of their mentorship experience. Patton (2001) states that purposeful qualitative research concerns itself with purposefully selecting the correct research participant so that in depth interviews can create rich data. The participants in this study included five black male students who graduated from a mid-sized, predominantly white institution in the state of Kentucky. Their ages varied all though the participants in the study all graduated college within the last 3 years. Eight interview invitations were sent out to potential research participants. After a phone conversation to discuss the study and its goals, the researcher chose five participants who he felt best reflected the purpose and intent of the study.

The participants for the research study were recommended from contacts at the university as good representatives for the sample pool. A form of “community nomination” took place, in which research participants were proposed to the researcher as graduates who fit the criteria of the study. Also, several of the research participants were connected to the researcher from his time in college so he was aware of some individuals who fit the research criteria. This method adds a level of convenience to the sample for the researcher. The researcher’s campus contacts nominated participants based on their fitting into the research criteria of being first-generation, black males who successfully graduated from this university. All of the males for the study were contacted via email or phone for recruitment. During the phone conversation or email exchange, the goals of the research and the procedures were discussed in length.

Phone Survey

The respondents were asked demographic information via a preliminary phone call to clarify if they qualified for the study. The first question asked if the participant identified as black or African American. The second question asked if they were first-generation college student. The third question asked if mentorship played a significant role in their college experience. After a brief assessment for patterns in the respondent's phone call, the researcher chose the respondents who closely fit the goals of the study.

If the participants met the criteria of the study, more details of its goals and purpose were explained. Upon explaining the overarching goal of the research study, potential participants were sent emails requesting to participate in the study. Once the appropriate institutional review protocols were completed and approved the participants were formally invited to take part in the study that explored the perceptions of African American male graduates and mentoring.

Setting

The institution where this research took place was a medium sized, public college which is classified as a predominantly white institution. The selected institution has a 92% acceptance rate. In the fall of 2014, this institution reported an enrollment of 900 black males or 5% of the undergraduate student population (Western Kentucky University Fact Book, 2014). 75.9% of the undergraduate student body identified as white or Caucasian (Western Kentucky University Fact Book, 2014). It was intentional that the researcher worked with minority males from a PWI. The males in the study were able to successfully navigate a space that was perceived as off limits by many of their

peers. The institution sits in south central Kentucky amidst the Barren River Valley, and the institution houses 101 and undergraduate academic majors.

The institution was founded as a public college in 1906 and originally only served students from majority backgrounds. The institution originally began as a teaching college along with a business college. The institution has grown to be more diverse in its student body and its academic offerings since its inception. The university has three regional campuses and a community college housed under its system umbrella. The university, at one time, embraced “open enrollment, which allowed students with lower credentials to enroll while potentially completing remedial work to enhance skills and college access. The institution is unique in that it boasts nationally recognized programs like Journalism and Broadcasting while also being home to a national and international champion winning Forensic debate team. From arts to agriculture, this university offers many opportunities for students of all backgrounds to grow and succeed. The goal of the researcher was to highlight the individual success of five first-generation, African American males at an institution where they were significantly underrepresented as a population.

Interviews

The chief format for data collection was semi-structured informal interviews conducted on an individual basis. Qualitative researchers rely heavily on interviews to examine participant’s viewpoint and perceptions. The informal style of the interview allowed for the researcher to ask open ended questions that allowed the participants to discuss personal stories revolving around mentorship, relationships, and self-identity.

Interviews allowed a level of richness that cannot be duplicated in any other process. In calling upon phenomenological design methods, the researcher attempted to immerse himself and construct a detailed description (Smith, 2008).

The interviews lasted from 40-90 minutes, depending upon the respondent. Informal interviews are the most commonly conducted style of interview in that the questions do not have a detailed order to conduct the study (Fetterman, 2010; Cresswell, 2007; Cresswell, 2003). The researcher tape recorded the interviews for documentation with the intention to be transcribed later.

Data Collection

As previous noted, the purpose of this study was to document the perception of black male graduates mentoring experiences. Literature suggests that qualitative research can be conducted by using various approaches such as observation, interviews and documents (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Lichtman (2010) suggests that the goal of qualitative analysis is to take a large amount of information and interact with it in such a way that the researcher can make sense of it. In this study, data collection sources included interviews, field notes, and a phone survey.

Qualitative research is described by the collection of data using observations and interviews of participants to gain insight into their perspectives (Cresswell, 2008). In phenomenological research, the data collection process consist of six steps: a) collecting verbal data, b) reading the data, c) breaking the data into segments, d) organizing the data, e) articulating the data from an academic perspective, f) and synthesizing the data (Giorgi, 1997). Data collected came from semi-structured, open-ended interview

questions with the objective of examining the lived experiences of the research participants. The interview style for this phenomenological research was informal in nature allowing for participants to reveal answers to their level of comfort.

Upon receiving IRB approval, participants were selected for the study and all sent consent forms that were signed and returned to the researcher. After this process, interviews were scheduled with the research participants. The interviews were conducted over a one week time period. The interviews took place at various locations which were left up to the participant. The interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes. The researcher tape recorded all of the interviews after receiving permission to do so and transcribed them verbatim at a later time. Notes regarding observations were taken by the researcher throughout the duration of the interviews. At the end of the interview, participants were allowed to ask questions and were reminded they would receive a copy of the interview transcript.

The data analysis process was conducted using a modified version of Van Kaams (1966) seven step method via Moustakas (1994). The seven steps are: a) preliminary grouping (horizontalization), b) reduction and elimination, c) clustering, d) identification of themes, e) individual textural and structural description of the experience, f) individual structural description, g) and textual-structural description of the meaning.

Each transcript was reviewed and coded with color. Various colors represented different themes and significance to the study. The codes were put into an excel spreadsheet document in an attempt to organize and manage them easier. After the interviews were transcribed, they were all kept in a binder to manage the data. The interviews were

analyzed using phenomenological procedures manually using several of Van Kaams methods. The van Kaam method allowed the researcher to analyze the experience of the individual participants. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with five African American male graduates who were selected for the study. The research study participants were asked the same set of questions used during each individual interview with semi structured follow-ups. This process allowed the researcher to have an in depth discussion with the research participants which increased the richness of the data.

Data Analysis

According to Saldana (2015), a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, literature, artifacts, photographs, video, websites, e-mail correspondence and so on.” Researchers often attempt to make meaning of the thoughts and words of their interview subjects. The meaning making is done mainly through two types, which are open and axial coding.

Open coding (initial coding) is typically used to construct categories about the phenomenon being researched or observed (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Saldana, 2015). Open coding can take several liberties during the analysis process like coding an individual’s statement as an action. Axial coding is used to focus on a specific category in an attempt to get to the heart of the phenomenon being observed or researched (Saldana, 2015; Charmaz, 2006). Saldana (2015) suggests that axial coding is fitting for research studies that employ different forms of data like interview transcripts, field notes,

journals, etc. The researcher used Taylor-Powell's & Renner's (2003) approach to coding and arranging information.

Memo writing took place during the coding process as another safeguard for accuracy. Memo writing is significant because it puts heavy emphasis on the emerging codes and categories (Saldana, 2015) Memo writing forces the researcher to analyze the data and the codes early in the research cycle. Charmaz (2006) states that memos provide a researcher with an avenue to explore the ideas that are created around the research categories.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the significance of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability to qualitative research, claiming that credibility assists the researcher in analyzing how thorough the study is, along with how the research will be conducted. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that establishing credibility in research findings happens by connecting with the research subjects for an extensive amount of time. In this research study, credibility was established by the time spent with the subjects during the interview. Also, upon reviewing the findings, the researcher employed member checking to build more trustworthiness with the research participants (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

The researcher employed member checking and peer reviewing by discussing his findings with his research participants as it was developing and sharing transcripts and analyses (Yin, 2009). Trustworthiness was further established by providing data for each theme that emerged, allowing the participants to contribute to the data while it was being

reported (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). He also employed triangulation of the themes that emerged in the study to add more validity to the study. Creswell and Clark (2007) suggest that triangulation can add more validity to a study by connecting how data reinforces the theme.

The researcher's aim during this research process was to document his research process in order to bring more validity and credibility to it. Creswell (2003) states that a qualitative researcher "is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study." Creswell (2003) also suggests that interviews have the following advantages:

- Useful when participants cannot be observed directly,
- Participants can provide historical information, and
- Allows researcher "control" over the line of questioning.

Transferability can be used to describe how findings in a study are applied in various settings (Merriam, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The study attempts to summarize findings and analyze them while highlighting the best practices. The researcher also hopes to suggest a mentorship model based on the research findings. To ensure dependability and confirmability, significant efforts were made on behalf of the researcher to ensure that the research findings were supported by the data collected and that it reflected the voice and experience of the research participant (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The research participants' experiences were portrayed via their direct quotes. By using direct quotes, the aim was to connect the reader to their reality as it relates to mentorship.

Delimitations

The scope of this study was limited to that of black males who successfully graduated college. To obtain rich responses from this student population, the participants were drawn from this population. To aid with management of the data collected, the researcher only used open ended questions that were repeated for all the research participants, although differential follow-up probes were asked as needed. The researcher also only interviewed males who qualified as first-generation college students. Additionally, the study was centered on males who identified mentorship as a beneficial experience. Finally, the study was focused at one institution in Kentucky.

Limitations

Cresswell (2003) acknowledges several general limitations to qualitative research. Qualitative research provides indirect information from the perspective of the participants. It is also research that takes place at an assigned setting rather than naturally in a field setting. The researchers presence could lend bias to the response of the research participants. Lastly, people are not equally articulate and perceptive doing interviews.

A limitation of this study is that it only uses students who were graduates from one public institution in the state of Kentucky. The institution type, programs, or services provided on campus could influence the student's mentorship experience compared to another institution in the state or nation. With only one institution being analyzed, the impact of the study could be limited.

Another limitation of the study is that the sample population was narrowed to only include black males from first-generation backgrounds. A student's background prior to attending college can make it difficult to assess experiences as they relate to mentorship. A small sample size can make it more difficult to discover the existing differences amongst the research participants.

A third limitation is how personal and subjective mentorship can be. The experience of mentorship and its benefits may vary to the participant based on the process in which mentorship was experienced (formal program, church, family member, etc.).

A fourth and final limitation is embedded in the behavior of the research participants in the study. The researcher had no control over how open the participants were in their responses for the study. Their level of comfort and willingness to share intimate details about their mentorship experience was completely up to them, although efforts were made by the researcher to enhance their comfort level to be open.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of black male graduates from a predominantly white institution in Kentucky and the impact of mentoring on their academic success. A qualitative method was selected to aid the researcher in connecting with the participants and exploring the mentoring phenomenon. The phenomenological approach was appropriate for this qualitative study because it afforded the researcher an opportunity to gain valuable insight into the perspective of the research participants.

Following the ethical guidelines of research, informed consent was obtained from the research participants before interviews began. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained throughout entire process. Following the completion of the process, the materials used were kept in a secure locked cabinet under the researcher's ownership. Data collection was performed by performing one-on-one interviews in person with the participants. In depth interviews provided rich detailed information on the research participants lived experiences.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis and Results

The intent of this phenomenological qualitative study was to provide context to the lived experiences of black male graduates and their mentoring experiences. The study focused on the experiences of five African American males who participated in or benefited from a mentoring experience. Chapter four presents the results of the in-person interviews with the black male graduates. In this chapter, the data analysis aims to create rich statements and vibrant descriptions from interviews. The intent of the study was to document the lived experiences of this demographic in an attempt to provide a road map for success for future black male college students.

The intent of the study was to create rich descriptions that capture the experiences of black male graduates from a predominantly white institution in Kentucky. Through a social constructivist lens, the researcher explored black male graduate's perceptions of mentorship, both formal and informal. Chapter three discussed the data analysis of the research interviews of the black male graduates. Chapter three also contained a discussion of the research study, demographics, data collection, emerging themes, and chapter summary.

Research Questions

The research questions examined through these interviews were:

- 1) How do black male graduates perceive that formal or informal mentorship influenced their college experience?

- 2) What kind of mentoring was most prevalent in their experience with mentoring?
- 3) How do the research participants believe mentoring benefited their overall college experience?
- 4) Was mentoring significant to their academic journey in a unique way because they were at a predominantly white institution?
- 5) What do black male graduates recommend to institutions of higher education for addressing the success of black males?

Data Collection Procedures

As discussed in chapter three, the black males interviewed for this study were graduates from a predominantly white institution in the state of Kentucky. The recruitment letter was emailed electronically to eight prospective research participants who fit the study criteria. Of the eight prospective research participants, six responded to the email expressing interest in the study. One of the respondents was eliminated after expressing not having mentorship related experience. The remaining five respondents were invited to participate in the interview phase of the study. All of the research participants completed an informed consent form and a 40-60 minute interview where the researcher was able to establish a connection through an informal interview in a neutral setting. The structured interview consisted of open ended questions which exposed the participants' experiences and reflections on mentoring.

The researcher created a welcoming environment that helped participants feel comfortable in sharing their feelings while reflecting on their past. All participants were met with a level of assurance that their responses would remain confidential at the

conclusion of the project and that it was within their rights to reject a question they did not want to answer. All of the participants were interviewed in a location and at a time of their choice. The interviews took place over a one week time period in three different cities in Kentucky. All of the research participants were open and engaged during the interview process while sharing their life experiences.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy. The transcribed interviews utilized a modified version of the Van Kaam method for this phenomenological data analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

Background of the Participants

This phenomenological qualitative study employed a purposeful convenience sample method of black male graduates from a regional institution in Kentucky. Upon receiving IRB approval from Eastern Kentucky University, the research participants gave formal consent to participate in the study. The research respondents answered demographic questions pertaining to their gender, race, and parent's educational background. They also identified their age and their experience with mentorship (formal or informal).

Participant one (R1) was a 25 year old higher education professional in the southeast. He received a bachelor's degree in public health. He originally attended the institution because a family member of his worked at the college. During his time there, he participated in various activities and became a very active leader on campus. He did not participate in any formal mentoring programs but had several mentors during his time

in college. He decided to participate in a mentoring relationship for guidance and answers to questions he did not know himself.

Participant two (R2) was 22 years old and in his second year as a teacher at the K-12 level in the Midwest. He graduated with a degree in early childhood education from the institution. As an undergraduate, he participated in some of the mentoring initiatives on campus. He also had mentors who served in various capacities at the university. He credits a mentor from his time in high school as playing a pivotal role in his life and development.

Participant three (R3) was a 21 year college graduate who completed his course work in three years. He majored in broadcast journalism as an undergraduate student but decided to take a different path after graduation. At the time of the interview, he was a recent graduate who just began a career as a sales executive for a fortune 500 company. He participated in a mentoring initiative on campus and also credits people from his childhood and his church for playing critical roles in his development.

Participant four (R4) was a 23 year old college graduate who completed his undergraduate studies in communication. He currently works as a higher education professional in the Midwest. During his time in college, he was active in campus organizations but did not participate in any formal mentoring initiatives. He did credit some of the mentor relationships from college and high school as ones that guided him to completion. His involvement in campus organizations were significant to his graduating from college.

Participant five (R5) was a 23 year old graduate with an undergraduate degree in business management. He currently works in higher education at a university in the Midwest. In college, he participated in campus activities and programs but particularly credits the relationships built with individuals at the institution as key members of his “success team.” He suggest that without mentorship he would have been lost and may not have graduated (see TABLE 1).

TABLE 1. BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Career Field	Age	Major	Marital Status	Parent Education Level
R1	Higher Education	25	Public Health	Single	None
R2	K-12 Teacher	22	Early Childhood Education	Engaged	Trade School
R3	Corporate Executive	21	Broadcast Journalism	Single	Bachelors (in progress)
R4	Higher Education	23	Communication	Married	None
R5	Higher Education	23	Business Management	Single	Associates (in progress)

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study was coded, collected, and analyzed in conjunction with the research process presented in chapter three. This phenomenological data depends heavily on Moustaka’s (1994) adaptation of the Van Kaam method of analysis: a) preliminary grouping (horizontalization), b) reduction and elimination, c) clustering, d) identification of themes, e) individual textural and structural description of the experience, f) individual structural description, and g) textual-structural description of the

meaning. The researcher examined each participant's interview statements and used horizontalization to identify all relevant experiences regarding mentorship. This data analysis method allowed for the researcher to use the bracket method while gaining understanding of the research participants lived experiences. Repetition of descriptions, phrases, or key words allowed the researcher to analyze rich clusters of data. The data clusters were further analyzed in an attempt to identify emergent themes and later analyzed to create structural descriptions. The themes and descriptions allowed for the researcher to analyze the research questions that guided the study closer.

The Taylor-Powell & Renner (2003) approach to content analysis was utilized in the analysis process in an attempt to synthesize the data and allow for a comprehensive exploration of the findings. The data was reviewed, coded, and then categorized for themes. The categories were analyzed even further into dominant themes as will be discussed in the findings.

Emergent Themes

Five African American male graduates from a regional institution in Kentucky provided the interviews for this research study centered on mentorship and their lived experience as college graduates. Data was collected and analyzed from structured interview questions (see Appendix B). There were three major themes that emerged from the interview data. The themes were 1) the role of a mentor, 2) role models, and 3) transfer of knowledge. These primary themes also encompass sub-themes. The themes derived from the transcription of the research participant's lived experiences. All of the interview responses were examined using the modified version of the Van Kaam method.

The themes were assembled and the evolving themes were put into clusters for further examination using the textural and structural analysis description. The themes are discussed below.

Theme1: The Role of a Mentor

Four of the research participants spoke to the value of mentoring and how the overall process played a significant role in their academic success. The research participants expressed that based on their experience that mentoring and the guidance it provided helped to improve their confidence and academics. Out of the five research participants, four grew up in single parent homes headed by women; three of these participants had relationships with their father. Therefore, for most of the participants, mentoring assisted in filling a void for support and direction from a male. The participants also revealed that their mentors were a great resource for life related questions or concerns. Sub themes that emerged from their responses were critical guidance, confidence, and encouragement.

Critical guidance to development

All five of the research participants expressed that participating in a mentoring relationship or formal program gave them guidance towards reaching their career goals. Their mentors helped them by giving them relevant advice and strengthening their drive by supporting their personal goals. The responses below confirm that the mentoring life cycle gave the graduates the confidence to pursue their goals. R1 stated that “my mentor in college provided me the knowledge I needed to get through. I came to college lost on

exactly what I wanted to do and he helped me by giving me the tools I needed to find my way.” R2 looked at the mentoring relationship as “important to the development of black males in America. By looking to the elders, we are able to establish commonality in our experiences.” R2 also put a lot of emphasis on the relationship he had with one of his high school basketball coaches in regard to his development. He credited his coach for taking an interest in him outside of basketball and guiding him to the K-12 profession to make a difference. R4 stated that “my TRIO advisor gave helped me find a new major that suited my talents and skill set after I was struggling in a major I should not have been in.” R4 also suggested how during the mentor process it helped him to humble himself and put trust in older professionals who took an interest in his success. R3 had a very linear career goal in mind since he majored in broadcast journalism. He stated “from the day I stepped onto the college campus I knew who and what I wanted to be. It wasn’t until my senior year that an opportunity presented itself to work at a major company that my mind changed. I wrestled with it for the longest and the support of my mentor made the decision so much easier. He was able to help me see it from a lens that I would not have otherwise.”

The mentoring relationships were able to validate the research participant’s career goals and aspirations. Their mentors aided them in focusing on their academics but also gave them advice that would confidently guide them towards their career goal. The mentorship experience allowed the research participants to gain valuable insight into manhood and a better perspective on making bold career related decisions. It is important to emphasize that the questions in the interviews did not focus on careers. However, the importance of mentors helping these students find their way in terms of

careers clearly facilitated their academic success and graduation. Mentors helped them to see a purpose and direction.

Confidence and Encouragement

The responses from the research participants suggest that their mentors played a significant role in building their confidence and encouraging their personal success. R5 stated that “my mentor in college was an older fraternity brother of mine who was a senior administrator at the university. When I was down on myself about my grades and my career path he was there to pick me up every time. He is the reason I graduated college.” R4 echoed a similar sentiment “my Trio advisor was my mentor in college and still is today. He was always patient with me when I made errors whether it be personal or academic. He always challenged me while supporting me.” R4 also went on to express an unconventional means of encouragement he experienced with his advisor:

“I will never forget that I was a semester away from being academically suspended from my program at the university. My mentor had encouraged me to make some decisions which against his judgment I went against. I made some bone headed decisions that had me on academic probation and a semester away from being kicked out of school. My mentor took me outside of the building that he worked in and lets just say he used some colorful language in explaining to me how I was on the verge of ruining the opportunity to transform my life. In that very moment it clicked and it all made sense. From there I got on the right path and worked diligently to increase my gpa and work ethic.”

On the other end, R3 singlehandedly attributes his academic success to his mentor. He says “I always did pretty well in school, well enough to get a academic scholarship to college. But getting to college I quickly realized that the work load and expectation of you as a student was on another level. My mentor quickly helped me reassess my goals and study habits. From there I was able to stay on track and consistently do well until I graduated.” The research participants conveyed that through the guidance and encouragement of their mentors they were able to make sound decisions that altered their life. Their lived experiences whether positive or negative were directly influenced by the advice of a mentor.

Theme 2: Role Models

The research participants viewed mentorship as a process that has the potential to be transformative. Since their mentors were role models and gave them guidance they all currently participate in some form of mentoring to a younger generation of people with similar backgrounds. The majority of them expressed that mentoring was an obligation and they had to pay it forward to the next generation. All of the research participants suggested in their responses that black male mentors are important for representation in the community. Their guidance and influence could in turn inspire another generation of black boys to pursue higher education. Additional sub themes that emerged are dependable and authentic along with personal success.

Dependable and authentic

Dependability, or authenticity as one respondent said it, is a theme that was expressed by all of the research participants. Several of the participants alluded to how their mentor being dependable aided them in navigating the college process and campus culture. R2 discussed how he mentor was “a well of knowledge. I had access to him at the most obscure times with probably what he deemed as off the wall questions. No matter the questions nor time, if he did not know the answer he would always get back to me.” R3 concurred with this sentiment by stating that “my mentor was great because even when he did not know the answer he would find out or more importantly direct me to the person who had the answer. I never once felt like he was just brushing me off which he could have easily done. I was more dependent on his guidance during that time period than I realized at the time.” R1 and R5 both suggested that consistency was key during their college days because, being first-generation college students, they did not have anybody in their family they could turn to for guidance. So, having a consistent resource was critical for them to make it to the graduation stage. R5 stated that “my mentor ended up playing the role of big brother because I do not have any brothers other than my fraternity brothers so this was valuable to me.” R4 stated “growing up in a single parent home without a relationship with my father my college mentor was ten years older than me. He was a big brother the majority of college but really transformed into a father figure as his life and his family dynamic changed. He was a consistent motivating force in my life that was never anything but positive.” The research participants all alluded to how beneficial consistency was for their development. R5 stated that “growing up with my father he was always a hard worker in his blue collar background. Getting to college

was an entirely different level of work he could not guide me in. My mentor in college to a very large degree was an extension of my father and his teachings.” The research participants all had mentors in their life who were from the same ethnic background but four out of the five participants stated that race would not have mattered. So in this research participant pool cross cultural mentoring likely would have been just as effective if they were presented the same opportunity.

Personal Success

For the research participants their role models consisted of individuals in their family, advisors, coaches, and administrators. They all agreed in their reflections that mentors in the black community were significant to the next generation’s success. All of the research participants discussed how the visual representation of successful black males was inspiring to them. R1 viewed personal success and black male representation like this:

“Being able to see someone who looks like me be a leader while also being a source of inspiration to some degree is something I did not have growing up. I have a relationship with both of my parents but my mentors were able to provide me with a different perspective. So my parents were able to give me information that helped me get to one phase of my life while my mentor picked up where they left off and guided me to the next phase.”

R2 echoed a similar sentiment by expressing that “the entire time I was completing my undergraduate work my mentor put a certain level of pressure on me in helping me understand what I was trying to accomplish and be after graduation. Seeing

him elevate from a teacher to a K-12 administrator was more inspiration to push harder for my goals.” The majority of the participants expressed how important it is for black males to see what it is they can be. So they take their roles as a mentor seriously in that they know they have the power to shape the outcome of someone who is looking up to them. R4 agreed that “making the connection between who you are while in college versus who you can become is crucial but for me that would not have happened without my mentor. I did not have a lot of examples of what a successful black man looked like growing up nor did I have examples of what a healthy relationship or marriage looked like. These things that were missing from my childhood I gained from my mentor in college.” R4, along with R5, discussed success from a different perspective in that they were able to view the relationships their mentors had as motivating factors for the relationships they had. In being a role model, one can impact the academic and personal life of a mentee.

The role models (mentors) for the participants in the study were essential in their personal success. The role models that the participants had, came from all walks of life and professions. Though R3 spoke heavily about his college mentor, he credits his first mentor which was his older brother as laying a foundation for him. R3 stated “my older brother was a little bit of a knucklehead and got into unnecessary trouble at times. Even though he made poor decisions at times he made sure that I did not follow in his footsteps. He could have easily influenced my young and impressionable mind to do the same things he did but he saw something in me and always encouraged me academically.” In the same vein, R5 discussed how his father was his first mentor growing up. “My father played a significant role in the foundation of who I am as a man.

He taught me about life and manhood and is still teaching me to this day. I am really privileged to have the relationship I have with him because I know many of my friends cannot say the same.”

Support from role models, whether they be mentors in their family or individuals they met along the way in life’s journey, has proven to be significant in their individual success. The research participants were able to gain valuable lessons from their role models, no matter how the lesson was packaged. Seeing successful individuals who looked like them allowed them to view success as something that is tangible and achievable. Many of the respondents expressed the sentiment of ‘if they achieved it, then I can too’.

Theme 3: Transfer of Knowledge

For the black male graduates in this study, all of them worked in career settings where they were one of a few people who looked like them in their office/division. Not only their personal development but their career development was dependent upon the transfer of knowledge from more seasoned professionals who had already had experience. R1 reflects on an experience he had and how his mentor helped him navigate it:

“I worked at a higher education institution in the south and felt that I was facing constant microaggressions and prejudicial behavior from some of my colleagues. All of a sudden since I worked in the office I was the authority on all things in black culture. Or some of their statements had a bias tone that they could have been communicating unconsciously. Being 6’4 and 260 pounds I have heard so many statements that you

could tell people just did not think about before they decided to speak. I would get upset to the point I was fuming mad but my mentor who was more seasoned and had similar experiences helped me to learn to control my thoughts and redirect the conversation to the person and their statement. It has been a very important tool for me in the line of work I do.”

R3 and R4 expressed similar responses in how important learning from the generation before them was important to their personal growth and development. R3 stated that “working in corporate America I quickly realized how much faster things moved. Mentorship was so critical to me quickly adapting to my work environment and excelling at my job. Early on in my position I made a mistake that was very costly to the company. Though my boss was naturally upset with me she was able to mentor me in navigating this mistake and ultimately rectifying it.” R4 discussed in his interview how he was an open book and his extrovert personality was infectious to the people he worked around but he had to work on toning his personality down in his office environment. R4 stated that he took the following approach when thinking about his transition to the workforce:

“very early on when I started working I had to be very intentional about understanding the culture of my office and what was appropriate. I am a fun loving person who loves to joke and it is something that gets me through the day. I learned through conversation that I needed to bring it down a notch or two for my office. After a few conversations with my mentor he helped me understand that I should not look at it like I am not being true to myself rather I am taking a different approach to connect with my coworkers.”

R5 discussed how the transfer of knowledge helped him adjust to his new position. “My first position had me doing some coordinating work in an area I was not the most familiar with. My first couple of months I worked on getting used to the position and went through the natural learning curve. It was through my mentor sharing his experience and helping me work through my fear of failure that I was able to move forward with confidence. I really thank him for that time period because I really would have been lost without him.”

R2 is the only research participant who works in the K-12 field and he discussed how seasoned teachers helped him adjust. “It is one thing doing your student teaching but to actually be in the classroom and all eyes are on you is a different story. I had a teacher take me under his wing along with my mentor from high school who had worked in the field for two decades before I entered. Their advice was invaluable to my progression.”

The transfer of knowledge appears to be an experience that benefited all of the research participants. To some degree, a level of oral history exists in the stories they told since much of the advice they were given was simply based off of experience. The participants sharing a piece of their lived experiences, helped them to flourish and learn in their personal experiences.

Additional Findings

All of the participants spoke about how significant mentoring was to their life and their personal development as a man and a professional. All five of the research participants also reported that they are currently a mentor in a formal (big brothers big sisters, etc.) or informal (church, coach, etc.) capacity. Another appealing find in this

study is that all five of the research participants reported having mentors at some point in their life that were male and female. They described how their mentors provided different lessons and talents for the various seasons of their life. Due to the fact that all of the research participants were recent graduates and fairly new professionals (3 years or less), no other findings were visible.

Significance of Theme 1

All five of the research participants expressed how mentoring played a meaningful role in their personal, academic, and career development. This suggestion by the research participants correlates with the literature in the many cognitive and non-cognitive benefits of mentoring (Eby et al., 2008). Only two of the five research participants participated in some level of a formal mentoring program in their life while the others experienced only informal mentoring in their life. The research participants also expressed that depending on the season in their life, the mentoring relationships they experienced lasted different lengths of time. So no matter if the relationship was for a semester or for the decade they all expressed how they were able to find some value in all of the mentoring relationships they had. Due to the natural life cycle of the mentoring relationship (closing/ending phase), the respondents spoke candidly about the life lessons they learned from mentors who they no longer have a relationship with. Upon reflecting on the valuable life lessons and the relationships now lost, several of the respondents became visibly emotional.

Significance of Theme 2

All of the participants expressed how dependability was important from their mentors and how their mentor's individual success was influential to them. For the research participants it was through role models (mentors) that they were able to see the success that they aimed to be. It seemed natural that the participants gaining a sense of dependability and viewing their mentor as authentic would in turn foster confidence in the research participants. It is during this phase that the mentor and mentee transition from the nurturing phase to the maturing phase. Two of the research participants discussed how seeing their mentor's involvement with community and philanthropy work encouraged them to get more involved. Since mentorship focuses on development and making a person whole it is to be noted that mentees viewed the knowledge their mentors gave them as tools for success. It was in these tools for the mentees that they were able to make valuable meaning out of lessons but also personal and professional connections.

Significance of Theme 3

The transfer of knowledge through lived experiences and professional networks appeared to be valuable to all of the research participants. Surprisingly, one of the research participants discussed how he recently discovered the impact he made on a young man before he entered college. His manner and influence was one the young man modeled himself after, which was unknown to the research participant until recently. Something that is interesting to note about the transfer of knowledge is that one never truly knows the impact of their words and who is paying attention. The participants also discussed how knowledge gained from their mentors influenced them to enhance

themselves personally by becoming more knowledgeable about their career fields and reading books that were suggested by their mentors.

Chapter Summary

Chapter four discussed the findings of this phenomenological study that resulted from the experiences of black male graduates and their perception of mentorship. The chapter also included a discussion of the demographics, interview findings, data analysis, and emerging themes. The researcher reviewed the responses from the research participant's interviews and was able to create themes as a result of it. The themes were able to provide the foundation for the research analysis. The themes that emerged from the research study were (see TABLE 2):

1. The role of a mentor
2. Role models
3. Transfer of knowledge

These three emergent themes allowed the researcher to construct descriptions from the research participants lived experiences. The findings gave voice to the significant role mentoring provided for the males in the study. The study highlighted how mentoring was critical in the personal and professional development of the research participants. Another important finding was that the males in the study found that someone who was dependable was viewed as more authentic to them. It was in dependability that the research participants were able to see a role model and someone

that influenced them to be successful. The findings also discussed how valuable the transfer of knowledge was from one generation to the next.

TABLE 2. RESEARCH THEMES

Theme	Question associated
Role of mentor	1,3,6,10,12,15
Role Models	2, 3,7,9,11,14,
Transfer of knowledge	4,5,8,13,

Chapter five will provide an interpretation of the results as well as implications of the study findings. The chapter will close with limitations, gaps in the literature, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

Chapter five will include a restatement of the research problem, the purpose of the study, and an interpretation of the results. Chapter five will also discuss the significance of the results as well as the limitations and recommendations for future research on mentoring.

The goal of this research was to address mentoring and its significance to the academic success of black males at predominantly white institutions. This study attempts to employ a phenomenological approach, which allowed for the mentoring experiences of the black males in the study to be constructed from their lived experience. Their formal and informal mentoring experiences created the foundation of the study and analysis. In order to document the lived experiences of the research participants, five black males with varying life and career fields participated in semi-structured interviews. Through this interviewing process, the males in the study shared their experience. They also reflected on how the mentoring experiences added to how they developed as men and professionals. Through meaning making, the researcher was able to assess the research questions and explore the implications and limitations of the research study.

Research Questions

The central research question guiding the study was: How do black male graduates perceive that mentoring influenced their college completion? From the central question, five sub questions emerged to help guide the study.

- 1) How do black male graduates perceive that formal or informal mentorship influenced their college experience?
- 2) What kind of mentoring was most prevalent in their experience with mentoring?
- 3) How do the research participants believe mentoring benefited their overall college experience?
- 4) Was mentoring significant to their academic journey in a unique way because they were at a predominantly white institution?
- 5) What do black male graduates recommend to institutions of higher education for addressing the success of black males?

Interpretation of Findings

The goal of this qualitative research study was to investigate the lived experiences of five black male college graduates and their perception of mentoring. A phenomenological qualitative design was utilized to assess the black males' perceptions of mentoring and its influence on them eventually graduating from college. The findings of the study determined that mentoring was significant to the research participants in not only their personal development but also in their career readiness. The findings of the study also support current literature while providing perspective on how black male graduates perceive mentoring as it relates to them graduating college. This chapter also summarizes what the research participants perceived as key to a mentoring relationship. Table two presents the account of the research participant's statements through the research discussion (see TABLE 3).

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT’S THOUGHTS ON MENTORING

Research participant	Participant’s Thoughts on Mentoring
R1	Mentoring is an investment in someone. My first mentor was my pastor, he served as a father figure and disciplinarian my mentors taught me how to cultivate relationships and place value on connection. I had a Spanish teacher in high school he absolutely loved me even though I gave her a bad experience. She pushed me to take life more seriously.
R2	Mentorship helps me understand the importance of giving back to my community. Mentorship helped develop me holistically and influence me to be the first in my family to finish college. My high school basketball coach was my first mentor. He helped prepare me for life after high school and college.
R3	My first mentor was my supervisor at my internship in college. He developed into a big brother for me. Mentorship helped me navigate a PWI and helped me prepare for circumstances I would not have been ready for otherwise. Mentoring was significant to understanding society because it let me know I was not alone. Mentorship gave me a community within a community while I was in college.
R4	My first mentor was a neighbor of mine. He was a white male who took me and my brother under his wing. In regard to mentoring, I would tell someone that it is the reason I graduated college. Mentorship instilled in me that failure was not an option for me. Mentoring encouraged me to be a mentor now and I love it. I love the process of redirecting a young mind.
R5	Mentorship is about direction and guidance through a process or life event. My mentor in college was influential; he made me want to be a better version of myself. I could go to my mentors and talk to them about anything. That made me feel more confident about the decisions I made in college.

The table synthesizes in a very concise manner the five research participants' perceptions of mentoring and the effect those relationships had on them. The purpose is to be able to provide readers with an accurate depiction of the participants' stories in an attempt to learn about this research population. For many of the research participants their first mentors were their parents, older siblings, teachers, or community members. All of the research participants participated in some mentoring relationship before they attended college. The research participants were able to convey the significance of mentoring due to many of them being involved in a mentoring relationship for the majority of their life. In turn, their mentoring experience encouraged them to take on roles as mentors in formal programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters or to serve as a peer mentor while they were enrolled as undergraduate students.

Discussion of Themes

The three themes that emerged from the research study gave voice to the research participant's experiences while giving light to future implications for research.

Theme 1: The Role of a Mentor

The research participants all expressed how mentoring enhanced their life positively and how the guidance of their mentor(s) affected how they approached academics and their profession. Mentoring relationships provide not only support but critical direction and guidance for the mentee. Mentoring is significant in challenging students to surpass their comfort zone while developing a genuine connection with someone who is typically older than them. Mentoring is meaningful in building trust,

confidence, and competence in mentees. Many of the participants expresses the serious attitude their mentors took in regard to an approach with them. Sentiments of “you are special” or “you will not be another statistic” were consistent across the accounts of all five men.

The results of the present study affirmed that the mentor relationships that the study participants developed aided in their growth and development of self-efficacy. Mentoring relationships have the power to improve how the mentee develops future relationships. The focus on mentoring and success initiatives for minority students is a retention strategy and can give them access to professional networks that will allow them to reach the level of success that they aspire to. For the research participants, mentorship was important to the development of their identities. Mentors who have a positive concept and vision of self, allow them to model it for adolescent black males. Mentors and role models can make a difference in enhancing self-awareness and eliminating any sense of helplessness in mentees from a very early age. The research participants described their mentors in positive terms such as ‘patient,’ ‘leader,’ and ‘committed.’ Scholars Knox and McGovern (1988) created six critical characteristics of a mentor.

Theme 2: Role Models

The research participants viewed role models as individuals of an older generation who they could look up to. These are individuals who provided guidance in life regardless of their gender or ethnicity. The research participants all had role models in their life who were African American but several of the participants had experienced mentoring across cultures at some point in their life. Though they thought it was

important to have more role models, particularly African American men in the black community they still saw value in anyone who was interested providing mentoring services. R3 revealed:

Mentoring means a lot more than the color of their skin but it is more about the intent which will eventually lead to the desired impact. Having mentors of various ethnicities and gender identities I think that I have been able to grow a greater appreciation for the differences we all possess in the world. My mentors all came from different walks a life but they all had one common interest and that was to help me.

Through the interviews, the research participants also revealed how role models also included people in their families. All five of the participants attributed some aspect of their current success to a member of their family. The research participants appeared to gain different lessons from family members versus role models outside their family. R5 stated “when my dad taught me how to tie a tie I was a teenager. For some reason that was a really important day to me and I am not sure why. I almost felt like I became a man that day.” R4 discussed what he learned from his mother:

My mother would always tell my siblings and I why settle for working at McDonalds or a factory when you can own it. My mother always worked two jobs for most of my life so I think she really instilled a work ethic and an owner’s mentality in me.

For the research participants, someone to model behavior after emerged as an important point of discussion for not only them but also for all black males moving forward. Two of the research participants discussed growing up in rough neighborhoods

and how certain influences could have led them down negative paths. Instead, they modeled their behaviors after role models who were progressive and positive.

Theme 3 Transfer of Knowledge

One of the more significant themes of the study was the transfer of knowledge from mentor to mentee. In keeping with the African American tradition of oral history, the research participants all discussed how the wisdom gained from their relationship with their mentors was one of the more essential connecting pieces to their relationship with their mentor. Many of the participants expressed how they did not know they had so many commonalities with their mentor until they heard stories about their life experiences. Stories about their mentors advice and encouragement over the years flowed freely. The research participants shared common themes of advice and best practices from their mentors. R1 stated that “my mentor always discussed with me how important it is to connect with my coworkers”. This advice was important to the research participants because he found himself at times spending more time with his coworkers (in the work day) than he did with his wife. So it was important for him to look at his coworkers as extended family.

R4 expressed “my mentor would always tell me think twice, speak once” in regard to him being so quick to speak and express his mind on every topic. This was valuable advice to him because it forced him to be more observant and allowed him to take in more information before making a decision. R5 discussed how his mentor gave him valuable advice on progressing in his career. R5 stated that “he told me to take my career aspirations one day at a time. You should not be the same person you are now this

time next year”. This was valuable to the participant because he was able to place value on every experience that he encountered.

The transfer of knowledge appeared to be one of the more significant themes for the research participants. It was not only cherished in their personal development but it was important knowledge in filling in gaps and making the research participants more aware. R3 and R2 both expressed how their mentors were valued consultants in decision making. R2 says “he helped me make sense of new experiences and things I didn’t understand.” The research participants all appear to have received much more from the relationships than they originally anticipated in that they got models for how to develop their lives.

Limitations

Key limitations in the study were the size of the sample and the institution where the study was conducted. The sample size was a limitation in that the goal of the study was to have eight participants but the final study was based only on the experiences of five participants. Conflicts and nonresponsive research study candidates may have affected the outcome of the study.

A second limitation in the study was that the findings were linear because all of the participants in the study were black male graduates from one institution in the state of Kentucky. Similarities in culture and upbringing could have framed many of their responses from a similar lens or perspective. The third limitation for the research study was that all of the study participants attended one institution in the state of Kentucky.

Interviews with students from other institutions may have aided in more themes emerging from the research.

Recommendations and Research Implications

The phenomenological study revealed three themes in an attempt to fill a gap in the existing literature on black male graduates' perceptions of mentoring relationships. The following recommendations are made with the goal of helping four year predominantly white institutions to increase the graduation rate of black males. A significant amount of literature on black male mentoring discusses black males from a deficit perspective. The emergent themes represent the reflection of how black male graduates perceive mentoring as it relates to their individual successes. The findings add validity and significance to the importance of mentoring as a resource to this student population. This research was important to counteract the negative deficit model and support the fact that success is attainable through access. This research is also important to provide guidance to institutions or stakeholders interested in addressing the precise needs of this population. Mentorship, whether it happens formally or informally, can make a significant impact on mentors and mentees.

In regard to this student population, more research could be done involving the scholar Kram's (1983) phases of mentorship to explore how this student population progresses as they transition into different phases. The research participants were very open about sharing some of the wisdom they received from their mentors over the years that aided in their development. Transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next appears to be critical in the African American community. Also, through this transfer of

knowledge the participants all shared how they all were taught unwritten rules. Many of these unwritten rules revolved around race, politics, and perception of threat. Shared knowledge through stories and personal experiences appeared to be important for the participants to navigate their careers and families.

Another recommendation is for university administrators to specifically focus resources on programming for black males. Scholars (Blake-Beard, 2009; Crisp, 2010) suggest that mentoring is a bridge to providing valuable guidance and direction to students that can aid in their development and advancement, both socially and culturally. The state of Kentucky has a low number of African Americans and an even lower number of African American males attending college. Creating programming at the university level that targets this population could allow administrators and stakeholders to invest in the success of this population.

The third recommendation is for more encouragement of college level professors to serve in a mentoring capacity. The research participants revealed that they did not have the opportunity to build relationships with many faculty members outside of the classroom. For those that did attempt to build relationships with faculty, they felt as if they were met with resistance. After explaining to the participants many of the responsibilities that faculty members have (tenure track, research, committee work, etc.) they were better able to understand how they may not have had time to work with them during their time as a student. More participation on the faculty side and more incentive to mentor could be an area of change in the future.

The study findings also revealed future exploration potential of other forms of mentoring. All of the research participants are millennials' so some of their values and the things they deem important are the same. They expressed how they thought that more social media and technology could be incorporated into mentoring to reach a larger audience. Connecting with students through asynchronous and synchronous modes of communication proved valuable for all of the research participants. So communicating with a mentor via a messaging app or a phone call, though different forms of communication both provided value in relationship building.

The goal of the study recommendations is for administrators to attempt to implement more programming initiatives for this specific population that allow for mentoring relationships on campus. The recommendations also encourage black males to become more involved and engaged on campus in searching for mentoring opportunities. Also, it is important for administrators to understand how significant mentoring is for the development of one generation to the next.

Future Research Recommendations

This study focuses on black male graduates who successfully graduated from a predominantly white institution, but it does not focus much on what their experiences were as a student at this type of institution. More research and focus on that topic would be beneficial in the future. All of the males in the study were graduates so performing a future study with undergraduates involved would encompass different phases of the higher education life cycle and would be impactful. Also, comparing the perceptions of black males and mentoring at a PWI versus an HBCU would allow for another

perspective to be included in research. Commitment from upper level administration to support minority themed initiatives through financial and physical support is another thing to consider. There is also room for a longitudinal study on black males in mentoring positions to take place over an extended period of time or one that follows them from different education levels (middle school, high school, etc). Lastly, a future research study that would include more minority groups (latino, Asian, island pacific) would allow for the similarities and differences of their experiences to be included and examined.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a summary discussion of the findings, themes, recommendations, and future research. The study findings addressed how black males perceived mentoring as it related to their individual success. Participant interviews were analyzed to provide higher education administrators and stake holder's with valuable information on strategies that could aid in the successful degree attainment of African American males. The perceptions of the research participants could provide valuable insight into the creation and the maintenance of formal and informal mentoring initiatives at predominantly white institutions.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A:
Letter to Participants

Greetings Participant.

My name is Taurean Douglas and I am a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky University. I am conducting a research study titled: *African American Males and Their Perception of Mentorship: A Qualitative Methods Study*. The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative methods study is to examine the experiences and perception of black males and the influence mentoring had on them. I plan to focus on graduates from a four year institution in Kentucky.

Your participation will involve a one-on-one interview lasting between 30-90 minutes with the researcher. The researcher will record the interview that will be transcribed later. After the interview is transcribed you will be provided with the interview transcript to verify its accuracy and final approval.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate in the study or withdraw prior to the interview process please do so by contacting the researcher at the contact information listed below. If you withdraw from the study during the interview process please communicate your intent to the researcher. The results of this study may be published in the future but none of your personal or identifying information will be used in the results to maintain confidentiality. All data will be stored in a password protected computer. Any interview transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet and accessible only to the researcher. Interview transcripts will be destroyed three years after the interview. There are no foreseeable risks to you in this research.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time.

Taurean Douglas

Doctoral Student

Eastern Kentucky University

Email: Taurean_Douglas10@mymail.eku.edu

Mobile: 270-839-3865

APPENDIX B:
Interview Questions

Date of Interview: _____

1. What does mentoring mean to you?
2. Could you provide some examples of what good mentoring looks like from your experience?
3. Who was your first mentor and what do you remember about them? Tell me about that person and the role they played in your life.
4. What role did mentorship play in your college experience?
5. How did mentorship help you navigate the educational landscape of a predominantly white institution?
6. Were you involved in a formal or informal mentorship relationship or program at your university?
7. How has mentoring relationships enhanced your understanding of society?
8. Did mentorship influence you to finish college as a first-generation college student?
*If so, tell me about a mentorship experience you had that you think helped prepare you for college.
9. What did your mentoring relationships look like for you in college?
10. What is your perception of your mentorship experience in regard to who you are today?
11. Do you know any black males who grew up in your neighborhood who did not attend college and has not been very successful? Can you tell me about them and in your judgment, what made the difference in you being successful and him not?

12. If someone were to ask you about your mentoring experience in college and its impact on you, what would you tell them?
13. Tell me about how your mentorship relationship influenced your success in college?
14. Has your mentorship experience inspired you to become a mentor? If so, how do you mentor others in your life?
15. If you could share something with individuals who are interested in mentorship what would you say in regard to its importance?

Interview questions interjections may consist of the following

- a) What did you see as your role in the mentorship relationship?
- b) From your frame of reference, how do you view yourself compared to other students?
- c) What do you view as a positive outcome from a mentor/mentee relationship?
- d) What do you think you have gained from mentorship?

APPENDIX C:
Interview Script for Study

Hello! My name is Taurean Douglas, and I am a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky University and am conducting a research study entitled: *African American Males and Their Perception of Mentorship: A Qualitative Methods Study*. The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative methods study is to examine the experiences and perception of black males and the influence mentoring had on them. If you wish to remove yourself from the study at any time you may do so. Please communicate to me that this is your intention verbally and we will end the process. Before we begin the interview process do you have any questions or concerns is it relates to the study? Will you be able to stay for the duration of the interview? I will be taping the interview session for accuracy. Your participation is voluntary and data will be coded at a later time to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Please keep in mind that the interview is being tape recorded and that at any time during the interview the discussion can be ended. Is your participation in this study on a volunteer basis? The interview will begin now.

Throughout the interview, I may ask for clarification of your responses. I will only do this if anything is unclear and will verify with you any points of clarity in the conversation. If any questions or concerns arise post interview participants can contact me via email or phone per the contact information in their informed consent. The communication with the participants will end by thanking them all for their time and participation.

APPENDIX D:
Interview Questions

Hello, my name is Taurean Douglas. I am a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. As part of my studies I am conducting a research study about black male's graduates and their perception of mentoring. I have a few brief questions that would take less than 2 minutes to determine if you are eligible for the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary in regard to responding to the questions and no personal identifying information will be collected. No personal identifying will be collected during this process. Any information collected will be used to create data in the research study. The data files will be turned over to my advisor where they will keep them for three years. After that time period they will be destroyed.

Do you have any questions or concerns about the research study?

Are you ready to begin the questions?

- 1) Are you a first-generation college student?
- 2) Are you an African American male?
- 3) Did you experience mentoring at any point in your life?
- 4) Did you attend Western Kentucky University?

Thank you for your participation today. If you are selected for the study I will follow up with you at a later date. If you have any questions at a later time please do not hesitate to reach me at Taurean_Douglas10@mymail.eku.edu or 270-839-3865.

APPENDIX E:
Informed Consent

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF MENTORSHIP: A QUALITATIVE METHODS STUDY

Why am I being asked to participate in this research?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about African American males and their perception of mentorship. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you fit the population of the study which is first generation, African American males who graduated from Western Kentucky University. If you take part in this study, you will be one of about twelve males to do so.

Who is doing the study?

The person in charge of this study is Taurean Douglas at Eastern Kentucky University. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Tara Shepperson.

What is the purpose of the study?

By doing this study, we hope to learn if mentorship makes a difference in African American males persisting to graduation, and if so, how does it impact them.

Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?

The research procedures will be conducted at a public location like a library, but the location will be decided at a later date. You will need to come to this public location one time during the study. This visit will take about 30-90 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 90 minutes over the next 2 weeks.

What will I be asked to do?

As a participant in the study you will be asked a series of interview questions that revolve around your experience with mentorship. You will be tape recorded and from there the researcher will transcribe your interview along with the other research participants. The

researcher will then attempt to form themes in an attempt to see what the respondents have in common.

If you agree to participate in the study it will be a private interview. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. The questions asked in the study will be open ended and semi structured. They will attempt to explore your experiences and perception of mentorship and its role in your current success.

Are there reasons why I should not take part in this study?

If you do not identify with the population that will be targeted in the study which will be African American males, first generation backgrounds, and graduates from Western Kentucky University.

What are the possible risks and discomforts?

There is minimal risk associated with the study. The interviews will be recorded with a digital voice recorder and saved in password protected files. One possible but unlikely risk is that the identity or confidentiality of the participant could be breached. Also, it is possible that some of the questions asked to the participants may invoke emotion. If this does happen I will inform the participant that we can skip the questions or stop the interview. You may, however, experience a previously unknown risk or side effect.

Will I benefit from taking part in this study?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced gratification from knowing they contributed to research. We cannot and do not guarantee that you will receive any benefits from this study.

Do I have to take part in this study?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

If I don't take part in this study, are there other choices?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except to not take part in the study.

What will it cost me to participate?

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study other than the gas you may spend to get to the interview site or for public transportation.

Will I receive any payment or rewards for taking part in the study?

You will not receive any payment or reward for taking part in this study.

Who will see the information I give?

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about this combined information. You will not be identified in these written materials.

Can my taking part in the study end early?

If you decide to take part in the study, you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to participate. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to end your participation in the study.

They may do this if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of scientific reasons.

What happens if I get hurt or sick during the study?

If you believe you are hurt or if you get sick because of something that is done during the study, you should call Taurean Douglas at 270-839-3865 immediately. It is important for you to understand that Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for the cost of any care or treatment that might be necessary because you get hurt or sick while taking part in this

study. That cost will be your responsibility. Also, Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for any wages you may lose if you are harmed by this study.

Usually, medical costs that result from research-related harm cannot be included as regular medical costs. Therefore, the costs related to your child's care and treatment because of something that is done during the study will be your responsibility. You should ask your insurer if you have any questions about your insurer's willingness to pay under these circumstances.

What if I have questions?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Taurean Douglas at 270-839-3865. If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University at 859-622-3636. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

What else do I need to know?

You will be told if any new information is learned which may affect your condition or influence your willingness to continue taking part in this study.

I have thoroughly read this document, understand its contents, have been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, and agree to participate in this research project.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person taking part in the study

Name of person providing information to subject