A Phenomenological Study of African American Men Who Were Mentored While Pursuing their Bachelor’s Degree at Historically White Colleges and Universities

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A Phenomenological Study of African American Men Who Were Mentored While Pursuing their Bachelor’s Degree at Historically White Colleges and Universities

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Abstract

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Drexel University, June 2013
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African American men pursuing bachelor’s degrees at historically White colleges and universities (HWCU) are not graduating at the same rates as Caucasian men. With a continued rapid decline in degree completion, establishing a framework of success for these students is becoming increasingly difficult. While research concerning graduation rates for this population exists, little is known about the essence of the mentoring experiences of African American men who have graduated. For that reason, the purpose of this research was to study the phenomenon of mentoring through the lived experiences of African American male college graduates.

Using a phenomenological approach to research, this study sought to answer the following questions: What are the lived experiences of African American men who were mentored during their pursuit of an undergraduate degree at a HWCU? How do participants describe their academic experiences in light of the mentoring they received as undergraduates? How do participants describe managing issues of social integration with the support of being mentored?

Participants of the study identified myriad experiences. The need to manage comfort related to social isolation, prejudice, and bias was one finding. Others included the manner in which mentor relationships were established, the most valued traits of a mentor, the role of accountability and the impact that being mentored had on the participant’s academics.

The participants’ insight led to the following conclusions: the bias and stereotypes that African American men faced while attending HWCUs impacted their self-confidence and ability to feel comfortable on campus; informal mentoring experiences based on genuine interest and transparency yielded the most benefit and was the preferred method of relationship establishment. A means of expressing gratitude for the mentoring received was shown through increased efforts toward timely degree completion. The presence of a mentor was instrumental in confidence building, which led to greater academic achievement. The opportunities to secure a mentor were increased when participants became engaged with race-based student organizations and activities that exposed them to faculty, staff, and alumni of color. Participants in this study greatly attributed their degree completion to the mentoring they received as undergraduate students.
Dedication

To my greatest love, my son, Jace David:
This is just one of Momma’s many attempts to establish a framework of success for you.
Your potential has no limits… Philippians 4:13

To my Grandmother:
My saving grace, my angel both living and heavenly, for you and your selfless sacrifices
to make sure that I became the best that I could ever hope to be.

To Unc:
My greatest positive Black male influence. My Uncle, Brother and Father all in one, for
your unwavering support and confidence in my ability to achieve.

To Cornelius:
The wind beneath my wings.

To Soncia:
My personal and professional blueprint, my mentor, friend, soror, and other mother. For
holding me accountable, for believing in me and encouraging me to believe in myself.
Because of you, I can.
Acknowledgments

I must first give all the glory and honor to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for providing me with the faith and skill necessary to complete such a personal accomplishment. Without your guidance Father, none of this would be possible. Philippians 4:13

My journey through this process has been both rewarding and developmental. As a person I have developed patience specific to understanding that research and writing is recursive and embracing change opens the door for progress as evidenced through the concept of presencing and moving through the “U,” a leadership theory that will forever stick with me. Dr. Geller I thank you for walking the U with me. Lawson, you painted the picture of reality for me, providing me with what I provide my students every day, Thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Research suggests that through the establishment of mentor relationships, African American male students attending a historically White college or university (HWCU) can find success despite struggles with issues resulting from structural inequality and a lack of social integration (LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). Mentor relationships are said to assist with the development of persistence as well as promote student engagement. This notion is supported by literature that views mentoring as a vehicle that helps increase retention by fostering the connection between the student and the university (Mason, 1998; Tinto, 1975). While mentoring is regarded as beneficial for students of color working to complete undergraduate coursework, one must consider the challenge of connecting with mentors on campuses where the majority of the faculty is White. The U.S. Department of Education reported that in 2010 there existed public HWCUs in the northern California region where more than 70% of the faculty identified as White. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education reported six-year graduation rates at these institutions as low as 18% and 23.1% for the African American male population (College Results Online, n.d.). In situations like these African American men attending HWCUs may have few opportunities to develop mentor relationships with people from related backgrounds who may be better prepared to support the specific needs necessary for these students to successfully complete a bachelor’s degree.

Statement of the Problem to Be Researched

Although research exists to support the belief that mentor relationships assist students with establishing connections, which help them persist toward graduation, little
is known about what African American male students value most in the mentoring relationship.

**Purpose and Significance of the Problem**

While institutions of higher education in the United States now embrace the idea of an ethnically diverse student population, HWCUs only began admitting African American students on a continuous basis 50 years ago in 1962. Mississippi native James Meredith was admitted to the University of Mississippi at Oxford after the Fifth Circuit Court overturned the university’s decision to deny his admission based on race (Williams, 1997). Since the landmark ruling, more overt forms of racial discrimination have been outlawed. They may, however, have been replaced with what Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot (2005) noted as “indirect or subtle/invisible institutional forms of racism, which is referred to today as structural inequality” (p. 14). They illuminated this concept further noting that with structural inequality:

> The dominant culture officially stigmatizes explicit, traditional, or old-fashioned racial prejudice and overt discrimination (though it often tolerates these in informal or private contexts). At the same time it condemns efforts to raise racial issues, label racist values and practices unjust, or mobilize racial consciousness to challenge institutionalized racism. The dominant culture further challenges efforts to create social policies and programs that explicitly recognize race as a valid basis for redistributing societal resources (resources that are or have been mal-distributed as a result of institutional racism), including efforts to increase opportunities for people of color to attend first rate colleges. (Chesler et al., 2005 pp. 14-15)

Considering it has only been 50 years since African Americans fought and finally won the right to attend HWCUs, it is possible the structure of the curriculum and the resources offered at these institutions do not fully take into consideration the needs of students of color. Bush (1997) informed:
Because some Blacks today have greater access to this society than their ancestors, they should not lose sight of their profound message, that the educational system in the United States was never designed to inspire nor elevate African American people. (pp. 113-114)

Speaking specifically to the needs of African American men, this study sought to understand the mentoring experience of African American male alumni who attended HWCUs.

Tinto (1975) suggested that social and cultural integration in the university setting is a major determinant of student retention, persistence development, and graduation rates. Nora and Crisp (2007) noted that through opportunities allowing for the development of mentoring relationships during college, students have an increased likelihood of establishing a connection with the campus that keeps them there until graduation. Additional research indicated students who interact and become involved in a mentoring relationship find greater satisfaction in their college experiences and are more likely to persist to graduation than those who do not have this experience (Hughes, 1987; Moore & Toliver, 2010).

Mentoring, both formal and informal, may contribute to the development of a student on many levels. According to Terrell and Hassell (1994), a mentor provides awareness of values and cultures and provides opportunities for exposure to diverse experiences. LaVant et al. (1997) suggested the influence of a mentoring relationship may specifically help African American men manage both their studies and their social struggles by exposing them to people they trust and from whom they can seek support to advance in both their course work and personal lives.
Brittian, Sy, and Stokes (2009) studied the impact mentoring has on African American students and noted:

African American students reported the need for more students like themselves to enroll in college and they requested the hiring of African American staff to increase. The presence of African American faculty and staff on campus assists students in identifying individuals like themselves in positions of leadership at their university. Consequently, it provides a more supportive environment for African American students. (p. 89)

As evidenced in the research, a mentor appears to have the potential of assisting students with managing struggles associated with successfully completing undergraduate coursework (Brittian et al., 2009; LaVant et al., 1997; Nora & Crisp, 2007). Based on the literature, one wondered how much mentoring is historically and presently provided to African American men at HWCUs. The purpose of this phenomenological research was to study the phenomenon of mentoring through the essence of the lived experiences of African American male college graduates mentored while attending a HWCU.

**Research Questions**

The following questions are addressed through this phenomenological research:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American men who were mentored during their pursuit of an undergraduate degree at a HWCU?
2. How do participants describe their academic experiences in light of the mentoring they received as undergraduates?
3. How do participants describe managing issues of social integration with the support of being mentored?
The Conceptual Framework

Researcher’s Stance

This study was rooted in my axiological stance (Creswell, 2007). Drawing on the work of Guba and Lincoln (1988), axiological research is defined as a qualitative assumption that holds research as value laden and includes the values of the inquirer, the theory, the paradigm used, and the social and cultural norms for either the inquirer or participants. It was my belief the values of the participants would reveal themselves through the sharing of their lived experiences with having been mentored. This is consistent with the chosen research method of transcendental phenomenology where significant statements shared by the participants were categorized into themes that lead to a greater understanding of the participants’ experience with the phenomenon. My values as the researcher included educational equality and personal development. When speaking to the experiences of African American men who attended HWCUs, it was my belief that both educational equality and personal development hold significance when looking to secure a positive educational experience that might lead to graduation.

Taking into consideration my values and the worldview, a social constructionist perspective offers the ability to develop meaning from the lived experiences of the participants. According to Gergen (1985), “Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (p. 266). Both my axiological and social constructionist stances were evident in developing an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of degreed African American men mentored during college.
Researcher’s Experience

My interest in mentoring arose from my own life experiences. As a result of having been raised by my maternal grandmother, I had access to very few adults within my parents’ generation during my childhood. For this reason, I paid close attention to the men and women around my parents’ ages in school and church. I found myself drawn to positive influencers such as teachers and administrators. While informal, as early as the first grade, I independently began to seek out adults who offered personally supportive relationships and continued to do so at each point of my educational journey, including in the pursuit of my graduate degree. The experiences from these relationships helped shape my personal growth as well as my journey toward a career in higher education.

Creswell (2007) indicated that social constructionists seek to gain insight into the experiences people have and the world in which they live. As an African American, I drew from my personal experience the value and significance mentor relationships have on educational success. As both a student and now an administrator in higher education, I have seen that African American students who establish mentor relationships with campus faculty and staff appear to increase their chances of graduating. It is this experience that informed this study, and my interest in assuring that the voices, stories, and lessons of the participants were the foundation for exploring the meanings of the lived experiences of these students.

Conceptual Streams

The three streams of theory, research, and practice that informed this study are a) structural inequality, b) persistence as a key factor for success, and c) mentoring.
**Structural Inequality.** Structural inequalities at a HWCU may arise from the assumption that the approach to education that has worked successfully for White students will work in the same manner for students of color. While perhaps unintentional, the presence of structural inequalities fails to acknowledge the specific support needs of students who do not identify as White/Caucasian. Therefore, using the White student population as the basis for developing services and programs offered by the institution may not be sufficient.

Research suggests African American male students continue to face both academic and non-academic issues when pursuing college coursework (Cross & Slater, 2000, 2001; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2000). These issues are more likely at HWCUs where structures and resources of support were not created for students of color when higher education was established in the United States (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Faculty and senior administrators that have remained primarily White and male may not recognize the need to challenge either the structure or resources of support. Cross and Slater (2000) went so far as to suggest that if efforts to improve African American male graduation rates are not implemented systematically by colleges and universities, African American men are likely to become extinct within higher education. Shultz, Colton, and Colton (2001) further suggest efforts by the institutions to develop programs specific to the needs of students of color might prove beneficial, as a one-size-fits-all approach to education may not be effective in achieving the goal of the experience.

**Persistence.** The literature on development of persistence suggests this factor is critical for degree completion (Mason, 1998; Roach, 2001). Cuyjet (2006) acknowledged
that creating opportunities for African American men to increase their levels of social and cultural integration on campus will motivate them to become more persistent toward completing their degrees. African American men finding it difficult to engage socially on campus may factor into the decline of graduation rates for these students.

**Mentoring.** Nora and Crisp (2007) suggested implementing a multi-dimensional support system inclusive of mentoring at the collegiate level is needed to assist with declining rates of retention and graduation. They suggested such a system will encourage the construction of a framework which suits the needs of the individual student and will prove beneficial in the academic success of students (Nora & Crisp, 2007). Through a review of literature from research over the recent decades, it is suggested the presence of mentors and the development of persistence may have positive implications for the increase in African American male graduation rates (Brittian et al., 2009; Cross & Slater, 2000; Cuyjet, 2006; LaVant et al., 1997; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Roach, 2001; Warde, 2008). Further framing this work through a review of research on structural inequality offered insight into the organizational issues at historically White colleges and universities across the nation. By studying the lived experiences of African American men who were mentored while attending HWCUs, this study explored the perceptions African American men have regarding mentoring and the completion of their baccalaureate degrees. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the conceptual framework for this study.
African American/ Black

For the purpose of this study, academic success is defined as the completion of a bachelor’s degree at an accredited college or university.

African American/ Black

Used synonymously throughout this research. A U.S. citizen of African descent, who was born, raised, and resides in the United States, Bi-racial or mixed race included.
**Academic Variables**
For the purpose of this study, this term refers to grade point averages and standardized test scores.

**Formal Mentoring**
A process in which a screening process is required in order to pair the protégé with the expert in an effort to ensure success and compatibility in a given area (Tolentino, 1999)

**HWCU (Historically White College or University)**
“An institution of higher education whose histories, traditions, symbols, stories, icons, curriculum, and processes were all designed by whites, for whites (Brunsma, Placier, & Brown, 2012, p. 3).

**Informal Mentoring**
An influential relationship between one or more people with the intent to gain insight and direction on such things as careers fields or major course of study (Terrell & Hassell, 1994).

**Institutional Racism**
“A symptom of fundamental maladjustments in the interactions of culturally and ethnically differentiated beings” (Law, Phillips, & Turney, 2004, p. 27).

**Matriculate**
Enrolled in college in pursuit of a degree (Warde, 2008).

**Mentee**
Student being mentored (see Mentor) (Nora & Crisp, 2007).
Mentor

“A person of a superior rank, special achievements, and prestige who instructs, counsels, guides and facilitates the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (Blackwell, 1989, p. 9).

Non-Academic Variables

For the purpose of this study, the following definition is used: non-academic issues that may impact academic success (e.g., financial stress, emotional distress, social isolation).

Persistence

“Desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through degree completion” (Seidman, 2005, p. 14).

Structural Inequality

For the purpose of this study, structural inequality is defined as inequalities rooted in the framework and operations of an organization that benefit one group of individuals over others.

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

My assumptions about this research were based in my belief that African American men who successfully establish mentor relationships with campus faculty and staff increase their chances of graduating. This assumption was based on my experiences as a Student Affairs professional who witnessed the positive relationships some students of color were able to establish with campus faculty and staff. A second and related assumption drawn from both my tacit experience and the review of published research is
that the systematic implementation of mentor programs at the undergraduate level significantly contributes to improving the graduation rates of African American men. These assumptions lead me to believe that exploring the essence of the lived experiences of African American men with mentor relationships may further contribute to understanding what is needed to enhance persistence to graduation for more African American men.

Acknowledging and bracketing my personal assumptions through epoche was required when conducting this transcendental phenomenological study. Epoche, a concept developed by Husserl, is a technique requiring a researcher’s suspension of judgment (Moustakas, 1994). “Epoche requires the elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Bracketing these assumptions allowed me to remain cognizant of any biases that had the potential to influence my interpretation of the participants’ experiences with mentoring.

**Limitations**

This research focused on the essence of the experience of being mentored through the lived experiences of a small group of African American men who possess bachelor’s degrees from HWCUs. Participants recalled these experiences up to eight years after graduation.

**Summary**

The graduation rates of African American male undergraduates in a six-year period at HWCUs across the United States are measured at rates as low as 18%, according to the U.S. Department of Education (College Results Online, n.d.). Seeking to understand what may better support African American men attending these
institutions, this study explored the experience of having been mentored in relation to academic persistence and success by analyzing the essence of the lived experiences of 12 educated African American men who successfully completed bachelor’s degrees at historically White colleges and universities. Establishing the conceptual framework of this phenomenological study consisted of reviewing the literature related to recognizing structural inequality, understanding persistence to graduation, and reviewing prior research on mentoring. Chapter 2 provides a detailed review of these three streams.
Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction

This overview of the theory, research, and practice of three streams forms a foundation for understanding the experiences of African American men in pursuit of baccalaureate degrees at a Historically White College or University (HWCU). In stream one, the researcher summarizes prior literature regarding structural inequality. For the second stream, a foundation of understanding how persistence contributes to degree completion for students who face struggles inclusive of both academic and non-academic pressures is reviewed. Lastly, the third stream focuses on mentoring in relation to academic success. This research sought to explore the interplay of the relationships between structural inequality, student persistence, and mentoring to understand their impact on the academic performance of African American male students.

Extensive research suggests unrecognized institutional structural inequalities create a less than positive and productive learning experience for students of color (Chesler et al., 2005; Law et al., 2004; Turner, Garcia, Nora, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 1996). Matlock, Gurin, and Wade-Golden (2002) studied the experiences of students of color at the University of Michigan and discovered the students were experiencing various racial struggles associated with feelings of exclusion and being stereotyped during their college career, while White students reported a positive college experience. Chesler et al. (2005) noted that although the students of color struggled with feelings of isolation and educational inadequacy, White students were often blind to issues of race. They noted, “White students who do not understand their own racial
membership cannot understand the reality and status of students of color” (Chelser et al., 2005, p. 84).

Persistence is needed to assist a student with successfully navigating past their first year of college and move them across the following years toward graduation. Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, and Royster (1991) noted, “discrepancies between the number of African American students who actually get college degrees and those who ever attended, points to a problem with persistence” (p. 88). When speaking specifically of the African American male population, Blackwell (1990) revealed:

Persistence is associated with such variables as financial aid, the quality of the learning environment, academic problems, the magnitude of racism in the classroom and on the campus, the way in which institutions handle racial incidents, home factors, psychological factors, relationships with teachers, and interactions with students. (p. 41)

Finally, mentoring is seen as enhancing self-concept, self-esteem, and self-confidence through a relationship that leads to specific outcomes (Haensly & Parsons, 1993; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Levine and Nidiffer’s (1996) findings suggested mentoring was of significant importance in the experiences of the first-generation college students or poorer students, as it helped boost their confidence and connect them positively to the campus, resulting in increased rates of graduation for these students. Warde (2008) suggested mentorship is “an important factor at helping African American males to navigate the academic experience” (p. 70).

Gaining an understanding of these concepts through a review of the literature and exploring the specific lived experiences of African American men who completed their baccalaureate degrees while being mentored at a HWCU may assist with identifying
ways to help increase graduation rates for African American men. The findings may also offer institutions information they find useful.

**Literature Review**

**Structural Inequality**

Brubacher and Rudy (1997) noted the basis for establishing higher education in the U.S. was to educate White men with the intention of preparing them for the Christian ministry. “In the early colonial period religion dominated student life” (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997, p. 42). For this reason, structures were put in place to ensure the success of these early students who were White and male. As higher education transitioned from religion-based institutions, educating men only, to public institutions open to both women and people of color, the framework for higher education did not change as new populations joined the milieu. Brubacher and Rudy (1997) noted these institutions still possess ideologies resembling those in existence at the inception of higher education in the United States when the only students in attendance were White Christian men.

Structural inequalities in higher education are those pre-existing elements that often go unnoticed as a result of being a part of the framework of an organization or system since its establishment. Examples of structural inequality within higher education can include the assumption by a HWCU that all students, regardless of background, will be successful at completing their undergraduate coursework in a climate created to ensure the success of White men (Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002). Smith et al. (2002) suggested being “unseen” at HWCUs, many African American men suffered from feelings of isolation on a campus that does not recognize their differences in learning and life experiences when compared to the majority. They went on to note that failure on the
university’s part to consider the impact that creating a climate of inclusion can have on
the educational experience of African American men is another example of structural
inequality at the collegiate level (Smith et al., 2002). Already at a disadvantage when
considering enrollment numbers, African American students experience feeling as if their
needs go unnoticed on a campus made up of primarily White students and faculty. Such
feelings are described as making African American students feel like “fish out of water”
(Law et al., 2004, p. 49). “The fish do not see the water and whites do not see the racial
nature of a white polity because it is natural to them, the element in which they move”
(Law et al., 2004, p. 49). Experiences like these widen the gap of inclusion for African
American men which then may result in them disengaging from campus life and
developing a lack of confidence in their ability to compete intellectually (Mills, 1997).

Research suggests structural inequality can also be seen in a faculty member’s
approach to teaching (Stassen, 1995). Stassen’s (1995) study focused on the impact that
the structure of an institution had on the development of positive or negative attitudes
toward African American students. Drawing from data collected using responses from a
multiple regression survey that included 941 White faculty members from six
universities, Stassen (1995) discovered that faculty framed their approach to classroom
instruction on the context of the university overall and recognized that the environment of
educational institutions set the standard for the manner in which teaching takes place in
the classroom. This idea coupled with a faculty member’s mental models regarding
issues of race makes the approach to teaching students from multiple backgrounds
challenging and has less than positive implications for the African American male
educational experience (Chesler et al., 2005).
Turner et al. (1996) noted that until the 1950s, nearly 75% of African American students were receiving bachelor’s degrees from Historically Black College and Universities. However, by the late 1970s, they suggested African American student attendance shifted to where more than 50% of these students were attending historically White colleges and universities (Turner et al., 1996). While this shift reflects the potential for leveling the academic playing field for Black and White students, Black students attending HWCUs are largely disadvantaged when compared to their White counterparts (Thomas, McPartland, & Gottfredson, 1980). Allen (1992) stated:

All students must adjust to college, but Black students face additional problems. Many must create their own social and cultural networks given their exclusion (self and/or other imposed) from the wider University community. Of all problems faced by Black students on White campuses, those arising from isolation, alienation and lack of support seem to be most serious. (p. 29)

Whether related to the historical basis for the establishment of higher education in the United States or assessing the experiences of African American students and their specific needs in the form of support, both academic and social, structural inequality likely exists in higher education. While research suggests the African American student’s struggles are far greater than simply coursework, there also exists research suggesting HWCUs across the decades are not making enough efforts to provide a community conducive to the learning styles of ethnically diverse populations of students (Holmes et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993). As Holmes et al. (2000) noted, “This is not to imply that predominantly White institutions have intentionally created learning communities that are unresponsive to the needs of diverse student groups” (p. 45). However, history does inform us that institutions of higher education were not created with the intention of educating people of color (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).
Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas (1999) suggested feelings of familiarity are present when African American students engage with African American faculty; this engagement creates feelings of confidence that deal with issues related to structural inequality on a HWCU campus. In a qualitative study including interviews with a total of 126 African American fourth-year seniors, both men and women, participating in 11 focus groups, the researchers explored the experiences of African American students on a single HWCU campus. They specifically sought to explore “African American students’ experiences with the overall social climate and understand more specific experiences with classroom environments and relationships with faculty” (Schwitzer et al., 1999, p. 191). They continued, noting:

The focus groups were facilitated by two trained student facilitators and addressed three specific questions: (1) what words best describe what it is like to be a student here at this university? In particular, what words best describe what it’s like to be an African American student here? (2) To what degree, and in what ways are the faculty here supportive and helpful-or less than supportive and less than helpful-to individual students? To what degree does race influence faculty supportiveness and helpfulness? Finally, (3) to what degree are you comfortable approaching instructors here? Which instructors are the most comfortable or least comfortable to approach? In particular, those of a different race? Same race? (Schwitzer et al., 1999, p. 191)

The results of Schwitzer et al.’s (1999) study revealed that African American students experienced “feelings of aloneness, isolation, or underrepresentedness at the institution” (p. 194). They noted that students reported experiences reflective of structural inequalities through various campus programs and resources, specifically stating the institution appeared to focus on the perceived needs of the majority, as if those issues were reflective of the entire student population (Schwitzer et al., 1999). Regarding faculty approachability and accessibility, the students reported feeling more comfortable
interacting with faculty with whom they had something in common (i.e., race or gender), and many students reported feelings of intimidation or intellectual inadequacy when interacting with most faculty members (Schwitzer et al., 1999).

Whether African American men experience issues related to academic or non-academic variables while pursuing a bachelor’s degree, the fact remains that further research identifying ways to improve their graduation rates and eliminate inequalities on college campuses is necessary to assist these students with having positive educational experiences. More positive experiences with education may lead to the possibility of more conferred degrees for African American men who choose to attend HWCUs. Such an effort has the potential to educate both the students in their chosen field of study as well as faculty in areas such as diversity training. This effort might also assist with developing effective teaching methods that benefit the more diverse population of students in attendance.

**Persistence**

Seidman (2005) defined persistence as the “desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through degree completion” (p. 14). Tinto (1975), in an effort to increase rates of retention, developed a student integration model that highlighted the significance that both academics and social interactions play in a quality educational experience for college students. He suggested persistence occurs when a student successfully integrates into the institution academically and socially. Tinto (1987, 1993) noted various models were developed to measure the impact of persistence on the academic success of students at the university level. Drawing across over 20 years of research, Tinto (1998) concluded that while various
areas of research within higher education such as retention and academic success gained attention, none as much impacted the decision to stay or drop out as the topic of persistence.

Tinto (1975) suggested it is the interplay between the individual’s commitment to the goal of graduating, as well as the student’s commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the decision to drop out will be made. Tinto’s (1987) research identified that the ability to adjust to varying social climates played a significant role in the academic success of students. His research concluded that a student’s choice to leave prior to completing their coursework was attributed more frequently to negative experiences than to academic pressures (Tinto, 1987). Tinto’s (1993) work further suggested that a student’s ability to successfully integrate socially on campus has implications that contribute positively to a student’s academic performance and increased the possibility of retaining them until graduation.

Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) work focused heavily on first-generation college students; it aligns with Turner’s (1994) research conducted on issues of retention and degree completion for students of color attending HWCUs. Turner (1994) conducted a survey of 32 students, faculty, and staff at a HWCU. He concluded that despite the institution’s efforts to enhance the educational experience of students of color, the culture of the university and underlying belief system that framed the structure of the institution still left much to be desired. He suggested the students’ academic success was contingent upon their ability to find comfortable and positive engagement experiences on campus (Turner, 1994).
At the collegiate level, academics are important; hence, many academic variables such as grade point averages and standardized tests have been used to measure a student’s ability to complete a baccalaureate degree. However, with the steady decline in degrees completed by African American men, researchers have also identified non-academic variables within higher education at HWCU's such as social isolation stemming from structural inequality as reasons why these students may find it difficult to complete their coursework (Matlock et al., 2002; Mills, 1997; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Schwitzer et al., 1999). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) further suggested that in addition to academics, there also exist other influences outside the classroom, including self-esteem and family influences that have the potential of impacting a student’s ability to finish school.

Additional research supports the belief that financial assistance is a major factor for African American students’ decisions to leave school prior to completing their degree (Hurtado, 1992; Sedlacek, 1999). Cross and Slater (2001) noted educational financing has also been identified as a stressor for these students, often leading to their decision to drop out of school. “Probably the most important factor in achieving a high Black student graduation rate is the availability of financial aid” (Cross & Slater, 2001, p.104). They noted:

According to Nellie Mae a subsidiary of Sallie Mae, the largest nonprofit provider of federal and private education loan funds in this country, 69 percent of African Americans who enrolled in college but did not finish said that they left college because of high student loan debt. (p. 104)

For a population of students from socioeconomic backgrounds lower than many of their White counterparts, managing the cost of attending college in addition to stress related to
social isolation and academic pressures at a HWCU can be difficult and prove detrimental to their ability to complete their studies (Cross & Slater, 2001; Hurtado, 1992; Mills, 1997; Sedlacek, 1999).

Mason (1998) examined factors connecting persistence to college attrition rates of African American men in pursuit of undergraduate degrees at Kennedy-King College. Kennedy-King is a non-traditional commuter institution located in Chicago where it is estimated that more than 30% of the student population are residents from the surrounding community (Mason, 1998). Mason’s (1998) findings revealed that “most of the students have a similar financial need, similar level of encouragement and/or discouragement, and similar family responsibilities” (p. 754). His findings prompted the proposal of a strategy to increase persistence within the African American male student population through establishing career goals, maintaining support from outside the college environment, and having confidence in campus programs to effectively support these students. Mason (1998) concluded that these factors “were found to have a significant influence on the students that could be used to develop a proactive strategy to increase persistence” (p. 755).

Forde’s (2008) research has suggested the development of peer relationships within similar ethnic groups, such as Black student organizations or multicultural service departments, may be beneficial for African American student academic success. Other scholars suggest efforts to increase retention and persistence stem from the development of support programs specifically targeting African American men (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006).
Cuyjet’s (2006) research of African American men in college identifies a population of students struggling to complete bachelor’s degrees while managing issues associated with social and cultural isolation on HWCU campuses. Through a discussion of the importance of self-esteem building, family influence, and peer support, Cuyjet (2006) recognized the need to create opportunities for these students to develop the motivation required to persist despite their struggles and acknowledged these opportunities must be specific to the needs of the African American male. He noted:

The issues to be addressed, the programmatic offerings established to meet the various special needs, and the probable solutions to the problems identified as particular to African American men may be somewhat different from those for the broader student population—or indeed completely unlike them. (p. 237)

Focused efforts of support both academically and through co-curricular opportunities is the overall theme presented by Cuyjet (2006) to assist with developing the level of persistence required to increase retention and graduation rates of African American men.

Palmer, Davis, Moore, and Hilton (2010) noted recently that from a global perspective, research suggests the decline of African American male graduation rates will be detrimental to the United States competitive position. Cross and Slater (2000) previously suggested, “If the downward enrollment trend of Black men were to continue unabated into the future, by the year 2070 Black men would disappear altogether from the halls of higher education” (p. 85). Palmer et al. (2010) addressed the declining rates of African American male college participation and persistence and noted the country needs to focus more on its efforts to increase the numbers of college graduates within underrepresented minority groups with special attention paid to the African American male population especially in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and
Mathematics (STEM). They noted, “Increasing matriculation and graduation rates for African American men is not only a matter of equity, but in the context of STEM, it has major implications for the competitiveness of the United States in the global economy” (Palmer et al., 2010, p. 105). They concluded that due to lower academic achievement, wages and health, African American men constitute a loss of human capital. Their research further discussed the transition from elementary education through post-secondary education noting, “African American males are beset by problems in education, which emerge in elementary school and continue to deepen through higher education” (Palmer et al., 2010, p. 112). As a result of these findings, the researchers recommended the government increase funding, psychological support, and educational intervention programs as early as elementary school for African American boys in an attempt to begin the developmental process for acquiring the persistence needed to complete undergraduate degrees later in life.

Warde’s (2008) phenomenological study focused on the undergraduate experiences of African American male graduate students. He selected a population of graduate students to explore key experiences that contributed to their successful completion of a bachelor’s degree while attending a HWCU. Warde (2008) acknowledged specific struggles the students faced as they attempted to navigate through an institution that still maintained practices and traditions in place when students of color were not allowed admission:

To expand knowledge of the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American men of all socioeconomic and age levels, as well as identifying strategies that may aid in increasing enrollment and graduation, soliciting the descriptions of non-traditional and traditional age African American men from
low to high income households who have actually obtained their baccalaureate degree is warranted. (Warde, 2008, p. 61)

Basing his findings on interviews with two focus groups, one consisting of five participants and the other of six participants at the City University of New York, Warde’s (2008) research identified four major themes that were instrumental in African American men completing their degrees at a HWCU:

1. Having an epiphany about the importance of higher education.
2. Having the resources needed to attend and persist in an institution of higher education.
3. Having a mentor.
4. Resilience when faced with obstacles.

Warde’s (2008) findings suggested that if HWCU’s hone in on these four themes, paying particular attention to the specific needs of African American men and creating formal opportunities for relationship building between the students and the faculty and staff, then graduation rates of African American men may increase.

According to research, African American men have the potential to complete their academic coursework despite the adversities they experience while navigating through their undergraduate career if the development of persistence is encouraged (Cuyjet, 2006; Warde, 2008). While the struggles these students face include both academic and non-academic issues, such as finances and social isolation, there are African American men who, through their ability to persist, have found academic success despite the obstacles that research identifies as being specific to them.
**Mentoring**

Although academic issues have an impact on the rates of degree completion for African American men, researchers caution against using grades and course completion as the only rubric for measuring the success of these students (Brittian, et al., 2009; Cuyjet, 1997; LaVant et al., 1997; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976). Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) identified mentors as support people who play an influential role in the lives of students of color and suggested mentors increase the potential for academic success, especially when faced with issues outside the classroom, such as struggles with structural inequality, finances, and socialization.

While the definition of the term mentor is fairly broad and depicts a mentor as being a person who is influential and supportive, there exist other definitions of the term. Blackwell (1989) suggested that mentoring within minority populations is defined as “a process by which persons of a superior rank, special achievements, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (p. 9). Otto (1994) described mentoring as a relationship made by the choice of those involved and based on mutual respect, although the mentor does have a level of perceived power or superiority. Brown, Davis, and McClendon (1999) and Murray (2001) similarly defined mentoring for students of color as a one-on-one relationship between an experienced person and less experienced person in which the purpose of the interaction is for learning and development in a given area. The similarity within these definitions is that there is a prescribed role of the mentor to impart wisdom and insight onto the mentee as a means of personal growth or development. However,
the varying definitions of the term make it difficult to establish a standard framework when looking to develop formal mentor programs.

For African American men who may face both academic and non-academic hardships, research suggests mentors provide guidance on issues that will impact the completion of their academic course work. Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) found that students of color who are successful in their educational pursuits often develop mentor relationships during their undergraduate years. Acknowledging the damaging effects of structural inequality on HWCU campuses for students of color, Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) highlighted the importance of establishing mentors as early as the student recruitment and orientation process. They noted establishing mentor relationships so early is said to assist the students with successfully managing feelings of inadequacy and isolation on a HWCU campus.

Just as students faced with difficulties supporting their education seek the advice from the financial aid office, or students who identify with the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgendered (LGBT) community seek the services of a LGBT program office, African American students will look to more knowledgeable people with similar lived experiences for insight on issues pertaining to the challenges they face (Frierson, Hargrove, & Lewis, 1994). An example of this was brought to the forefront when Frierson et al. (1994) conducted a study on the attitudes of African American students who participated in a university summer mentoring program and discovered that the presence of African American faculty provided positive attitudes and educational experiences toward being mentored by the students.
Terrell and Hassell (1994) suggested formal mentor relationships for minority students are those established within a prescribed framework with the intent of providing guidance and wisdom to an individual seeking growth in a given area. They indicated formalized mentor programs were developed within higher education to assess the needs of at-risk students in an effort to ensure their academic success (Terrell & Hassell, 1994). Unlike the prescribed guidelines and meeting expectations for formal mentor relationships, informal mentoring is often based on the mutual interest of the participants, such as career fields or major course of study, and does not require the same level of intentionality as that of formal mentoring (Terrell & Hassell, 1994). While both forms of mentoring appear to support a specific purpose, for mentoring to be effective, a balance of both formal and informal relationships are most effective at obtaining a successful mentoring experience (Terrell & Hassell, 1994).

Through an exploration of various mentoring models, LaVant et al. (1997) discussed the necessary steps required to develop an effective, supportive mentoring program that motivates African American men to complete their degrees. The authors describe mentoring as “a nurturing process that fosters the growth and development of the protégé where the wisdom of the mentor is acquired and applied by the protégé” (LaVant et al., 1997, p. 44). Through their research, they find that as a result of student interactions with staff and faculty, students increase their potential for academic success. LaVant et al. (1997) concluded that just implementing these programs is not enough. They suggested that for an institution to be effective at establishing support programs for African American men, the administrators must secure buy-in from the university, potential mentors, faculty, and staff to coordinate a program that develops partnerships
with campus departments and the surrounding community. LaVant et al. (1997) noted, “Mentoring is vital. It also enhances their [African American male student’s] ability to make plausible gains in higher education” (p. 52).

Perhaps one of the most telling recent studies was published by Forde (2008). Forde (2008) studied the progress Wake Forest University made toward increasing the graduation rates of African American students by putting population-specific support systems in place through the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA). In 2004, the Wake Forest OMA recognized that between 1998 and 2004, “Black student enrollment at Wake Forest dropped from 337 students to 244” (Forde, 2008, p. 23). As a result, the OMA decided to diversify its support efforts for African American students by intensifying its recruitment practices and focusing on providing resources specific to mentoring that would assist with retaining these students through graduation. These efforts included developing various mentoring programs that paired students with faculty and staff, as well as exposing them to co-curricular involvement opportunities.

Forde’s (2008) research suggested that through these efforts, the students were able to develop meaningful relationships and secure the services necessary for their academic success. Some of the additional services rendered included financial aid and academic advisement. Since 2004, OMA’s efforts have helped Wake Forest “boast one of the highest graduation rates of Black students in the country…in 2006 the four year graduation rate for Black students was 71.4 percent and the five and six year graduation rates were 91.7 percent” (Forde, 2008, p. 23). Implementing mentor programs and support resources for these students directly contributed to an increase in their graduation rates.
Extensive research suggests that both formal and informal mentoring have their benefits when assisting students with achieving a quality educational experience (Barker, 2007; Brittian et al., 2009; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Frierson et al., 1994; Haensly & Parsons, 1993; LaVant et al.; Terrell & Hassell, 1994; Tolentino, 1999; Warde, 2008). While the literature suggests multiple benefits of mentoring, a consistent theme among scholars is the benefit that established mentor relationships have on the degree completion for African American men (Brittian et al., 2009; LaVant et al., 1997; Warde, 2008). In addition to its contributions to positive academic experiences, mentoring also plays a role in personal growth and socialization, which lends to increased opportunities for African American male involvement in campus life, an area that many African American men struggle with while in college (LaVant et al., 1997). Early research suggests that both academic and social integration are determinants that influence students’ decisions to continue their studies or drop out (Tinto, 1993). Encouraging student involvement on campus is essential when attempting to establish a connection between the student and the campus as a means of managing issues of retention (Astin, 1984). For this reason, and based on literature revealing consistent findings over the past 40 years, it is important to actively involve African American men in mentoring relationships during their pursuit of a bachelor’s degree (Hughes, 1987; LaVant et al., 1997; O’Brien, 1988; Warde 2008).

**Summary**

The literature reviewed through the streams of structural inequality, persistence, and mentoring assists with identifying the need for exploring the successful mentor experience of African American men who completed bachelor degrees at HWCUs. Since the 1970s, research in these three areas have confirmed the continued presence of
structural inequality, the impact that persistence development has on academic success, and the role mentoring plays in the undergraduate experience of African American men attending HWCUs. Although institutions of higher education have made major strides since the colonial period in making education accessible to all people regardless of race, class, religion, or gender, structures that have become part of the framework for the successful operation of HWCUs are still in place. Although unintentional, structural inequalities continue to create disadvantages for African American men who have needs far different from their White counterparts and often require support. Issues of social isolation, self-confidence, connections with faculty and staff and finances have all been identified as areas with which African American men struggle while pursuing bachelors level degrees at HWCUs.

The research suggests development of persistence for college students is often fostered through student engagement in campus life by establishing a connection between themselves and the institution. This kind of engagement enhances a student’s desire to continue coursework despite the adversities they face on a campus. Mentors, as identified through the literature as those who impart wisdom on the mentee, allow for the possibility of African American men to establish relationships with knowledgeable people who can assist with the successful navigation of their undergraduate experience. Establishing mentor relationships with seasoned individuals who provide insight that lead to positive outcomes have repeatedly been found to assist African American men with the successful completion of their bachelor’s degrees. A recent study of a planned intervention at Wake Forest University that targeted recruitment, support, and mentoring efforts provides strong evidence that interventions inclusive of mentoring substantially
increase the graduation rates of African American men. Additional insight secured through this phenomenological study focused on African American men who were mentored and successfully completed bachelor’s degrees at a HWCU will add to existing research with specific information on the lived experience of being mentored.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

Building on the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, this study sought to gain an understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of African American male graduates who successfully negotiated the university and college environment at a HWCU with the support of a mentor. Using a method focusing on “exploring people’s perceptions of their conscious life-world experiences,” the following questions guided this phenomenological study (Schram, 2003, p. 71):

1. What are the lived experiences of African American men who were mentored during their pursuit of an undergraduate degree at a HWCU?
2. How do participants describe their academic experiences in light of the mentoring they received as undergraduates?
3. How do participants describe managing issues of social integration as a result of the mentoring?

Chapter 3 presents the research methods, a description of the participants, the research design, and the research rationale for this study. In addition, Chapter 3 includes details regarding the significance of phenomenological research, insight from relevant theorists, information on how the data were collected and analyzed, a description of the research methods, the timeline for this study, and ethical concerns that required consideration.
Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative research is a process by which “an existing social or human problem is explored in a natural setting through the analysis of words and the detailed perspective of the participant for the purpose of gaining a clear understanding of the issue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 249). Considering this study sought to gain understanding of the lived experiences of African American men mentored during the pursuit of a bachelor’s degree at a historically White college or university, qualitative research with phenomenology was used as the method.

“Phenomenology is the study of people’s conscious experience of their life-world…the task of the phenomenologist is to depict the essence of the experience” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 24-25). Phenomenology, whose founding is credited to Edmund Husserl, a 20th-century philosopher, allows the researcher to gain an understanding of the lived experience of a participant through the development of a thick, rich description (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Van Manen, 1990). Transcendental phenomenology specifically focuses on capturing the essence of a human experience (Moustakas, 1994; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

For this study, the transcendental approach was used, as it allowed the researcher to focus “less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on the description of the experiences of participants” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). According to Moustakas (1994) “the core processes that facilitate derivation of knowledge” for transcendental phenomenology include three overall steps: a) epoche, where the researcher was required to refrain from judgment or assumption related to the phenomenon; b) transcendental phenomenological reduction, where each experience was categorized singularly, and
depicted through a textural description that captured, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions; and c) imaginative variation which focused on honing in on the structural description of the experience, identifying how, where, and the manner in which the experience with the phenomenon took place (p. 33). These three steps assisted with guiding the researcher’s journey toward discovering the essence of the experience.

**Site and Population**

**Population Description**

As this study looked to understand the individual lived experiences of African American male college graduates mentored while attending a HWCU for bachelor’s level coursework, the population for this study consisted of 12 African American men who completed bachelor’s degrees at various HWCUs across the United States since 2005. Participants were mentored for a minimum of two years during their undergraduate career. They also had their degrees conferred within six years of beginning their collegiate coursework. An identified maximum of eight years since graduation was set to allow for more accurate reflections of the undergraduate mentoring experience. A participant identification form was used to determine the eligibility of all participants (see Appendix A). Mentor experiences were with people both within and outside the college setting. Some of the mentoring experiences stemmed from relationships between the participants with faculty and staff on this campus. Other mentors were revealed as alumni, peers, and community members.
Site Description

As mentioned in the population description, study participants were alumni from various HWCU located across the United States. The participants had no present relationship with the institution from which they graduated beyond being its alumnus.

Participant Access

Snow ball sampling, a process by which the researcher identifies initial participants, interviews them, and then requests references to other potential participants was used to secure the participants for this study (Merriam, 2009). The initial participants who chose to engage in this study came from a pool of African American men with whom the researcher had an existing connection. They consisted of colleagues and prior students. Additional participants were secured through a referral process from those initially interviewed.

Research Methods

Three methods were triangulated to secure the data for this qualitative study. These three methods included semi-structured one-on-one interviews; a review of relevant artifacts provided by the participants that added context to their lived experiences with mentoring; and the researcher’s observations, thoughts, and reflections recorded in a research field journal. Relevant data collected were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using transcendental phenomenological practices for the final report.

Description of Methods

Interviews. The interviews for this study ranged from 38-60 minutes in length. Semi-structured interviews were used, as they “allow the research to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the
topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90) (see Appendix B). To ensure the relevance of the questions asked as they pertained to the study as well as to be sure the number of questions asked suited the time frame allotted and would yield pertinent information for the study, one pilot interview was conducted as part of the process.

Interview participants were individuals who met the requirements of this study and committed to the process. All participants were contacted initially through email correspondence (see Appendix C). A confirmation of their agreement to participate was followed up with a telephone call at which time the date and location of the interview was determined with the convenience of the participant being the determinant.

Information regarding the details of the interview was then submitted to the participant in a final email. Before each interview began, the researcher personally reviewed the informed consent form with each participant and requested a signature to confirm his agreement to participate (see Appendix D). Once the form was signed, the interview began.

The tools of data collection for the interviews consisted of two recording devices and an interview protocol. Upon completion of the interviews, the data collected were transcribed and coded. All data collected from interviews was managed on an individual basis when used for data analysis and held in confidence identified by pseudonym only. The list of participants and their pseudonyms, the recordings, and transcriptions were contained in a locked cabinet.

**Artifacts.** A request of relevant artifacts was made during the confirmation telephone call. All artifacts were secured during the interview. Artifacts included physical materials obtained from participants that provided evidence of or added context
to a pre-existing mentor relationship. The artifacts collected included letters of recommendation, bible scriptures, quotes from books, and photographs as well as literature specific to an established formal mentor program. All artifacts were identified through a labeling and sorting process as they were received in an effort to make a clear connection with the respondent and his shared experience. Artifacts were identified by pseudonym, held in confidence, and kept in a locked cabinet to assure their safety. At the conclusion of the study, the artifacts were returned to the participants.

**Researcher’s field journal.** The purpose of the researcher’s field journal was to collect notes that included thoughts from initial bracketing through epoche, identify experiences, and maintain diagrams of interview locations as well as ideas, reactions, mistakes and thoughts about the research method while the study was being conducted (Merriam, 2009). “Field notes can come in many forms, but at the least they include descriptions, direct quotations, and observer comments” (Merriam, 2009, p. 137). Observations, reflections, and journal entries were documented during both the epoche and interviewing process. Additional notes were gathered to gain an understanding of the significance of the artifacts as well. It is important to understand that the inclusion of the researcher’s field journal played a very significant part of this triangulated methodology. While the journal was used to document reflections directly from epoche, interview reflections, etc., the field journal also allowed the researcher to accurately document all non-verbal gestures and responses that could not be secured through the audio recording devices used during the interview. Accurate documentation and inclusion of such gestures assisted the researcher in her journey toward understanding the essence of the lived experience of the participants. The journal was in the form of a binder filled with
templates and blank lined paper that allowed for the documentation of the various experiences listed above. The participants identified in the journal included the researcher conducting the study and her personal experiences and observations. All journal entries were organized based on experiences with each person in the study in an effort to maintain accurate documentation. Data for the field journal were collected as the researcher moved through the study during times of reflection, observation, and interviews (see Appendix E).

Data Analysis Procedures

Drawing on the work of Moustakas (1994), the phenomenological process for the analysis of data used for this study included a) epoche, b) coding c) the development of themes d) drafting a textural description of the phenomenon experience, e) drafting a structural description of the phenomenon experience, and finally f) drafting a composite description of the phenomenon using both the textural and structural descriptions, referred to as the essence of the experience (as cited in Creswell, 2007). These steps took place after the transcription of interviews occurred (see Appendix F).

Epoche, as mentioned previously, allowed the researcher to set aside existing biases that might impact the validity of the data in relation to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas 1994). Coding, also referred to as horizontalization by Moustakas (1994), is the process by which significant statements are identified both individually and equally and that spoke to the participants’ experiences with the phenomenon. From the coding process, “larger units of information called themes are developed” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). These themes are also referred to as “clusters of meaning” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). “The themes exist to categorize the participant’s
experiences with the phenomenon into “meaningful units of understanding” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). This is referred to as a textural description (Creswell, 2007). Imaginative variation includes the development of a structural description, which identifies how and where the experience with the phenomenon took place (Creswell, 2007). Finally, Moustakas (1994) suggested a combination of both textural and structural descriptions known as the essence to be developed to “represent the culminating aspect of the phenomenological study” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 159). This passage is descriptive and “focuses on the common experiences of the participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62).

**Stages of Data Collection**

Upon approval of the doctoral committee and the Drexel University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the stages of data collection for this study began. The process began in December 2012 and was inclusive of four stages. See Table 1 for relevant date information provided through the time line.

The stages of data collection were as follows:

1. Stage one took place prior to data collection and was inclusive of epoche, “setting aside our prejudgments, biases and preconceived ideas about things.” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). Considering research could not be conducted until IRB approval was granted, the epoche process took place while IRB was under review. Once all approval was granted, the participants for the study were recruited. Documentation of observations and reflections in the research field journal also began during stage one and continued through stage three.
2. Stage two included the one-on-one semi-structured interviews of the participants. Interview questions were drafted in a manner that allowed for the recollection of personal experiences through open-ended responses that allowed for the expression of feelings and insight into the participants’ worldviews (Merriam, 2009). This stage also included the collection of artifacts relevant to the participants’ mentoring experience. The artifacts were collected in an effort to substantiate the mentor relationship.

3. Stage three is inclusive of the transcription and coding of the conducted interviews. Both transcription and coding was done in an effort to maintain the accuracy, confidentiality, and validity of the data (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

4. The fourth and final stage was the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. This process assisted with revealing relevant themes that assisted the researcher with the findings included in this final document.
### Table 1

**Timeline for Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Proposed Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proposal Hearing</td>
<td>December 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage One: Epoche</td>
<td>December 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage One: IRB Certification for Drexel University</td>
<td>January 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage One: Participant Identification</td>
<td>January 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage Three: Transcription and Coding of the Data</td>
<td>February 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage Four: Data Analysis and Interpretation</td>
<td>March 2013</td>
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<td>March 2013 - May 2013</td>
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<td>Dissertation Defense</td>
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### Ethical Considerations

**Participant Confidentiality**

Preserving confidentiality was important to both the participants and the credibility of the study. Therefore, descriptors that had the potential to pinpoint or reveal a participant’s identity were not used. No physical descriptions of the participants were used. However, pseudonyms were used when referring specifically to a participant or when findings were reported.

**Credibility, Reliability, and Ethics**

Since the method chosen for this research was phenomenology, it was important the data collected were both credible and reliable. For this reason it was essential the
proper steps to conduct a credible, reliable, and ethical study were taken. The process of triangulation was used to assure this qualitative study drew from multiple sources of data including interviews, artifacts, and the researcher field journal. With interviews being the primary source of data collection, developing a well-crafted procedure for securing information inclusive of questions that were comprehensive and encouraged open dialogue among participants was important to the credibility of the study. With this in mind, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought through Drexel University. The IRB assisted in assuring the study was conducted using ethical standards; it helped determine the worthiness of the research and assisted in assuring the protection of privacy for the participants.

The study began with full disclosure of the purpose and process for the study. All participants were given the option to choose to participate in the study and a commitment to preserving their privacy and confidentiality was provided. They were informed that pseudonyms would be used instead of their real names in an effort to protect their privacy and maintain the reliability of the study’s findings. They were informed that recordings, transcripts, and notes would be maintained in a locked location during and after the study and available only to the researcher. Allowing for revisiting data with the participants, an Expedited IRB process was followed and participants completed a signed letter of consent.
Chapter 4: Themes, Findings, and Interpretations

Introduction

Chapter 4 reports the findings revealed from analyzing the qualitative data gathered through interviews inclusive of researcher observations and artifacts. Twelve African American male college graduates who were mentored for a minimum of two consecutive years while completing their Bachelor’s degrees at historically White colleges and universities (HWCU) in the United States were the participants in the study. Drawing from the coding and analysis of the interviews and artifacts five themes emerged. A thick, rich description of the themes is provided through verbatim representations from the participants who are identified by pseudonym and descriptive reference to their respective HWCU. Building from the themes identified, and the findings that emerged, the study’s results are highlighted for the significant ideas that aligned with or countered existing theory, research, and practice represented in the literature. The chapter concludes with an interpretation of the results and summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to study the phenomenon of mentoring through the lived experiences of African American male college graduates who were mentored while attending a HWCU.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this phenomenological study:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American men who were mentored during their pursuit of an undergraduate degree at a HWCU?
2. How do participants describe their academic experiences in light of the mentoring they received as undergraduates?

3. How do participants describe managing issues of social integration with the support of being mentored?

**Participant Demographics**

The participants of this study included 12 men who self-identified as African American. Of the 12 participants, one identified himself as both African American and bi-racial with African American and Mexican American being described as his ethnic make-up. The participants were alumni of six HWCUs, both public and private. Degree completion for all participants was between 2005 and 2012. Average length of time to degree completion was five years; no degrees were completed earlier than four years and none took longer than six years to complete. The participants at the time of the interview were 25 to 29 years of age. All participants were employed at the time of the interview, five of the 12 have earned graduate-level degrees and 10 of the 12 participants remained in contact with those they identified as mentors. One mentor was recently deceased and the other had relocated across the country. Figure 2 provides detailed demographic information pertaining to each participant.
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<td>Reggie H.</td>
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<td>3 years</td>
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<td>5 years</td>
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*Figure 2. Participant demographic chart.*
Themes

Five primary themes emerged from the analysis of interviews, artifacts, and field journal reflections and observations. These themes were determined using a transcendental phenomenological approach to data analysis, which honed in on the significant statements made by participants during the study (Moustakas, 1994; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The five themes are: a) managing feelings of comfort, b) relationship establishment, c) valued mentor traits, d) role of accountability, and e) impact on academics. Each primary theme presented contained sub-themes illustrated in figure three and are described in more detail later in the chapter.
### Primary Themes

| Managing Feelings of Comfort | • Feelings of isolation stemming from low representation of African American students  
• Experiencing stereotypes, prejudice and bias  
• Establishing connections through student organizations with a special interest in African American students |
| Relationship Establishment | • Organic emergence of mentoring relationships |
| Valued Mentor Traits | • Being transparent  
• Being supportive  
• Being accessible |
| Role of Accountability | • Familial accountability  
• Mentor accountability  
• Paying It Forward |
| Impact on Academics | • Transformation from feelings of intellectual inadequacy to intellectual confidence |

*Figure 3. Primary themes and sub-themes.*
Managing Feelings of Comfort

Managing feelings of comfort emerged from descriptions provided by the African American male participants of the struggles they faced while attending a HWCU for their bachelor’s degree. The participants described how these challenges had an impact on their initial ability to adjust to college life. Three sub-themes emerged in their descriptions. The sub-themes are: a) feelings of isolation stemming from being one of a small number of African American students, b) managing stereotypes, prejudice and bias – their own and that of others, and c) establishing connections through student organizations with a special interest in African American students.

Feelings of isolation stemming from low representation of African American students. Eight of the twelve participants expressed they initially felt alone or isolated on their HWCU campus. This sense of isolation was identified as a major contributor to their inability to establish connections as African American male students on campus and to develop a sense of comfort in this new environment. The reason for these feelings was identified as the lack of African American student representation on campus. Reggie H. said regarding his initial reactions during his first days as a college student, “I didn’t see anyone like me there. Most of the Black people were not African American; they were African, Nigerian, and hardly any males… I didn’t have anyone to relate to.”

For four of the participants, this lack of representation had them questioning their decision to attend their chosen college. Examples of these feelings of discomfort came as early as the first day of orientation. One participant noted, “I can remember my first day being there, I saw one other Black person at my orientation and right off the bat I didn’t
even want to stay on campus for the orientation week” (Larry). In a similar vein

Reggie H. described his initial experience on campus:

I didn’t like being there. I lived in the horrible dorms that were built in the 20s or something and had a roommate, White guy named Rick who was from Orange County and here I am this Black guy from Vallejo and listened to rap. I was surrounded by people who didn’t look anything like me or have experiences anything like mine. All my classes, none of them looked like me. They were all Asian and White. The only Black people I saw were the ones who sat in the quad during lunch and when I walked by them they would always look up, maybe a few of them were new and for the most part I didn’t feel like I belonged there. I think that’s why I was struggling academically. It wasn’t because the work was hard; I didn’t think the college life was for me.

David also spoke to this initial sense of isolation reflecting on his entire college experience:

Being an African-American male at a White college you’re just always alone, there’s no one there like you and very few people understand you…There’s always only like one or two in a class and just really –you’re one of a kind. Going to college it’s just a rare thing to see and one thing I noticed when I came up was a lot of African American dudes start as freshman and by the time they get to those last three or four years you don’t really see the same people. Because of that it’s not common to see us graduate.

Adding to the feelings of isolation, five participants spoke to their experiences with being left outside of the academic circle by their White counterparts and the impact it had on their self-confidence. Sire noted, “when you’re in the classroom and you look around and only see yourself that can really diminish someone’s motivation to keep doing what they’re doing, I mean it happened to me for a little while.” Another participant (Landon) described his experience living at the margin:

Being the Black male in the class, you know, people, uh, what’s the best word, they’d help each other and talk to each other and kind of look out for each other but being by myself and having people look at you differently it was exactly what it was. People would keep me on the outside and not offer me help. I was different than everyone else and I never got that assistance I needed from faculty or
students and I was behind the eight-ball a lot of the times in my classes because of that. (Landon)

Two participants described how the isolation they experienced created more issues for them in the form of fear. One participant spoke specifically about the fear of rejection:

There’s also that fear of rejection. You don’t want to ask something that might shine a light on a point of ignorance or insecurity because you have to in many respects, um, maintain a certain image in any facet of life. I can attest that it was challenging to go out and ask and be vulnerable to rejection that may or may not exist. (Aric)

Mayor spoke about his fear of making mistakes, “I was so afraid of making mistakes that I was making mistakes on top of mistakes on top of mistakes.”

As the participants continued to describe their experiences with being isolated, coupled with the fears related to that isolation, they also provided insight into the lack of campus services specific to the African American student population and how the absence of those services contributed to their feelings of being alone.

There wasn’t anything specifically toward African-American males or programs that could go ahead and guide us toward graduation…Maybe if there was African American counselors and everyone steered you in the right way; you can go and motivate more of us to graduate. Kind of like the Latinos, they use their resources and get together, there’s counselors and dedicated people of their own background to help those students. We didn’t have anything like that, we were by ourselves. (David)

Mayor shared:

No one there would help me…I just wanted someone to go through this experience with me and find it worthy enough to want to talk about it. I just wanted to be open, candid, and talk with someone with a shared experience, but I didn’t have that.

The lack of resources specific to these participants coupled with the absence of other Black faces led these men to question whether or not college was for them. Reggie
H. spoke directly to this stating, “I thought that college was meant for White kids and not for me.” Lamar questioned how he came to be on this type of campus:

Many a time I was in class and being the only African-American I was asking myself how I got there because there were times where I was just like “Man, I can’t believe I made it in” but, also asking did I miss something. A lot of questions popped into my head like “What school did they go to? How did they learn this?” I can remember asking one of the students where they were from and the name of their school and just off there made me start to compare the schools we had versus the schools they said they went to.

**Managing stereotypes, prejudice and bias.** Stereotypes, personal bias and prejudice were identified by six of the participants as issues they faced frequently during interpersonal and academic interactions while attending an HWCU. One participant shared his approach to managing relationships with both White students and faculty:

I would avoid the negative connotations that you know are around-- Those that just, you know, being the average Black guy you'd see on primetime television. You don't want to carry on that connotation, and I didn't want them to think of me as this person or that person, or pass judgment on me because I might look like another person. So I’d steer away from using common slang during work office hours, make sure I didn't have a do-rag on, pants up to my waist, so on and so forth. I’d look presentable in terms of what other people think. When I say “other people,” what I mean is a predominantly White folks. (Michael)

Aric reflected on his desire to avoid prejudicial behavior and identified his approach as:

There is a heightened expectation since you’re an African-American both academically when you're dealing socially with your peers and professors and so forth. For that reason I didn’t want to fall into this box where if I was African-American I’d join African-American groups or activities. (Aric)

While experiencing prejudice from other students appeared to be common among the participants, some also described instances of discrimination with faculty and staff that seemed to reflect a biased perspective.

There was this one guy in particular who taught general chemistry…every time I tried to talk to him or had questions he wouldn’t talk to me at all. When he did talk to me you could tell he was smug about it…When I really found or decided
that he was really not willing to help, or had some ill feeling towards me and my classmates we really tried to help each other and we needed to help each other to get through the class. 

The one time we worked together he accused the three of us of cheating. He tried to fail us and it was a big ordeal and he really tried to make things difficult for us. I was really hurt by the whole thing simply because I’m not the type to cheat on an exam and I was really trying. We were trying really hard in the class because general chemistry is a class that you have to have to get to medical school. We were putting forth effort and for him to make these accusations and try to fail us…and the way he did it made me feel bad. He put our names on the overhead projector in front of the entire class, and yeah, it put us out there like heathens. That is what bothered me the most because I felt embarrassed and ashamed and humiliated.

For a long time I had ill feelings towards him and towards White professors because I didn’t like the whole situation. It was handled wrong and was just all wrong. It discouraged me for a little bit because when you’re at a predominately White institution you start to think if this is going to be the whole time I’m here, this general chem was my first class of the sciences. If this is how it’s going to be in the beginning and I have to do this for two more years or so, I don’t know if I’ll make it. I don’t know if I can stand public humility like this and not wanting to say some inappropriate things. It really did bother me. (Landon)

Two participants also described experiences they faced with campus support staff.

One reflected on his experience with bias of a White counselor at his undergraduate institution stating:

I had a meeting with a counselor, a White lady…I was basically crying to her because I can’t handle the workload and saying I don’t feel like I can make it. She said “Maybe you should drop out. Maybe Beta Nu isn’t a school for someone like you and you should go to Junior College then transfer to Alpha State.” (Reggie H.)

Another spoke of his experience with what he viewed as prejudicial oversight by the student services staff that made assumptions about his club’s revenue generation.

Closer towards the end of my college career there was a real misunderstanding between us and the accounts office where it felt like for some reason our organization was being targeted, that was a real problem. I had to clear my name. We were a Black club, formed by Black men who had a lot of money coming in from tournaments. For some reason they couldn’t understand how we were doing it even though we gave them all our accounting records they just didn’t believe us. No other clubs had to deal with stuff like that. (David)
Experiences with prejudice and being stereotyped appeared to impact the participants in different ways. While some adjusted their appearance and vocabulary when interacting with Whites as a means of avoiding being stereotyped and to minimize bias, others feared facing similar situations throughout their entire undergraduate career. While these approaches to managing the stereotypes and prejudice they faced appeared to be the most common among the participants, there was one who chose to respond in a different way. Refusing to be swayed by the prejudicial behavior he experienced, Reggie F. did not adjust his speech or appearance to appease his White counterparts. Instead, he celebrated his differences as an African American and encouraged others to do the same stating, “don’t feel that what you’re doing is beneath anything or that what you’re doing is wrong because it’s not.”

**Establishing connections through student organizations with a special interest in African American students.** Becoming involved on campus was a key factor that impacted how these African American men managed their feelings of comfort while attending a HWCU. Eleven of the twelve identified that they did, in fact, participate in campus activities and student organizations with a special interest in African American students. These experiences were described as assisting them with feeling more connected to the campus. One participant described his experience as:

Some of the challenges at a predominately White school was being on a campus where you had social organizations but not feeling like they appealed to your interests. Coming from a family that was a close unit to kind of being catapulted onto a large campus of twenty plus thousand students and we all lived on campus so being able to find organizations and resources especially as a freshman was challenging and as sociable as I am, I was reluctant to finding what would work for me…but there was a Black student union on campus that was geared towards the needs of the students of African-American descent. That was helpful even
from a social standpoint, it’s a new world, away from mom and dad and the
closeness of family and you’re walking on campus with people that either look
like you or don’t look like you it’s a safe haven where you can express what’s on
your mind. On top of that was seniors or senior students who would school you on
resources on campus. (Aric)

Another spoke of how the absence of support for African Americans increased his desire
to join student organizations that focused on African American students:

Truthfully there was no specific services there to help me. So I got into clubs that,
you know were Black-- like, that just was a club about being African American
and just learn, make friends, you know, stuff like that. But I personally got into
what I call the “Brother’s Forum” and that’s a club so brothers know that there
are others here- and that it is still currently hard for a Black man in America to get
his way. And that was what the club was about, basically, and that taught me a lot
because there were special mentors that would come and that turned into stuff that
helped other Black people. I was able to help get scholarships for people that
needed it, buy books for people that needed it, you know. (Reggie F.)

As a result of what five participants eluded to as an absence of specific support
for African Americans, the need to connect with other students who looked like them
appeared to drive their desire to join student organizations. Michael shared:

I tended to revolve around and hang out with predominantly African American
males and females. Predominantly those who were in the African American
programs and so on and so forth, they opened my eyes in many cases and I think
that helped the transition a bit as well.

Acknowledging the role that being a member of a historically Black Greek
lettered fraternity played in managing feelings of comfort on a HWCU campus, Reggie
H. noted:

I was surrounded by African-Americans that looked like me and I could relate to.
It made me feel like I belonged at Beta Nu Public University…My fraternity is
the one that leads the Black community. It’s everything from events to fun social
things. Without the Kappa’s, I don’t know what my life would be like.

Another participant reflected on how the lack of positive African American male
representation on campus and in the community fueled his motivation to get involved:
There’s not enough of us so it was important because we need that and need more brothers out there doing those things that can show us in a different light. It was about networking, leadership, empowerment and also understanding your ancestry. It was connecting your culture to propel you to be successful. (Josue)

Sire described the benefits of comfort from involvement in African American student organizations by stating “it’s easier when you look like the people you go to school with…you feel more comfortable.” Three other participants shared similar thoughts citing, “when you see someone that’s like-minded that has the same goals as you, it’s refreshing” (Reggie H.). Sire also added:

Joining a club like The National Society of Black Engineers was easier for me to make friends, that instant connection is there when someone looks like you it’s like talking to yourself. When you can talk to yourself it makes the conversation easier.

According to Michael, he could capture the benefit of his decision to intentionally pursue membership in only African American organizations in one sentence, “I created my own Black college within the White university.”

**Summary: Managing feelings of comfort.** As discussed in the representation of this theme and the related sub-themes, it was revealed through the research that the need to feel comfortable on a HWCU campus was important to the participants as African American male students. The participants first described the feelings of isolation they experienced as the result of there being very few African American students on each HWCU campus. These feelings of isolation were often exacerbated when they experienced varying levels of stereotypes, bias and prejudice, which were described as being specific to African Americans. While some participants addressed this by embracing who they were and being proud of what it meant to be African American, others consciously avoided certain behaviors inclusive of using certain verbiage and
styles of dress that might have reflected a negative view of the African American community.

Feeling isolated and facing both stereotypical and prejudicial behavior appeared to motivate the participants to seek out opportunities for involvement with special interest organizations that focused on the African American student experience. These organizations, both social and academic helped the participants develop a connection within the larger campus community where shared experiences and support was the norm. Opportunities to connect with other students from similar backgrounds through these student organizations helped the participants develop a connection with campus that was not available prior to their engagement with these groups.

**Relationship Establishment**

Eleven of the twelve participants described the establishment of their mentor relationship as an emergent process in which mentoring grew from informal interactions. Mentors emerged informally from faculty, staff, alumni, and community relationships.

**Organic emergence of mentoring relationships.** The concept of organic emergence of relationships relates to the natural or informal development of relationships, those that are not forced or required. Eleven of the twelve participants described mentoring relationships that emerged organically through social interactions or developed from conversations with a staff or faculty member. Table 2 reflects the different types of mentors the participants of this study had.
Examples of how these relationships developed included meeting a potential mentor at a presentation for a campus club or organization, connecting through church, or establishing relationships with a staff member who expressed a genuine interest in the participant. One participant described meeting his mentor at a student organization forum:

I introduced myself and gave a little bit about my background...Dr. Harper was a musician and I was invited to his church, we developed that relationship because he was an educator and always willing to help. (Kinard)

When asked to elaborate on how his mentor relationship was established, Sire stated:

I was trying to get involved in putting together programs and starting things on campus...She asked how it was different from the 500 other clubs and the purpose. I talked to her about that and she helped me reframe the idea, not breaking any regulations and mentored me about how to like put together bylaws and how to register as a 501(c)3...When the school decided to put a program together they wanted a student who wanted to get other students involved. She came to me and said she wanted me to meet some people and sat me down with different professors and introduced me and told them about the program I was running and that I’d be the perfect candidate.
In addition to Sire’s description of how his mentor relationship transpired, he went on to share, “I believe it can be ineffective when someone slams you with a mentor…you walk into a room and get a mentor, it’s like you’ve been handed a supervisor and you have to report to them.” Another participant reflected on the benefits he saw in a natural approach to building mentor relationships stating:

It’s a relationship that grows organically based off of both parties and how they determine and govern the way the relationship works. I love mentorship, it’s probably one of the coolest things you can engage it. It’s not even like the person has to know they’re your mentor…They can live a life that is honorable and you are drawn towards that…It keeps you on an even keel that at times you’ll stumble but knowing that you have that sense of mentorship where someone is looking out for you at all times. (Aric)

Although 11 of the 12 participants identified that their mentor relationships were established informally, one participant was formally mentored. While sharing a copy of the brochure that outlined the benefits and requirements of the formal mentor program in which he participated, Josue described his formal experience as:

Barker-Jones was for African-American students. That program propelled me and set the centerpiece for me to switch to ethnic studies, and really helped me graduate. It helped me focus on my studies and lift my GPA up tremendously. I was getting a 2.5 and then I raised it up to a 3.5. I almost got a 4.0 one semester…In order to be a part of it, you have to be set up with a mentor it’s a part of the process. They set you up with a professor…one of the benefits of having her is that she was in my field of study so it worked out tremendously.

Six of the study participants indicated their mentors took the first step toward building the relationship. One whose mentor was from his church stated:

He found out my pastor was thinking of making me a Deacon and (um) without my knowledge he had told my pastor he wanted to work with me. Next thing I knew, there was this man that I always thought was mean and stern (um), correcting me, he was actually trying to help me now. He said he told my pastor he’d work with me and asked when was a good time to meet. (Lamar)
Aric reflected on when he met his mentor, stating, “He inquired about what my name was and what was going on, just being really compassionate. He said if I had any questions to come see him and the extensions of that made it really easy to bond with him.” Another went into a bit more detail concerning his mentor’s desire to work with him, stating:

A mentor isn’t really somebody that you can just go find. And I say that because I didn’t go searching for a mentor, he kind of found me, you know like I didn’t go to Eric Bishop and say “I need you to be my mentor”...it’s more of a natural thing, like if you are dedicated to what you want to do or he sees it in your eyes, if he’s a true mentor and he will do what he has to for you without you asking him...you can't go to college and just expect a mentor that's going to help you, like you know, every college has a mentor office to where you go can and ask a for help, but you know they're not going to be a real a mentor, they're going to do their job, because that’s their job...they aren't mentors, their job is to mentor you when you come to their office. But I didn't go to his office, he didn't mentor me because he had to...he is naturally somebody with an opportunity to help a student, not because his job pays him to do it...you don’t go find a mentor a mentor finds you. (Reggie F.)

Eleven of the 12 participants had mentors who were African American. Five spoke to the significance these mentors played as role models. Michael shared:

I just got the real sense from him that the advice he was giving to me was the things he learned, so there's no need for me to make that same mistake because he's already made it. So before it even happened, or before I would encounter it, it seemed like he was right there to guide me in the right direction.

Another participant reflected on his admiration for his peer mentor, stating:

Just seeing him lead by example and having his ear when I needed it most and having someone I felt that I could aspire to be like. People have always told me I’m a great athlete, handsome, intelligent but it doesn’t mean anything until I hear it from someone that I aspire to be like or value. Ocie was that guy. (Reggie H.)

Landon noted:

There was a Black woman named Elizabeth Brown that I looked up to ...she was someone I could go to; and [she] help[ed] center and encourage me in many different ways...When it came to Elizabeth, even to this day, I appreciate her love
and friendship. You can have a lot of people who care about you for a certain time or a season; then you have others who will always throughout the time continue to love you and to be a friend to you. And the person, when you need to talk you can call them. Know what I mean? I think that Elizabeth for me was one of those people even to this day I could talk to her.

Lamar regarded his experience with acquiring a mentor in a way that other participants alluded to but seemed unable to articulate, “gaining a mentor is actually establishing a real relationship like family.” In a similar vein, Aric stated, “At times, you can have situations that give birth to some of the most beautiful mentor relationships.”

While the participants unanimously spoke of positive experiences they had with establishing mentor relationships, Aric also encouraged caution when gaining a mentor, stating:

Get a mentor but be careful of what streams of influence you allow in your circle. Too much of a good thing can be bad just because you overdose and allow too much outward influences to dictate what you do. Be selective. It’s just like dating, you don’t date everybody.

**Summary: Relationship establishment.** The second primary theme focused on the manner in which the participants developed their mentor relationships. The research revealed that 11 of the 12 participants’ mentor relationships were established through a natural, informal process rather than through a formal program sponsored by the university or another community entity. While the one participant mentored through a formal process also acknowledged the value of his experience as beneficial to his academic and career pursuits, the other participants experienced an organic approach to gaining a mentor and reported that this was the preferred and most beneficial method of establishing these relationships.
Ten of the twelve participants were mentored by people directly connected to the campus. These relationships emerged from the participants’ involvement in an on-campus student club or organization. Eleven of the twelve participants identified their mentors as African American and noted that these relationships emerged from clubs and organization involvement that supported the African American student experience. These participants noted it was the mentor who had initially made the connection by voluntarily expressing belief in the participant’s ability to succeed. This helped establish relationships that some participants later came to regard as extended family.

**Valued Mentor Traits**

Multiple mentor traits were identified by the participants. While the participants referenced beneficial mentor traits, such as being patient and providing guidance, as contributors to their ability to navigate the undergraduate climate successfully, there were three traits that appeared most frequently across the interviews: a) being transparent, b) being supportive, and c) being accessible.

**Being Transparent.** Nine study participants placed a high value on a mentor’s willingness and ability to open up, share, and be themselves when working with the mentee.

I think what I value the most is that they’re transparent. There are a lot of times I was more willing to open up if I saw you were willing to open up. The number one person I think of when I think of that is Dr. Ron hands down. This man has shared with me some things that made me think ‘why in the world is he telling me that’ and to be able to say ‘wow, if you’re that comfortable with me and only knowing so much of who I am’… how could I believe we have a relationship if I have to think to hold back. (Aric)

Another participant spoke to his appreciation of the open and transparent relationship with his mentor:
I feel like if you’re able to tell someone something, whether it’s good or bad…and you want to keep it between you two then that shows they care about you, and respect your wishes. Those traits are very important in any relationship including a mentorship. (Larry)

In speaking about his relationship with his mentor, Kinard shared, “Trust and honesty was very important.” Sire spoke to the importance of being honest as the mentee in the relationship:

Don’t be afraid to share things with them. You don’t know what they’ve been through and what they can tell you, and how they overcame it. If you shy away and just say you’re always doing great then they come to find out you’re not doing so great then your integrity is shaken plus they’ve missed out on opportunities to help you. (Sire)

Another aspect of transparency was the participants’ appreciation of their mentor’s frank and forward communication. Regarded by some as the ability “to keep it real,” Josue stated:

She was real. It’s who she was, she didn’t have to be someone else, and she kept it real. She was true to herself and I value that. She was her African self and not afraid of having to change and gave me that example of being you and being successful. You don’t have to change for anyone. Her realness and not worrying about others thought of her.

Reggie H. acknowledged, “The most meaningful aspect of our relationship was the blanket of realness. It was nothing for him to cry in front of me and vice versa.”

When asked how he thought a mentor should be when working with African American male college students, Aric stated, “Just be real, transparent, blunt, those are the things that allow a mentorship to evolve into a friendship and kinship.” Mayor added, “Don’t look for the people that tell you what you want to hear. Be ready to have open and honest conversations.”
As a result of the mentors’ abilities to be transparent, it was suggested by 10 of the 12 participants that the friendships that came to exist between the participants and their mentors developed out of the foundation of the mentoring that took place during the undergraduate years. In addition to Aric’s statement about allowing mentorship to “evolve into a friendship,” Josue described the development of a friendship with his mentor by stating, “It happened between sharing of stories and being vulnerable. When you’re vulnerable you can relate and get a connection from someone with their stories. When that happens that friendship develops because of the vulnerability.” Aric went on to make mention of his existing relationship with his two mentors stating: Pastor Lovelace,…I’m active in his ministry and interfacing with him on a weekly basis and Dr. Ron he’s the Godfather to my daughter…I’m always talking with him, texting him, emailing him.

**Being Supportive.** Support received from the mentor, was the second trait highly valued by 11 study participants. Statements such as “They had my back” and “They believed in me” were used to describe support. Specific to the African American male need for support, Landon said, “Without having mentors especially being a Black male student at a PWI; it’s easy for you to fall by the wayside.” Mayor noted, “A mentor is in your good graces and has your back and that’s what she does…and challenges and supports you regardless.” Josue made reference to his mentor stating, “She provided support and gave me extensive community and being a part of something bigger than myself and Alpha State.” Josue substantiated the importance of support further by talking about a book suggested by his mentor on Stephen Biko, a South African activist
who dedicated his life to focusing on the issue of apartheid, which had an impact on people’s lives other than his own.

Reggie F. provided specific details regarding the supportive language his mentor used with him:

He would tell me “you know you can handle this, you know you’re good.” So even if I was stressed, or I kind of played off my stress, he would still see all of it…he’d say “Please, you got this, this is easy for you, this is all easy for you. It’s the confidence you need, if all students were like you then everybody would be better off,” like, he would say things like that to where I would just feel like “Yeah, I do got this” or, “Yeah, I’ll finish” or “You’re not a problem” you know, he would just make you feel comfortable, make you feel warm, make you feel happy about being at school.

A mentor’s ability to be supportive was further evidenced in relation to helping participants with financial matters, providing recommendations, and being an advocate.

Seven of participants admitted to having financial struggles and spoke of their mentor’s ability to provide useful information regarding finances and financial aid. They described how their mentors introduced them to student resources or intervened on their behalf.

He showed me how to use your resources and maximize those resources… the whole time we’re trying to buy books and stressed about paying $200 or $300, I just checked out a library book for the 8 weeks, 9 weeks I was in school for free because of a website called Link Plus and I just checked it out like it was a library book. (Reggie F.)

There was a time where I was actually…I don’t know if the terminology is correct but I was withdrawn from university not being able to meet my financial obligations. I was in my California government class and the professor called roll and said I had been officially withdrawn due to insufficient payment…Me being 3,000 miles from home I needed someone to talk to other than my mother and father. Because of Jerry, within 48 hours I was not only back in school but back in classes and that was a definitely a moment in my college experience. (Aric)
Two participants shared letters of recommendations written by their mentors for graduate-level education and job opportunities. Aric and Reggie H. described thoughts and gratitude for expressed support they received from their mentors at critical moments:

Mentorship for me was like that cheering session at the end of the road, you got that quarter mile left, and you have this sense of determination where I’d have to die to not finish. You going to have to kill me, because it means so much to you personally, professionally, culturally when you’re looking at engaging a job market transaction, I mean, mentorship just means you have to keep going. (Aric)

Along similar lines, Reggie H. expressed:

A mentor also opens up doors for you by being your megaphone and the person who says your name behind closed doors with all of the big decision of your mentor. You need someone else to say your name.

**Being Accessible.** While 11 of the 12 participants admitted that dropping out of school was a consideration at some point during their undergraduate career, they also mentioned it was the availability and the insight received from their mentors during late night moments of frustration that led them to reevaluate their decision and stay on track to continue their degrees. Reggie F. expressed, “Just that I can call him any night, day, time, place, meet, anything. That’s it, like that I was able to talk to him whenever I needed him to talk to him.” David simplified his appreciation for his mentor’s willingness to assist whenever he was needed by stating, “He was there when I needed him.” Lamar referred to a mentor as someone who is “there to help you whenever things happen.” Aric described his mentor’s most valued traits by stating, “He was on campus, accessible, casual and laidback. He was very resourceful.” Aric also acknowledged accessibility as his mentor’s willingness to be of assistance in the initial meeting, “He inquired about what my name was and what was going on, just being really
compassionate. He said if I had any questions…to just give him a call or stop by his office.” In addition to this, Aric added, “our relationship went beyond the initial transaction of help me, I’m sinking here, he told me here’s my card if you have any more questions…that made it really easy to bond with him.”

Landon shared what he would tell another African American male pursuing a bachelor’s degree about securing a mentor, “I would tell him that being mentored is something like a lifeline because at any given moment when you need something, advice, someone to be there, a mentor will always be there for you.” When Reggie F. was asked what he thought a mentor should be, he stated, “A mentor should not blow smoke and just say they’ll be there for you and not mean it, a mentor should never say they’re too busy for you, a mentor should always be accessible to you.”

**Summary: Valued mentor traits.** Valued mentor traits identified three characteristics of a mentor most appreciated by the participants of this study: being transparent, supportive, and accessible. Being transparent was defined as a mentor’s ability to open up and be vulnerable; this sub-theme was about “keeping it real.” A mentor’s ability to be supportive was characterized as the expressed desire to assist during times of stress and was evidenced through encouragement with the mentor being both the cheering section and advocate. Being accessible was described in the sense of a mentor’s availability to provide guidance or insight on anything at any time was noted by 11 of the 12 participants as the reason why they opted to continue their education (as opposed to dropping out of college). Having access to their mentors was very important to the participants and helped to validate their mentor’s commitment to their relationship.
Role of Accountability

Each of the African American men who participated in this study described the importance of accountability in two ways. The first level of accountability reflects the participant’s feelings of accountability toward family, speaking most specifically to their parents. The second level focuses on accountability toward his mentor. The difference between the two, as described by the participants, is that one focuses on feelings of obligation toward parents and pre-existing relationships while the other focuses more on the desire to give back to the mentor in an effort to express gratitude for their freely given commitment and support. As a result of the experience with mentoring, participants expressed the desire to pay their experiences forward by making contributions to students who came after them. This is regarded as the third level: pay it forward.

Familial accountability. The term familial was selected in lieu of the term parental as some of the participants were raised by other family members. When asked what kept the participants from acting on their thoughts of dropping out of school, some of the responses included, “My parents being on me, really. If they ever found out I was not waking up and going to school they’d be mad.” (Sire) Another participant indicated, “My mother because I know for sure being the only son that I had to not only go to college but finish college” (Aric). Larry expressed, “There weren’t any other options. My mom wanted me to do that and I wasn’t going to let her down.” In addition to these reflections, Kinard coupled his familial accountability with his personal goals stating, “No I knew that was not an option in terms of myself having goals to achieve in life and my parents as well…there was no room to drop out at all.”
Eight participants made statement to their feelings of accountability toward their parental figures acknowledging, “My upbringing especially my father and my mom telling me to not quit anything I started” (David) and “My grandmother would kill me, so that was quickly diminished” (Michael). Reflecting on the accountability he felt toward his Grandmother who raised him and passed away just shortly after he entered college, Landon stated:

If I wouldn’t have done anything else in my life she would have been happy with me just graduating. And so with my mom, when we had that conversation that really helped and pushed me to say okay let’s keep fighting and digging and make things happen.

Mentor accountability. Eleven of the twelve participants made references to holding themselves accountable to their mentors.

When you have a mentor or someone who is cheering for you, [you] want to do it for yourself and them. I don’t like to let anyone down so it gave me that extra push…I wanted to finish, and my mentors what they’ve accomplished I wanted to accomplish as well. (Kinard)

The participant who experienced a formal mentoring process noted, “Being a part of Barker-Jones was like a family at Alpha State and kept me accountable.” Another who experienced a peer-mentor relationship expressed:

Ocie told me “Look I need to see your grades after this trimester” and he pretty much went to every class with me and told me what grades I needed to get and to let him know if I needed any help. I got A’s. He believed in me and I didn’t want to let him down. (Reggie H.)

Reggie H. also shared, “It’s a lot harder to fail when you have mentors that believe in you than when you have nobody that believes in you and proving everybody wrong.” In regard to his mentors, Reggie F. expressed:
I’m doing it more for them as well. I can’t let them feel that all the help they gave me, all the support they gave me…I can’t not finish because of all the stuff that they did for me.

Some participants who referenced accountability during their interview also described how those feelings of accountability developed:

When you’re not sure if you can do something, or strong enough to believe in yourself even if you just have one person who truly believes in you and sticks with you, you can’t help but feel something from that. Maybe there is something inside of me that I can’t see, this person believes in me and really believes I can do it; maybe I can do it. I just have to figure out a way to do it. I think that’s what it did for me (Landon)

Mayor described in his interview what a mentor should be:

A mentor is in your good graces and has your back… I think there’s a certain approval or affirmation that I sought. I didn’t want it verbally from her but I wanted to show that everything she’s put into me hasn’t gone to waste.

The role it played provided a degree of accountability that wasn’t there before. And also, with that accountability came discipline, follow through, it helped…to have someone you have reverence towards telling you that you need to get your act together. Why haven’t you finished your degree yet? You’re a semester behind the last time we talked. It’s what I call spiritual chin check; it tells you that you need to get your act together. (Aric)

In making this statement, Aric shared a passage from a book that his mentor had given him as a gift during his undergraduate years. The passage quoted from The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here For?, by Warren (2002), reads:

Pastors will one day stand before God and give an account of how well they watched over you…But you are accountable, too. You will give an account to God of how well you followed your leaders. (p. 166)

As for Lamar, in addition to what the other participants shared, mentor accountability provided an opportunity for him to develop personally:

Accountability is so important because it allows you to have someone to not only pat you on the back but also be able to do that correcting that others may be afraid to do or may not do. Part of accountability is being able to share things in a safe
place. So, it allows you to be able to admit to things that you may struggle with. You may say “Hey I want to give up” and to be vulnerable without feeling like someone is going to be judgmental. (Lamar)

**Paying it forward.** Growing from their descriptions of mentor accountability, the notion to pay it forward was revealed. Seven participants expressed feelings of now being accountable to African American students who came after them stating, “How I could extend the resources I know to others which very well could be in similar situations I was in” (Aric). Another participant added:

> When I looked around and only saw myself I represent who may end up being the next Black person in this class…If I don’t represent them and let them know that hey, a Black person actually took this class they may be reluctant. (Sire)

In regard to his peer mentor experience Reggie H. stated:

> It’s something we pay forward. I mentioned the guys that came to me and said they’d help me and I ended up doing that for a lot of people too. Those people ended up being in my fraternity and they do it in return too. It’s just something that keeps being paid forward.

Mayor reflected on how his undergraduate mentor’s behavior influences him as a professional sharing “Now whenever I request a lunch meeting with students I’m like ‘Nope, put your money away.’ I do it because one day I hope that you’ll be able to do it with your students.”

Michael made reference to a verse in a popular hip-hop song identifying his desire to pay forward his experiences.

> It makes me want to do the same for another individual in which is pretty much the tree that allows us to grow…You know like Jay Z’s song says “it took 26 years for me to find my path, my only job is to cut yours in half.”

**Summary: Role of accountability.** The theme of accountability was evidenced through the sub-themes familial accountability, mentor accountability, and paying it
forward. The participants shared that the first level of accountability they experienced was specific to those who parented them – mother and father, mother alone, grandparents, grandmother. Familial accountability was described as emerging from the obligation to their parents (and parent figures) to do well in school and related to pleasing their parents.

Eleven of the twelve participants acknowledged experiencing feelings of accountability toward their mentors. They described mentor accountability as the desire to show their mentors that the freely given commitment to their success as undergraduate students was both appreciated and not in vain. Finally, paying it forward was discussed as the need to provide others with what had been provided to them through mentor relationships. Participants described the importance of supporting African Americans who chose to attend a HWCU after them.

**Impact on Academics**

Mentoring had a telling impact on the academic success of 10 of the African American men who participated in this study. Statements in support of this finding include: “Mentoring had an amazing effect on me academically it was like a 180° turn-around.” As the result of having a mentor, Larry stated, “It impacted my GPA and I finished on time even before I was supposed to.” Larry went on to express:

A lot of my poor grades came from my poor time management. He said I had to put more time into my studies before I can do anything else…he told me if I needed help to go to the daily tutoring sessions. Go to your advisors, and make sure you understand as much as you can and don’t be afraid to ask questions because nobody is going to help if you don’t ask. I ended up going to tutoring and advisors so I’d get comfortable doing the work on my own to the point where I could actually graduate.
While Larry reported suggestions his mentor provided to secure academic help from on-campus resources, Kinard spoke to the benefits of his mentor experience and the academic help he received directly from his mentor:

It played an important role. It kept me on track, from getting bad grades on my papers because I had the reinforcement of proofreading and giving me the necessary corrections. The mentor played an important role in terms of my academics.

Another participant shared:

It lifted my GPA that’s for sure. I don’t know if I would have graduated. I feel like mentorship helped me finish school in the timely manner I did. I was supposed to graduate in 6-7 years but being a part of Barker-Jones it really helped me do it in 5 years. It actually lowered the amount of time it took me to graduate and raised my GPA up. When I finished I was getting like a 3.8 and it raised my GPA up to a 2.8 overall. (Josue)

Josue added:

With academics, with Dr. Ridley, it really helped me focus in on areas I was weak in and needed improvement. Having a mentor and having someone look at your work and where you’re at its keeping you aligned on where you need to be and what you need to be doing to get you back on track…Having him as my other mentor improved my writing and also my reading too. He was an avid reader and when I’d go to his library he’d have thousands of books and he had read all of them, it was amazing. It was motivating for me to want to read more.

In regard to his academics and mentor experience, Lamar stated, “I’d say overall, it helped me stay on track and stay focused. It continued to push me even at times when I felt like I was at a standstill.” Another participant’s reflection included a bridge between personal development and academics adding, “from a personal standpoint a mentor can help you keep your head on straight and once that personal development is there you can perform very well academically” (Sire).

**Transformation from feelings of intellectual inadequacy to intellectual confidence.** The transition from feeling intellectually inadequate to intellectually
confident as the result of having a mentor emerged as a sub-theme from mentoring’s impact on academics. Feelings of intellectual inadequacy stemming from attending a HWCU were shared in many of the interviews. Lamar reflected on his feelings of intellectual inadequacy as they related to the preparation for college he received in high school compared to his White counterparts:

They had better teachers, more students that are prepared for college versus just graduating from high school. Some of their schools focus on their kids getting them ready for college and you have other high schools like mine just focusing on getting the kids through and maybe going to a two-year college.

In response to these feelings and after receiving encouragement from his mentor, Lamar “went to get a tutor…it was a big part of building my confidence.” Reggie H. shared as the result of his mentor relationship, “When Ocie came around I started to feel a lot better about myself and became happy again. You need that in your life.” Reggie H. continued:

My grades picked up, too. I went from a transcript that had C’s, D’s, and F’s to A’s and B’s and nothing below a B-. It was because of that that I got into graduate school at Alpha State…It made me feel like I belonged at Beta Nu.

Statements attributing confidence to their mentor experiences were made by several participants, “She gave me a lot of confidence in myself” (Landon). “It definitely gave me some confidence” (Michael). “It helped get my confidence up too” (Larry).

While focusing on the confidence developed through their experiences of being mentored, 9 of the 12 participants made statements regarding the necessity of a mentor in their academic success. “Without it, I wouldn’t have graduated. I would have dropped out” (Reggie H.). “It’s a must... It’s a must” was the sentiment shared by Michael. David’s articulation was noted as “I think if I didn’t have a mentor I’d be complacent
about being a student and not graduated.” Aric regarded mentorship as the fuel required to implement change “It’s non-negotiable.” He went on to state:

Mentorship did a few things. It helped me realize I didn’t have it all together. That’s a very humbling process. Secondly, it gave me something to look forward to. Looking at these men who were 20+ years my senior and seeing the lives they live. The relationships they have and how secure they are within themselves. Those things play a part in the academic journey because it’s more than quizzes; it’s about cultivating who you are and who you want to be. The skillsets you develop, how you talk with people, and how you respond to adversity, mentorship did all that. (Aric)

Sire stated, “You need a mentor, a mentor being on you about different things being on top of the game.” Mayor expressed, “The completion of my degree wouldn’t have happened without Diane.” When asked what role if any did mentorship play in the completion of his degree, Reggie F. stated, “It had everything to do with it.” Larry noted, “I probably wouldn’t have finished it on time if I didn’t have some type of mentoring support.” Landon shared, “I can honestly say aside from my faith, if I didn’t have mentors, I don’t think I would have graduated.”

**Summary: Impact on academics.** This fifth theme revealed that the presence of a mentor had a significant impact on the academic achievements of these African American students at HWCU. All 12 participants acknowledged their mentor relationships had a great deal to do with the completion of their bachelor’s degree. The participants regarded their mentor relationships as the reason why they were able to combat their feelings of intellectual inadequacy and replace them with intellectual confidence. Each of the 12 participants made reference to the idea that had they not had the opportunity to maintain a mentor relationship while in college then they likely would not have graduated.
Summary of Themes

Through the field research, it was revealed the participants first experienced feelings of isolation on a HWCU campus. Those feelings were exacerbated when the participants were confronted with instances of stereotypical, prejudicial or bias behavior on the part of White counterparts, faculty, and staff on campus. Situations such as these led the participants to connect with other African Americans by establishing membership in organizations that focused on the African American student experience. As a result of this form of student engagement, the opportunity to develop informal mentor relationships were provided and mentor traits such as being transparent, supportive, and accessible were valued highly. The presence of these traits led to an increase in feelings of accountability and academic success, which encouraged the participants to pay their experiences forward and provide similar types of support to African American students who came after them. This increased desire for accountability and academic success created opportunities for the development of intellectual confidence confirming for the participants that a completion of their bachelor’s degree was possible.

Findings and Interpretations

This section of chapter four contains the findings of the study. The findings are based on themes revealed through the research and include an interpretation of each finding. Four findings have been identified and will be discussed as they relate to relevant literature and the research questions which guided this phenomenological study. The findings provided in this section will set the framework for the recommendations discussed in chapter five. Figure four provides a visual representation of the findings that have emerged through the research.
Figure 4. Visual representation of the research findings.

Finding #1. Informal is the Preferred Approach to Mentoring

The participants of the study identified their mentoring experiences as positive and influential contributing to both their academic and personal development. During the interviews, the participants often spoke highly of their mentors and reflected on their experiences with large smiles and upright posture, using their hands to describe significant experiences they shared with their mentors. The participants’ perceptions of the mentor’s contributions aligned with the definition of the term, “A person of a superior rank, special achievements, and prestige who instructs, counsels, guides and facilitates
the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (Blackwell, 1989, p. 9). This was accurate for all of the participants, including those who identified themselves as having a peer mentor in addition to the older traditional mentors identified.

Different from Forde’s (2008) research on the Wake Forest Office of Multicultural Affair’s formal mentoring initiative, 11 of the participants in this study described the value of informal mentor relationships that supported their academic success. Terrell and Hassell (1994) noted both informal and formal mentoring are effective for students of color pursuing post-secondary education. This research supports LaVant et al.’s (1997) conclusion that universities must not simply move forward with establishing mentor programs for African American men, they must also secure buy-in from the students as well as the faculty and staff who show interest in order for formal mentoring effort’s to be effective. Documented in the researcher’s field notes, the researcher reflected on being mentored in both formal and informal circumstances and recognized that the most meaningful of her own experiences were those that came from the informal mentor relationship, as the formal relationship felt more like an obligation than an experience.

Allen’s (1992) research on structural inequality revealed that African American students attending HWCUs often needed to manage feelings of isolation. Mills (1997) noted this was a serious issue resulting in disengagement and a lack of intellectual confidence for these students. Students in this study described their initial feelings of isolation suggesting that in the 20 and 15 years since the publication of Allen’s (1992) and Mills (1997) research that HWCU have yet to create systems of support. Students in
this study described their feelings of inadequacy and suggested it was the initial transparency of their mentors who expressed open and genuine interest in them and advocated on their behalf that shifted these feelings and became an important basis for their subsequent success. By virtue of the guidance received from their mentors, participants developed stronger connections with the university community.

**Finding #2. Non-Negotiable Mentor Characteristics**

A mentor’s ability to be transparent and supportive are characteristics that held major significance for the participants of this study. In addition, the research also identified two other characteristics they regarded as essential: a) a mentor who is African American and b) a mentor who is accessible. Establishing a relationship with a mentor based on trust and care was important for the men interviewed. This research parallels Brittian et al.’s (2009) study where it was noted the presence of African American faculty and staff on campus assists African American students with identifying individuals who looked like them in positions of leadership on campus. It was the reason the participants of this study requested an increase in the hiring of African American staff in an effort to secure a more supportive campus environment.

**African American mentors.** This research confirms Schwitzer et al.’s (1999) conclusions that this population of students preferred mentor relationships with other African Americans as it helped them boost confidence, establish familiarity, and assisted with combating issues related to structural inequality while attending a HWCU. The participants in this study collectively spoke to their mentors’ abilities to relate to their experiences because of their shared race and cultural experiences. They also described
their mentors as role models from whom they desired to model their personal and educational experiences.

This research aligns with Turner’s (1994) survey research which suggested the academic success students of color experience while attending HWCUs was contingent upon the positive experiences they had on campus, inclusive of faculty and staff of color. The participants in the current study looked to their mentors as individuals they could pattern their lives after and believed if their mentors could accomplish their goals despite challenges they faced during their undergraduate years, then they could certainly do the same. As a result of the role modeling, participants described being motivated to do well academically which increased their persistence and played a significant role in their academic accomplishments.

**Accessibility.** The need for an accessible mentor may reflect the lack of campus support and the feelings of isolation participants experienced as they navigated the undergraduate climate at a HWCU. This study’s participants spoke of a mentor’s accessibility, often reminiscing about times when they called on their mentors during the middle of the night as they struggled to manage the stresses of college life. Responses at those moments were important to them as it confirmed their mentor’s commitment to assist them with their educational and personal issues. This research supported Harris’s (2007) conclusion that for African American men, mentors must be available and accessible when help is most needed.

Participants noted their mentors frequently shared books and readings to assist them with gaining a perspective on their struggles. The gifted readings were specific to the African American male experience in White America, Christianity, and the South
African apartheid and appeared to do two things for the participants: a) it gave them a reliable reference, something tangible to refer to that connected them to their mentors, assisting them when perhaps their mentor was not available for counsel and b) it provided the participants with a greater understanding that they were one of few African American men pursuing a college education and for that reason they had to complete their degrees in order to keep from being invisible in society. This was depicted in Ellison’s (1952) book *The Invisible Man*, provided by one participant’s mentor. Gaining a deeper spiritual understanding of the role they played as Christian men and clearly identifying for themselves the definition of faith was key for others. The researcher gained a deeper perspective on the role mentors played in the participants’ growth both personally and academically through her review of these readings.

Some of the most urgent undergraduate needs participants identified were related to financing their education and costs related to attending school. Their discussion reinforced the importance of Cross and Slater’s (2001) finding that educational financing is a primary stress for African American students and “probably the most important factor in achieving a high Black student graduation rate is the availability of financial aid” (p. 104). Hurtado (1992) and Sedlacek (1999) similarly concluded that the lack of financial assistance is what leads students to drop out of school. It appears again that time has not mitigated this circumstance for African American men attending HWCUs. For these participants, getting guidance from their mentors related to securing more financial aid, managing the cost of books, and budgeting more effectively, was regarded as significant, and helped minimize their stress while in college. Their success in continuing toward their educational goals despite initial financial concerns further
reinforced conclusions and recommendations offered by Blackwell (1990) and Mason (1998).

**Finding #3. Established Mentor Relationships Encourage Persistence through Accountability which Leads to Graduation**

The theme of accountability in this study led to the sub-theme that holding themselves accountable to their mentors was a major factor in these participants’ desires to continue their undergraduate coursework despite the issues arising from structural inequality such as stereotypes, prejudice, bias, and social isolation faced while attending a HWCU. Accountability to mentors had a major impact on the participants’ academic success. Many saw the completion of their degree as proof to their mentors that the commitments made to support them were not in vain. Understanding the role of accountability in an informal mentoring relationship is an important addition of this research. While none of the previous literature spoke specifically to the role of accountability in the African American student’s success, it did make connections between the recognition that African American male students benefit academically when specialized services and support specific to their needs are available (Cuyjet, 2006; Forde, 2008; Harper, 2006; Mason, 2008).

Scholars have previously concluded that because African American male students struggle with a myriad of non-academic issues on a HWCU campus including conflicts with low self-esteem and self-confidence, and suggested it is important to create opportunities where motivation can be fostered in order for them to persist despite the struggles they face while in school (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006; Turner, 1994). This research reinforced these conclusions in the informal mentoring experiences described.
Many participants spoke of the role the mentors played in helping them build their self-confidence and learn to identify resources in support of their academic success.

Schwitzer et al. (1999) noted increases in self-confidence and the ability to manage issues with structural inequality on a HWCU campus are enhanced when relationships are established between students and the faculty or staff who are familiar to them. For the participants of this study, faculty and staff were extended to community members, and peers, all (accept one) who were African Americans. As a result of the relationship with these mentors, the participants described working harder academically and viewing graduation as an attainable goal.

**Finding #4. Student Involvement Helps to Establish Community for a Population Who Feels Isolated from the Larger Community**

Previous research identified that the disconnections taking place on HWCU campuses stem directly from feelings of social isolation as a result of structural inequality (Matlock & Wade-Golden, 2002; Mills, 1997; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Schwitzer et al., 1999). The participants of this study validated this finding by sharing the struggles they initially faced as one of very few African American men on campus. Tinto (1975, 1993) whose work spans four decades, suggested that assisting students with establishing connections on campus is directly related to student persistence and success. This was reinforced in this study where 11 of the 12 shared that their decision to pursue opportunities of involvement through registered student clubs and organizations assisted them with building an initial connection with their campus and led to many of the informal mentoring relationships.
For the participants, getting involved on campus meant pursuing memberships in clubs and organizations that focused on the interests of African American students. The specified support they found in these organizations helped establish a community within the larger campus community that, by the participant accounts, was not equipped to meet their specific needs. The organizations discussed included historically Black Greek letter fraternities and academic clubs geared toward African American membership.

In addition to establishing the much-needed connections that could assist with keeping the students engaged until graduation, some of the participants shared that getting involved on campus helped with establishing peer-mentor relationships as well. The peer-mentor experience was regarded as beneficial as it provided the participants an opportunity to connect and relate to someone within their generation who had likely recently overcome many of the obstacles the participants were currently facing. Cuyjet (2006) noted that such peer support was necessary for African American men to develop the motivation required to persist toward degree completion on a HWCU campus.

The researcher noted in her journal during epoche’ some similarities with this experience. After being introduced to Greek life by her mentor, she became a member of the same historically Black sorority as her mentor. The researcher also acknowledged her co-curricular involvement on campus as being heavily focused on the African American student experiences from leadership in the Black student union to employment in the multicultural center where she felt most comfortable and accepted on campus.
Summary

Five primary themes and their related sub-themes emerged from the triangulation of interviews, the researcher observations and personal journaling, and artifacts. The themes were a) managing feelings of comfort, b) relationship establishment, c) valued mentor traits, d) role of accountability, and e) impact on academics. From these themes, four findings were identified and discussed in relation to previous research. The four findings were: a) informal is the preferred approach to mentoring, b) non-negotiable mentor characteristics include being African American and highly accessible, c) established mentor relationships encourage persistence through accountability which leads to graduation, and d) student involvement helps establish community for a population who feels isolated from the larger community. The findings and interpretations presented here inform the conclusions and recommendations presented in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Although extensive research exists to support the belief that mentor relationships assist students with establishing connections that help them persist toward graduation, little is known about the essence of the lived experience with mentoring specific to African American men pursuing bachelor’s degrees at HWCU. The purpose of this research was to study this phenomenon through the reflections and stories of 12 African American men who graduated from a HWCU in recent years.

Through a review of existing literature and a thorough analysis of the data, the researcher sought to gain an understanding of the essence of the experience of African American men being mentored during their undergraduate careers in HWCU. The data secured through interviews were further clarified with a review of artifacts provided by the participants, as well as reflections and observations from this researcher’s field journal. A thorough qualitative analysis of the data, inclusive of coding, resulted in the discovery of patterns or trends presented as five primary themes coupled with relevant sub-themes substantiated by the voices of the participants. The primary themes that emerged included: a) managing feelings of comfort, b) relationship establishment, c) valued mentor traits, d) role of accountability, and e) impact on academics.

Considering the themes in light of existing literature, four findings emerged that both supported and countered existing research. The four findings included: a) informal is the preferred approach to mentoring, b) non-negotiable mentor characteristics called for accessible African American mentors, c) established mentor relationships encourage
persistence through accountability which lead to graduation, and d) student involvement helps to establish community for a population who feel isolated from the larger community. It is the consideration of the themes, findings, and interpretations that inform the conclusions and recommendations offered in this chapter.

This chapter offers conclusions to the three research questions that were the foundation of this study.

1. What are the lived experiences of African American men who were mentored during their pursuit of an undergraduate degree at a HWCU?

2. How do participants describe their academic experiences in light of the mentoring they received as undergraduates?

3. How do participants describe managing issues of social integration with the support of being mentored?

Recommendations specific to future research and practice are provided by the researcher following the discussion of the conclusions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study as well as the researcher’s personal reflection on the study.

Conclusions

HWCU graduation rates for African American men pursuing bachelor’s degrees are significantly lower than their White counterparts. Previous researchers have studied why the achievement gap is so disproportionate as a means of providing suggested actions and programs to support the academic success (degree completion) for this population of students. This study sought to explore the essence of the lived experiences with mentoring that recent African American male college graduates had while attending
a HWCU seeking to understand what elements are needed to increase the graduation rates of current African American students.

**Research Question #1: What are the lived experiences of African American men who were mentored during their pursuit of an undergraduate degree at a HWCU?**

**Challenges with fitting in.** Presented as the first primary theme of this research, the African American male graduates who participated in this study described their experiences attending a HWCU as challenging during the start of their academic careers. Attending institutions with few African Americans on campus, the participants reported feeling socially isolated from the larger community. As a result of these feelings and the lack of other African American students on campus, participants described feeling alone and unable to relate to their White counterparts. In addition to these feelings, there existed the very real fear of being rejected, which initially kept the participants from establishing social interactions on campus. During this period, these feelings and experiences are what led the participants to consider transferring or leaving school altogether as each perceived personally that college was not a place for them.

African American men choosing to attend HWCUs for their Bachelor’s level coursework face significant interpersonal challenges specific to their ability to relate to their White counterparts. It also appears that both the African American students and their White counterparts contribute to the social divide. African American men struggle with making connections within the larger community due to a lack of familiarity, which keeps them from reaching out, while frequently their White counterparts do not appear to embrace or extend an opportunity to engage the African American student population due in part to limited experiences with African American men. While academic variables
prepared the participants for collegiate coursework, it did not prepare them for the
struggles with the feelings of isolation they faced. Skills, such as persistence, and
opportunities to relate to those with like experiences, such as African American students,
staff, and faculty, proved beneficial, helping African American male students to
successfully manage their struggles with feeling alone while attending a HWCU.

**Combating bias, stereotypes and prejudice.** Stereotypes and bias based on
communication styles, style of dress, and physical appearance were reported to have an
impact on the participants’ experiences as African American men at HWCUs during their
interactions with White students, White faculty, and White staff. African American
participants assumed White students made assumptions about them based on their
appearance in relation to how African American men were portrayed in media and that
their experiences suggested White faculty and staff made assumptions about the
participant’s ability to do well academically. Some of the participants responded to these
perceived stereotypes and prejudice by adjusting their appearance and communication
styles in an effort to change the way African American men were viewed. Others worked
diligently at their academic pursuits to dispel the myth of African American male
intellectual inadequacy seemingly imposed on them by White faculty and staff.

A conclusion drawn from this is that it is important for HWCUs to recognize such
stereotypes and biases do exist and create hurdles for African American men who choose
to pursue undergraduate degrees at their institutions. While stereotyping, prejudicial
behavior and bias were not reported as having a major impact on the participants’ desires
to continue their education, it did impact their confidence and feelings of comfort on
campus.
Establishing mentor relationships informally proves most beneficial. The majority of the participants in the study reported establishing informal mentor relationships through an unstructured process where the mentors initially sought out the relationship. These organic opportunities for relationship establishment were described as the preferred approach to mentoring. Informal mentoring was highly valued based on a mentor’s willingness to be open and transparent about their own life experiences and their ability to offer both unconditional support to the students. Although there is the possibility of finding this value within formal mentor opportunities as evidenced by one relationship, the participants felt informal opportunities of mentorship were more genuine considering they were based out of a mentor’s sincere interest in seeing the participant succeed. The conclusion drawn from this is that African American men pursuing undergraduate degrees at HWCUs fare better at managing mentor relationships with someone who shows a genuine interest in them out of sincerity as opposed to out of obligation. For the participants of the study, the development of trust began when the mentor reached out, exposing his or her vulnerability, and then encouraged the participant to do the same.

Research Question #2: How do participants describe their academic experiences in light of the mentoring they received as undergraduates?

The presence of mentors leads to timely and successful degree completion. This research suggests mentor accountability with the participants holding themselves accountable to their mentors as a means of repaying them for their support and guidance was a key to their academic success. The participants acknowledged that completing their degrees was a way of expressing thanks to their mentors for “believing in them”
during their undergraduate pursuits, as it was a personal goal. As a result of the feelings of accountability toward their mentors, the participants increased their focus on academics, which resulted in more timely completion of their degrees. They developed the desire to pay their mentor experiences forward with African American students who came after them.

What is concluded from this is that African American men who are mentored while pursuing undergraduate degrees have a great appreciation for their mentors’ support and assistance during their college careers. The appreciation is so great they take into consideration pleasing their mentors by completing their degrees. While feelings of accountability to parents were expressed, accountability to mentors were identified as more critical to their degree completion. Perhaps this is impacted by the role these mentors play in providing specific advice for financial and academic struggles. The value they place on their mentor experience is so high; as alumni, they recognize the importance of providing the same opportunities for present and future African American students with similar struggles. As a result, these participants position themselves to mentor other African American students through similar challenges and perhaps to keep them from making the same mistakes.

Mentorship increases confidence, which results in higher grade point averages. It was reported through the research that the participants felt less competent intellectually than their White counterparts while attending HWCUs. However, having recognized their mentor’s confidence in them, the participants began to develop more confidence themselves. This increase in self-confidence was soon displayed in the
academic environment and ultimately led to an increase in participant grade point averages.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that for African American men pursuing undergraduate degrees at HWCUs, the presence of a mentor is instrumental when working toward building the confidence required to achieve academically. Regarded by some as role models, the presence of mentors reminded the participants that their educational goals were attainable and connecting with someone they know well and hold in high regard that has completed the same goal solidified this notion for them.

Research Question #3: How do participants describe managing issues of social integration with the support of being mentored?

Mentors promote increased campus life engagement. Participants struggled with feeling alone during the onset of their academic careers at a HWCU. This was due in large part to the low numbers of African American students enrolled at their campus. However, it was through the second finding, which focused on relationship establishment, that many of the participants sustained their journey toward social integration. Mentor relationships in this study were developed after having met the mentor through a campus life activity such as a student organization event or meeting. Prior to meeting the mentors, the students themselves managed their struggles with social integration by first taking an interest in student groups that focused on the African American student experience. It was in situations such as these that mentor relationships were fostered between the participants and campus faculty, staff, alumni, and community members. Although mentors were not the catalyst for assisting the participants with managing their social integration woes, they definitely encouraged the continued pursuit
for social integration through student involvement opportunities. For some, this resulted in the participants pursuing membership in the same fraternities as their mentors or special interests groups that focused on careers similar to their mentors. Drawn from this is the conclusion that African American men who seek opportunities of engagement through student organizations focusing on the African American student experience increase their chances of identifying a mentor. Among other things, the mentors encouraged the participants to stay connected to the campus through various social outlets, which may have resulted in the participants following similar paths as their mentors both socially and professionally.

Recommendations

The recommendations provided in this section are based on the themes, findings, and conclusions of this study. All recommendations are provided for senior-level administrators at HWCUs who make decisions about enrolment efforts, academic services, and campus life initiatives. The recommendations provided are intended for implementation to better support African American male students attending HWCUs. While other institutions might find these recommendations useful, it is important to note that these recommendations were designed with a specific population in mind. Additional recommendations are also provided for future research on the African American male undergraduate experience at HWCUs.

Recommendations for University Administrators

University leadership and relevant staff need to consider the following when looking to address the needs of the African American male undergraduate student population at HWCUs:
1. Establish an orientation tradition exclusively for the African American student population in which both the students and the families can attend, celebrate, and meet other new students and mingle with existing African American students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Scheduling such a tradition during new student orientation or during the first month of the academic year might assist African American men with making connections with the African American community prior to or early in their first year and offer the potential to initiate informal mentor support. Invite organizations that support the African American student experience to have a presence and recruit members at this event. Senior-level administrators, such as the university President, Vice President of Student Affairs, or the Dean of Students, should also be present, irrespective of their race and as a means of showing the university’s support of the African American student population.

2. Opportunities to increase the cultural awareness and sensitivity of faculty and staff have the potential of assisting under-represented students with a stronger sense of belonging. Campuses that offer such training to their staff and faculty may see an increase in feelings of comfort for African American men on HWCU campuses, which may lead to an increase in graduation rates.

3. Consider supporting a peer pairing (buddy) effort specific for the African American student population at the onset of freshman year. This is suggested in an effort to decrease feelings of social isolation related to low African American student enrollment numbers by providing opportunities for African American men to develop an immediate circle of support with students with
whom they share common interests and experiences. This program offers African American men, who have completed their first or second year successfully, the ability to “pay it forward.” Securing their participation and insight may validate their experience and keep them engaged on campus.

4. Opportunities to develop mentor relationships naturally proved successful for the participants of this study. Supporting an effective and committed campus Black Faculty and Staff Association who identifies one of its goals as regular fellowship with the current African American student population outside the classroom may increase opportunities for informal mentor relationship development. With the most highly valued traits of a mentor identified as being transparent, supportive, and accessible, social opportunities such as these may provide African American male students the chance to interact with faculty and staff socially, increasing the potential of recognizing the valued trait of being transparent. Attending and engaging in the events sends a message of support to the students, and holding events outside of daytime hours contributes to their desire for an accessible mentor.

5. Make a concerted effort to diversify the candidate hiring pools for open campus faculty and staff positions through the use of various employment management tools that focus of professionals of color. This effort will prove beneficial when looking to secure more professionals of color. This will assist in varying the ethnic make-up of the faculty and staff as well as increase the opportunities for establishing mentor relationships with more African American faculty and staff.
**Recommendations for Future Research**

African American men require a welcoming and inclusive learning environment as well as the support and guidance of someone they hold in high regard in order to be successful academically while attending a HWCU. The data from this study captured the essence of the lived experienced of African American men who were mentored and graduated from HWCU. The researcher recommends the following opportunities for continued research:

1. A study on the experiences of African American men who graduated from an HWCU in six years or less but were not mentored. This will provide insight on how men who were not mentored managed their undergraduate careers successfully on a campus with low African American representation.

2. Conduct research on the reasons why African American men who attend HWCU do not complete. The information garnered from this study holds the potential of assisting universities with determining areas within the system failing to support this population of students, possibly resulting in their decision to leave indefinitely.

3. Further research should be conducted to gain a deeper understanding on the unconscious role that structural inequality may continue to play in classroom situations. This will assist the administration with identifying the less than obvious inequalities that exist in academia and that have a major impact on academic equity and the African American male student experience.
Closing Reflection

The graduation rates of African American male undergraduates in a six-year period at HWCUs across the United States are measured at rates as low as 18%, according to the U.S. Department of Education (College Results Online, n.d.). While institutions of higher education in the United States now embrace the idea of an ethnically diverse student population, HWCUs only began admitting African American students on a continuous basis 50 years ago in 1962. Considering it has only been 50 years since African Americans fought and finally won the right to attend HWCUs, it is possible the structure of the curriculum and the resources offered at these institutions do not fully take into consideration the needs of students of color. Seeking to understand what may better support African American men attending these institutions, this phenomenological study sought to explore the phenomenon of mentoring through the essences of the lived experiences of African American male college graduates who were mentored while attending a HWCU.

This study revealed that for African American men who attend HWCUs, gaining a mentor had a large impact on their ability to complete their undergraduate coursework. This study found that the support these young men received from a mentor led to an enhanced intellectual confidence that developed through peer-mentor relationships. The study’s findings suggest the nature in which these mentor connections were established – informal and organic – led the student to a stronger sense of being supported by someone who was making a personal commitment to their success. Based on this trusting relationship, a strong sense of accountability to the mentor developed and degree
completion along with becoming a mentor for others who follow is how the students evidenced their appreciation of the mentors’ actions on their behalf.

In the larger scheme of things, HWCUs working to identify the support necessary for African American men to succeed at their schools require a sincere and intentional effort that draws from existing research to understand the issues and challenges faced by this population. They need to secure the buy-in of various stakeholders including campus administration, faculty, staff, African American alumni, and the students themselves with regard to student success. The institution must be committed and well prepared for such an effort if they are to begin closing the achievement gap.

While it is hoped that HWCUs will benefit from this study, African American men choosing to attend HWCUs need to recognize the necessary actions required for them to fare well in an environment that likely does not recognize their feelings of isolation and may not be aware of their lack of confidence. These men are encouraged to reach out immediately to the community on campus that is most familiar to them in order to begin moving toward securing a social support system and a mentor. While this in no way is an attempt to shift the burden of responsibility for existing issues of structural inequality from the institution to African American male students, it is intended to suggest that personal initiative is necessary to mitigate the challenges faced in the African American male’s undergraduate experience on these campuses.

Reflecting on this insightful opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of mentoring through the lived experiences of African American men who attended historically White colleges and universities for their bachelor’s degrees, the researcher
recalls a statement made by one of the participants that highlights the immense value of being mentored so well.

When you’re not sure if you can do something, or if you’re not strong enough to really believe in yourself or you might not have the confidence to believe in yourself. Even if you just have one person that truly believes in you, and they really speak to you, really speak positively to you and speak life into you and speak victory into you and speak nothing but good things to you in a realistic way. You can’t help but feel something about that, you can’t help but feel inspired and feel motivated and feel like maybe there is something inside of me if this person can see it. Maybe I can’t see it myself because of everything I’ve been through. But if this person believes so strongly in me and really believes that I can do this; maybe I can do it. We just gotta figure out a way to do it. I think that’s what it did for me.
List of References


Harris, P. D. (2007). The influence mentoring has on the persistence of academically successful African American males who are juniors or seniors at a public, predominately White institution (Doctoral dissertation). Youngstown State University, Ohio.


Appendix A: Participant Identification Form

Name: ______________________________________________________
Email address: _______________________________________________
Phone number: _____________________________________________
Gender: Male or Female (please circle one)
Race: _______________________________________________________
Has your bachelor’s degree been conferred by a University? Y or N (please circle one)
Name of the University: _______________________________________
Years of Attendance: _________________________________________
Date Degree Conferred: _______________________________________
Were you mentored while pursuing your bachelor’s degree? : Y or N (please circle one)
Length of Mentor Relationship: _________________________________
In the space below, please provide a brief description of the mentor experience indicating how you know or met your mentor (faculty, staff, community member, etc.):

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer: Davin E. Brown

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Introductory Statement: The purpose of this research is to study the phenomenon of mentoring through the lived experiences and perceptions of African American men who successfully negotiated the university and college environment with the support of a mentor at various historically White colleges and universities across the United States. The data collected will come exclusively from recorded interview sessions with the participants. This interview is expected to last no longer than 60 minutes. The name of the interviewee will be replaced with a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. All data collected will be maintained in a secure locked cabinet of the interviewer. As a requirement of this research project your consent to participation must be documented with a signature. Can you please read, sign and date this consent form?

I will now turn on the recording devices and begin recording.
Questions:
1. Describe your experience being an African American male college student at your undergraduate college?

2. What specific services/resources did the University provide that assisted you either academically or socially during your years as an undergraduate?

3. As you reflect on your years at the school, were there any times you considered dropping out?
   a. Please describe the moments?
   b. What allowed you to stay?

4. Who was your mentor during college? Please specify their name/s and the nature of the mentoring relationship (Faculty, staff, supervisor, community person; formal or informal)?

5. How was this mentoring relationship initially established?

6. Describe the relationship you had with your mentor.
   a. How did it develop?
   b. What conversations do you recall?
   c. What was most meaningful to you about the relationship?
   d. What did you value most about this individual?
   e. How long were you mentored by this person?
   f. Do you have a relationship with this individual today?

7. Describe the role mentoring played in your academic experience and personal development during your undergraduate journey,
   a. What specific examples related to the role mentoring played in either area can you provide?
   b. What impact, if any, did mentoring have on your completion of the degree?

8. Based on your experiences, how do you personally define what a mentor is or should be?

9. If you were describing this experience to current African American male undergraduates what would you tell them about having a mentor and the experience of being mentored?

10. Please share anything additional that you believe is important for me to know concerning your experience in being mentored?
Appendix C: Participant Solicitation Email

Greetings INSERT NAME HERE.

The purpose for contacting you today is to inform you that I have reached the research stage of my doctoral program and would like to solicit your participation in my qualitative study, as well as of the participation of any others you would suggest. The purpose of my research is to study the phenomenon of being mentored through the lived experiences of African American male college graduates who were mentored while attending historically white colleges and universities. I am personally drawn to this given my experience as a Student Affairs professional.

For this study, would you be willing to assist me by serving as a participant? Participation consists of the completion of a participant identification form and a 45 - 60 minute face-to-face interview that will be recorded. A short follow-up interview may be held to clarify information from the initial interview. While the information you provide will be included in the study, you will only be identified by a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Your assistance with this effort would be greatly appreciated. Please let me know by responding to this message whether or not you would be willing to participate. I am more than willing to answer any questions or address any concerns that you might have. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you,

Ms. Davin E. Brown
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D. Educational Leadership and Management
Drexel University-School of Education
415.305.1622
Deb74@drexel.edu
Appendix D: Document of Informed Consent

Consent Version Date

Consent to Take Part
In a Research Study

1. SUBJECT NAME
   ______________________________

2. TITLE OF RESEARCH
   A Phenomenological Study on the Lived Experiences of African American Men Who Were Mentored While Pursuing Their Bachelor’s Degree

3. INVESTIGATOR'S NAME
   Kathy D. Geller, Ph.D.

4. RESEARCH ENTITY
   This research study is being done by Drexel University.

5. CONSENTING FOR THE RESEARCH STUDY
   This is a long and an important document. If you sign it, you will be allowing Drexel University and its researchers to perform a research study on you. You should take your time and carefully read it. You can also take a copy of this consent form to discuss it with your family, or anyone else you would like before you sign it. Do not sign it unless you are comfortable in participating in this study.

6. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH
   You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to study the essence of the phenomenon of being mentored. The study is based on the lived experiences of eight to twelve African American male college graduates who were mentored while pursuing their bachelor’s degree.

   This research project is being conducted as partial fulfillment to obtain a Doctorate in Education degree. You have been asked to participate in this study based on your stated experience with having been mentored while pursuing your
bachelor’s degree. Participants will be graduates from historically White colleges and universities across the United States. All participants will be African American men who completed their bachelor’s degrees in six years or less and graduated no earlier than 2005. Participants must have been mentored for a minimum of two years while completing their bachelor’s level coursework.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including audio recording) will be deleted and omitted from the final documents.

7. PROCEDURES AND DURATION
The following procedure will be conducted at the study visit:
An audio recorded one-on-one interview with open ended questions that allows you to describe your personal experience with having been mentored will be conducted. The semi-structured interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes. A follow-up interview may be scheduled to further clarify your perceptions. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. The audio recording will be transcribed and only be reviewed by the investigators and only for the purpose of this study.

8. RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS/CONSTRAINTS
The following are risks associated with participating in this study:
Risks are minimal, however possible mental discomfort associated with answering questions that might be considered sensitive or personal could occur. In the event this takes place you will be provided the option to move on to the next question.

9. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to be in the study or you may stop at any time. However, if you choose to participate, you will be expected to follow the instructions provided by the researcher.

10. RESPONSIBILITY FOR COST
There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY
In any publication or presentation of research results, your identity will be kept confidential. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the dissertation or other publications, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous. All the information gathered will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the investigator’s office at Drexel.
12. **NEW INFORMATION**

   If new information becomes known that will affect you or might change your decision to be in this study, you will be informed by the investigator.
13. QUESTIONS
If you have any questions about this study or your participation in this study contact:
Dr. Kathy Geller (kdg39@drexel.edu) or by telephone at 916-213-2790
If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact:
   Drexel University College of Medicine
   Office of Regulatory Research Compliance
   1601 Cherry Street, 3 Parkway Bldg.
   Mail Stop 10-444
   Philadelphia, PA 19102
You may also contact the Office of Regulatory Research Compliance at 215-255-7857.
Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all of your questions.
If you agree to participate in this study, you will receive a signed and dated copy of this consent form for your records.

14. CONSENT

- I have been informed of the reasons for this study.
- I have had the study explained to me.
- I have had all of my questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I have carefully read this consent form, have initialed each page, and have received a signed copy.
I freely consent to participate in this research study.

Subject or Legally Authorized Representative

Investigator or Individual Obtaining this Consent/Permission

Witness to Signature

List of Individuals Authorized to Obtain Consent/Permission, as specified on the protocol or by the IRB.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Day Phone #</th>
<th>24 Hr Phone #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Davin E. Brown</td>
<td>Co-Investigator</td>
<td>(415) 305-1622</td>
<td>(415) 305-1622</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ONLY THOSE INDIVIDUALS NAMED HERE MAY CONDUCT THE CONSENT PROCESS AND SIGN THE CONSENT FORM.
### Appendix E: Field Journal Document

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diagram of Room</strong></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram of Room" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelf</td>
<td>Chair (Participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair (Researcher)</td>
<td>Desk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Phenomenological Data Coding Template

EPOCHE

SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

TEXTURAL DESCRIPTION

THEMES

STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION

THE ESSENCE OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE