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Understanding Mentoring Relationships: The Black Male Graduate Student Perspective

Kwame R. Patterson Jr.

Eastern Illinois University

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Understanding Mentoring Relationships:

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Kwame R Patterson Jr.

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Understanding Mentoring Relationships: The Black Male Graduate Student Perspective

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This thesis is dedicated to the outstanding men of my family, to my father Kwame Patterson Sr., thank you for your support, your words of wisdom, being my first mentor, and most importantly being a great father. To my younger brothers, Kahmal, Khalil, and Jerimiah, thank you for being my first mentees, it is always a pleasure to know that I have you guys looking up to me and always pushing me to be better.

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Abstract

Black males face many obstacles in higher education. They are disproportionately represented among students who are forced to withdraw, underperform academically, and report negative experiences. Despite the negative experiences Black males may encounter, many still have a strong interest in education, and mentoring plays a role in that interest. The purpose of this study was to explore the mentoring relationships and influence on the Black male graduate students experience. A qualitative study was conducted with Black males who received their master’s degrees from a regional Midwestern institution. Research revealed that mentoring played a major role in Black male’s graduate experience as well as the decision to attend graduate school. Participants discussed the value of having a mentor(s) and attributed their success to interactions with a mentor.

Key words: Mentor, Protégé, Mentorship
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Chapter I

Introduction

Although some continue to question the economic rationale for an increasingly costly college degree, it still remains a significant predictor of future economic success (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Yet, the opportunity to secure a comfortable financial future through the attainment of a college degree is not equitable across racial groups (Brittian, Sy, & Stokes, 2009). Despite the importance of higher education in America, poor retention and graduation rates among Black males continue to be problematic (Brittian, Sy, & Stokes, 2009). According to The U.S. Department of Education (2014) the graduation rate for Black students was 45%, but the graduation rate for Black male students was 39%. For graduate students the story is different. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015) since 2000 the number of Blacks earning master’s degrees is up by more than 41%. There were a total 791,000 Master’s degrees awarded in 2015. Of those students 50,657 or 6% were Black, and about 15,000 or 1.8% were Black males. For many years, institutions have tried to initiate programs to improve this problem (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Many factors contribute to the academic success of Black students in college, the presence of a role model is considered one of those factors (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007).

Mentoring and mentorship programs provide students with the opportunity for personal growth, motivation, social support, emotional support and access to academic resources that are essential to their educational experience through inspirational staff and contact with other students (Brittian et al., 2009). Black students seek Black faculty and staff because they can identify with them, and feel more comfortable approaching them.
and receiving their feedback (Feist-Price, 2001). The number of Black students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) outnumbers Black faculty employed at PWIs (Feist-Price, 2001). As a result, some students are forced to seek cross-race mentoring. Cross-race mentoring is a relationship between a mentor and a mentee of different races. Most cross-race mentoring relationships involve a white mentor and a Black mentee (Jucovy, 2002). Unlike same-race mentoring, cross-race mentoring is typically frowned upon because many believe that it is ineffective for a mentee to have a mentor of a different racial or ethnic background, but cross-race mentoring can be very beneficial for both the mentor and mentee (Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, & Lee, 2002).

Blackwell (1989) stated that “mentoring activities can foster a continuing interest in education and may lead to a decision to undertake graduate work” (p.10). For some students this has been proven to be true, especially for students of color. For graduate students specifically mentoring programs are designed to provide close, supportive relationships between faculty and the student, which is important for students of color who are enrolled in predominately White institutions (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999). Mentors are capable of assisting graduate students of color with adjustments both the academic and nonacademic parts of graduate education (Brown et al., 1999). There is convincing evidence that mentorship and participation in mentoring programs have a positive result for students of color (Davidson, & Foster-Johnson, 2001).

**Purpose of the Study**

I grew up in the Englewood area on the Southside of Chicago and attended a high school that left me underprepared for college. In the Englewood area there were an abundance of gangs and violence, and very few positive outlets for children. I used sports
as an outlet, which continues to play a role in who I am today. Not only did my involvement help me stay away from trouble, it also put me around a group of men who wanted to help me be a better person. Outside of my relationship with my father, my high school coaches were some of the first mentors I had in my life. These coaches helped me to develop structure and discipline through sports, and because I was receptive and took advantage of what they had to offer I am the person I am today. There was one coach that took an interest in my life outside of sports. He was one of the younger coaches and he always told me that he saw something in me, but I never understood what he was referring to. He became someone I could talk to about anything and he also helped me to find ways to keep myself occupied outside of sports. He played a key role in where I am today because he informed me about an organization that I later joined after going off to college. I was also fortunate to be one of the few people in the neighborhood to have a father in my life. That, along with the support of my coaches provided me with opportunities that many of my peers did not have available to them.

Although I had people in my life who pushed me to do better, I never realized the importance of a mentor until I got to college. The relationship I developed with my mentor as a freshman was deeper than the relationships I had developed with my coaches in high school. As I began the journey to finding out who I was I had someone right there to help me through tough times. My mentor encouraged me to do well in classes by guiding me to or providing me with the resources I needed. He also helped me to get involved outside the classroom, which helped me remain at the university. My mentor also encouraged me to pursue a master’s degree. His intentional involvement in my life played a critical role in my undergraduate experience and shaped me into who I am
today. As I have moved through my Master’s program, my relationship with my mentor has continued. My research is inspired by personal experience, and I wanted to hear the mentoring experiences other Black males experienced during their graduate experience.

The purpose of this study was to explore the mentoring experiences of Black male graduate students. Additionally, this study sought to explore the role mentoring played in Black male’s decision to attend graduate school, how mentoring relationships are established and managed, how satisfied Black male graduate students were with their mentoring relationships. These objectives were addressed using the qualitative approach to research, through interviewing Black men who have recently completed a master’s degree.

**Research Questions**

I sought to understand what role mentoring in higher education played in the success of Black male graduate students. This was addressed by answering the following research questions:

1. What role did mentoring play in Black male graduate student’s decision to attend graduate?

2. How did Black males describe their mentoring relationships?

3. How were mentoring relationships established and managed for Black males?

4. How satisfied were Black male students with their mentoring relationships?

**Significance of the Study**

Mentoring in higher education has been a valuable and effective means in promoting interaction between student and faculty (Lavant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). Relationships with faculty members are crucial to the student’s educational and
professional development, and ultimately to the student's graduate school process (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). Primarily, Black men have reaped the benefits of mentoring programs at college and universities (Lavant et al., 1997). Retention of Black males at colleges and universities has always been a problem (Lavant et al., 1997; Museus, 2008). The motivation, social support, and emotional support that students are looking for on campuses are provided through mentorship, and all of these factors have been identified as helping in retention (Brittian et al., 2009). This has been proven to be true for the undergraduate student, but again there have been very few studies conducted on mentoring graduate students. I wanted to explore how mentoring relationships are impacting the decision to enter and remain in graduate programs.

Over half of all ethnic minority students at 4-year institutions fail to graduate within six years (Museus, 2008). Furthermore, the dropout rates are much higher for minorities compared to counterparts at each step of the educational pipeline, including graduate school (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). One reason for this is the lack of membership in the culture of their campus (Museus, 2008). Graduate student involvement, whether in local organizations or national organizations, holds many benefits for graduate students (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). Although there has been a significant amount of research conducted on the effect and influences of involvement at the undergraduate level, there have not been many studies focused on the effects of graduate student involvement in higher education (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). This study looked to provide insight on the importance of graduate student involvement for Black males, specifically mentoring.
Limitations

There were a number of potential limitations that were identified for this study. Researcher’s bias was one of those limitations. As a Black male who closely identified with the participants of this study, the researcher could have been a limitation. I worked to eliminate all biases by having each participant review their own narrative to insure that it is accurate. The thesis committee also reviewed all results and conclusions of the study. Another limitation was the choice to conduct the study at one rural state institution. With a limited number of Black men graduating with a Master’s degree from the institution each year, the pool to draw from was rather limited. An additional limitation was finding participants who were willing to share their experience with mentoring. To lessen these limitations, the researcher attempted to target graduate students with identified mentors. Choosing to conduct qualitative research was also a limitation, because it is not generalizable. I wanted to tell the stories of a select few students to share their perspective. Additionally, I wanted to help student affairs professionals understand their perspectives, and why their work should not always be focused on undergraduates.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definition or terms that are important to understanding the current study:

**Black/African American.** A person of African descent residing in America. For the purposes of this study participants will be referred to as Black.

**Cross-race mentoring.** Mentoring that occurs when mentors of a specific race/culture serve as mentors to students of another race/culture (Jucovy, 2002).
Understanding Mentoring Relationships

**Culture.** A convenient label for knowledge, skill, and attitudes that are learned and passed on from one generation to the next (Segall, 1979).

**Mentor.** A process by which a person of experience counsels, guides and facilitates the intellectual and/or career development of the protégé (Blackwell, 1989).

**Protégé/Mentee.** One who is being mentored (Blackwell, 1989).

**Race.** The group a person belongs to as a result of a mix of features such as skin color and hair texture, which reflect ancestry and geographical origins, as identified by others, or self-identified (Bhopal, 2004).

**Retention.** Student attainment of academic and personal goals, regardless to how long the student is in college (Seidman, 2005).

**Same-race mentoring.** Mentoring that occurs within the same racial and ethnic background (Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997).

**Summary**

This study focused on the effects mentoring has on Black male graduate students. Chapter one comprised of an outline of what information the reader can expect to receive from this study, the reason why the study is being conducted, and limitations that may be present in the study. Chapter two will provide more detailed literature about Black males in higher education, mentorship, both same-race and cross-race. Chapter two also explored Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (2006), Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory of identity development, and William Cross’s (1991) theory of nigrescence in relation to mentoring Black males graduate students. Chapter three will contain the methods the researcher will use for this qualitative study.
Chapter II

Review of Literature

This chapter presents a review of literature pertaining to the mentoring experiences of Black male graduate students. The literature explores the history of Black males in higher education, mentoring, same-race mentoring, cross-race mentoring, and graduate student mentoring. This chapter will also explore Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (2006), Chickering and Reisser’s Theory of Identity Development (1993), and William Cross’s Theory of Nigrescence (1991) as it relates to mentoring graduate students. The purpose of this chapter is to gain a better understanding of Black males in higher education, and the role mentoring plays in their experience.

Black Males in Higher Education

Black males experience high levels of underachievement in higher education, and are disproportionately represented among those students who are forced to withdraw, underperform academically, and report negative college experiences (Cuyjet, 2006; Jenkins, 2006). Compared to other ethnic groups, the enrollment and completion rates for Black males in higher education are extremely low (Palmer, & Maramba, 2011). Although the number of Black men entering higher education has increased over past decades, Black men continue to lag far behind their Black women and White male counterparts (Noguera, 2003). Additionally, the number of Black males in higher education is still significantly low compared to the number of Black males in prison (Cuyjet, 2006; Palmer, & Maramba, 2011). About one in four Black males between the ages of 20 and 29 are incarcerated, on probation, or on parole. On the other hand, only one in five is enrolled in two-year or four-year institutions (Palmer, & Maramba, 2011).
The low percentage of Black male students at colleges and universities are lacking the support needed to complete college (Cuyjet, 2006; Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins (2006) stated that Black males are not being effectively served, and often start out with a disadvantage in the classroom. In as early as elementary education, teachers and counselors are more likely to impose negative expectations on Black males (Palmer, & Maramba, 2011). Teachers and counselors disproportionately track Black males into low academic ability classrooms, while their White counterparts are placed in advanced courses that prepare them for college (Palmer, & Maramba, 2011). Teachers, both Black and White, are often afraid to engage and interact in nurturing ways with Black males because of racial stereotypes that label black men as the villain, and often fail to provide them with a positive educational experience (Noguera, 1996). Despite the variety of negative experiences Black males may encounter in life, many do have strong interest in education, and mentoring plays a significant role in this interest (Jenkins, 2006).

Black male graduate students. There has been research conducted on the experience of Black males in higher education, but there has not been much attention devoted to Black males at the graduate level. There are a number of Black male students who decide to attend graduate school, but similar to Black male undergraduate students’ the retention and success rates are low (Brown et al., 1999). Strayhorn (2009) highlights the existing research such as; African American students in higher education, African American men in college, and graduate students in the United States, but he also addresses the lack of research pertaining to Black males enrolled in graduate school. According to Strayhorn (2009) educational aspiration, age and salary were associated with the low enrollment in and completion of graduate degree programs by Black males.
Strayhorn (2009) also found that Black men who had highly educated parents were more likely to enroll in and complete graduate school than those with less educated parents.

Most of the information about Black male graduate students is more anecdotal, where Black males share their own experiences in graduate programs. For example, McGowan, Palmer, Wood, and Hibbler (2016) included a collection of stories and narratives provided by Black males regarding their experiences in academia. McGowan’s (2016) narrative opened with him remembering his first grade teacher’s encouraging words “you are going to make it, you are the one” (p. 16). Even before college McGowan had mentors and role models such as church elders, teachers, principals, coaches and family members who encouraged him to be successful. At the time, of course, he didn’t know what it all meant, but it was those words of affirmation and encouragement from people who believed in him and saw his potential that inspired his success. As a first generation college student McGowan experienced culture shock, and often questioned if college was for him. It was the support he received from close friends and mentors that helped him persist through the challenges he faced, and played a big role in the completion of a PhD and becoming the first Black male to be granted a tenure-track faculty position in the College of Education at Indiana State University (Mcgowan, 2016).

McGowan et. al. (2016) provided a narrative of a Black male who realized he was mathematically inclined at a young age. As a kid Jett (2016) remembers being considered the “little whiz kid” in mathematics. Jett decided to attend Tennessee State University, a Historically Black College located in Nashville, Tennessee for both undergraduate and graduate school. While attending TSU Jett was heavily involved in the University Honors
Program, the New Direction Gospel Choir, and was a mathematics major. The mathematics department at TSU was culturally affirming for Jett, because there were three Black male mathematicians in the department that influenced his academic success. The primary influence on Jett’s experience was Dr. Jeanetta Williams-Jackson, a Black woman at the university. Dr. Williams-Jackson provided Jett with mentorship, and still to this day offers him words of wisdom when needed. His experience at TSU grounded him academically, spiritually, and culturally to pursue his PhD and his career in the academy.

Sawyer’s narrative was another that appeared in McGowan et. al. (2016). As a freshman in college Sawyer became concerned about the lack of Black resident assistants in his area, and after a conversation with the resident director he was convinced to apply. During training Sawyer met a Black resident director who changed his outlook on higher education, and let him know that he could make a career out of higher education. After his first year as a RA his girlfriend informed him she was pregnant and they were forced to move off campus because the university would not house a pregnant student. After a series of hardships Sawyer decided to take a leave of absence from school and enlisted into the army to provide a better life for his daughter. Sawyer was later injured and received an honorable discharge and decided to enroll back into college. After a conversation with a mentor he decided to switch from a nursing major to a psychology major to pursue a career in higher education. After graduating he received a job as an assistant resident director. Sawyer attended a Division of Student Affairs breakfast with the vice president of Student Affairs a few weeks into his employment. At the breakfast he discovered that the vice president of Student Affairs was a Black man. After the meeting Sawyer made it his business to get to know the vice president of Student Affairs.
He scheduled a meeting with him, and after a conversation with the vice president Sawyer was convinced that he should attend graduate school. The vice president ended the meeting with “you do know I won’t be in this position forever. We need young brothers to get graduate degrees so you all can take over and carry the torch” (p. 97). From that moment forward the vice president became a mentor to Sawyer, and pointed him in the direction of others who could help him along his professional career. He completed his master’s degree and later finished a PhD. He contributes his success to the guidance of peers mentors, and people who took a chance on his potential. Each of these stories reflects the importance of mentorship and having someone there to support them through their collegiate experience at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

**Mentorship**

The description of mentorship can be traced back as far as ancient Greek mythology to Homer’s Odyssey in which Mentor, an old and wise friend of Odysseus’s, was trusted to guide and tutor Telemachus while his father was away fighting the Trojan war (Chao, 1997). Mentoring, as defined by Blackwell (1989) is a process by which a person of experience counsels, guides and facilitates the intellectual and/or career development of the protégé. Mentoring categories may include faculty to student mentoring, peer mentoring, professional mentoring, and even faculty to faculty mentoring (Strayhorn, 2008). Additionally, mentoring can be formal or informal. Formal mentoring relationships are typically matched or assigned by a third party, and can last up to a year (Kram, 1988). According to Kram (1988) these relationships are usually short term and apply to the mentee’s current position. Informal mentoring relationships on the other hand are usually developed based on mutual interests or developmental needs (Kram,
Informal relationships are often unstructured and typically last longer than formal relationships (Kram, 1988). Some mentoring relationships last for years even after the student graduates. Mentees often look to their mentor for career and other advice even after graduation.

Davidson and Foster-Johnson (2001) argued that effective mentoring within a department could improve multicultural students’ graduate school experience. They proposed actions to help faculty members enhance their multicultural competence to become effective mentors. Davidson and Foster-Johnson (2001) stated that mentoring activities can be categorized into either psychosocial or instrumental. Psychosocial activities address the personal needs of the mentee by providing psychological or social support, and in some cases, both (Davidson, & Foster-Johnson, 2001). The goal of psychosocial activities, is to provide the mentee with support to improve sense of self and their social interactions within the environment (Davidson, & Foster-Johnson, 2001). Instrumental mentoring activities assist the mentee’s professional needs by providing access to career related services to enhance skills and professionalism (Davidson, & Foster-Johnson, 2001). Mentoring is extremely important to the success of students at colleges and universities because it plays an important role in retention and completion rates (Strayhorn, 2008). Students that have more interaction with faculty and staff perform better academically and have more positive experiences (Strayhorn, 2008). The benefits of mentoring can also include increased satisfaction and commitment.

Colleges and universities establish mentoring programs to support student’s needs and encourage their success in higher education. Many students who do not have role models in higher education may find it difficult to be successful. Blackwell (1989)
provided strategies for faculty to increase educational opportunities for minority students. He identified that mentoring attempts to eliminate those problems, as it encourages student-to-faculty relationships, provides positive role models, and helps students perform better academically. Mentoring has encouraged more minority students to continue in higher education, earn master’s degrees and even become professors and student affairs professionals (Blackwell, 1989). The presence of a role model is considered an important factor for Black male student retention, but there is a lack of Black faculty and staff for students to identify with at a PWI (Brittian et al., 2009). Without faculty and staff to identify with, Black students may find it difficult to establish a positive identity on campus. The presence of Black faculty and staff on campus helps students to identify individuals like themselves in leadership positions at their university, and it provides a more supportive environment for Black students (Brittian et al., 2009).

Additionally, support is required from faculty and staff who do not identify as Black. Morgan (1996) evaluated mentoring programs that targeted young Black men, and evidence has shown that when given the opportunity to participate in higher education, and when support systems are put in place to promote achievement, Black men have been more successful. Programs such as Black Men Think Tank at the University of Cincinnati, and 100 African American Men at Washington State University provide students’ with mentoring and forums to deal with issues affecting success in college. (Morgan, 1996).

**Same-race mentoring.** Advocates of same-race mentors believe that racial and ethnic backgrounds play a huge role in forming an effective mentor-mentee relationship. Without a similar racial background, it is believed that the mentoring match is incapable of achieving its full potential (Rhode et al., 2002). Advocates of same-race mentoring
also believe that if the mentor is not a representative of the mentee’s racial or ethnic background that he or she will subconsciously impose their racial values on the child. Some have argued that a White mentor may experience negative emotions such as guilt and defensiveness from the racial oppression of America, and those emotions may interfere with the development of mentor relationships (Foster, 1994; Tatum, 1992). It is also believed that racial and ethnic communities should help members of their community develop a sense of unity.

The mentoring of Black male students by other Black males is essential to the success of Black males in higher education. When Black students have positive role models it contributes to the learning environment (Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2010). To be successful Black students need to be able to identify with Black faculty and staff who promote education (Palmer et al., 2010). Black students need successful role models they can identify with to promote academic competence and self-esteem (Grant-Thompson, & Atkinson, 1997).

**Cross-race mentoring.** With the lack of Black faculty and staff employed at PWI, cross-race mentoring may be the only option for Black students. Although cross-race mentoring is frowned upon by some, it can be very beneficial (Jucovy, 2002). There is some evidence that Black students will perceive faculty and staff who are culturally responsive to be more culturally competent than one who is unresponsive, regardless of race. White faculty and staff who acknowledge cultural differences and obstacles, instead of projecting an image of colorblindness, are perceived as credible sources for Black students (Poston, Craine, & Atkinson, 1991). Advocates for cross-race mentoring understand the potential effects of culture on mentoring relationships, but they feel that
the qualities and actions of the mentors matter more than the race (Jucovy, 2002). As long as the mentor motivates and encourages their mentee to be secure with their own culture identity, then the racial or ethnic differences become transparent (Jucovy, 2002). Cross-race mentoring can help both the mentor and the mentee develop a more diverse perspective of the world, and break down racial barriers by exposing them to cultures that they may have never been exposed to (Jucovy, 2002). Jucovy (2002) found that race, in itself, does not play a role in the development of mentor-mentee relationships. They found that the effects of race on mentoring relationships are minute, and combined with other factors create the ultimate influence of mentoring.

White mentors have a burden to overcome when it comes to the mentoring of minority students (Dahlvig, 2010). Although White faculty and staff members have successfully mentored minorities, some Black students may experience difficulties developing a functional mentoring relationship with White faculty, due to the history of African Americans in the United States (Grant-Thompson, & Atkinson, 1997). In order for a cross-race mentoring relationship to work, both the mentor and the mentee must be open to diversity. In the relationship both sides must be comfortable with addressing racial issues (Johnson-Bailey, & Cervero, 2002). Mentors naturally seek to mold their mentees into what they want them to be, but for a cross-race mentoring relationship to work the mentor must understand and accept who the student is (Johnson-Bailey, & Cervero, 2002).

**Graduate Student Mentoring.** There has been much learned about the effects of mentoring at the undergraduate level, but very little about graduate level mentoring (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). Information about undergraduates cannot be applied to
graduate students because of the difference in age, career stage, life circumstance, finances, and reason for pursuing an education (Cooke, Sims, & Peyrefitte, 1995). Graduate student mentoring relationships, are as vital as undergraduate mentoring relationships because they can provide the student with sponsorship, protection, challenge, exposure, counseling, acceptance, confirmation, and coaching (Green & Bauer, 1995). Because there are often less formalized processes for graduate students to be paired with a mentor, many report that their relationships with faculty were the most important aspects in their completion of, and satisfaction with their graduate education (Blackwell, 1981). Mentors play an important role in the graduate experience because they can foster student development and success (Green & Bauer, 1995). Students typically attribute their academic success to personal ambition, supportive family and supportive faculty (Brown et al., 2010). Lechuga (2011) explored faculty mentors' perceived roles and responsibilities in their mentoring relationships with their graduate students. He found that one of the most important factors graduate students use to determine the quality of their graduate experience is their relationship with faculty mentors (Lechuga, 2011).

Graduate students typically face some of the same issues as undergraduate students, but some of those issues may be more complex. Mentoring programs exist to provide graduate students with structured interactions with faculty and administration, and are geared toward increasing the students' chance of degree program completion and career success (Brown et al., 1999). Brown et al. (1999) identified that institutions such as the University of California-Berkeley and The Ohio State University offered mentoring programs in an effort to attract, retain, and graduate students of color.
Furthermore, mentoring programs for graduate students of color that are not rooted in the institutional structure such as the mentoring program at Princeton University, and the Peabody Mentoring Program at Vanderbilt University provide students with additional professional development opportunities. Brown et al. goes on to state that there are a growing number of institutions across the nation that have mentoring programs to assist graduate students, specifically students of color, with the adjustment to graduate school. These programs are designed to also provide students with support outside of interactions with faculty and administration. Additionally, these programs provide the option for students to select faculty mentoring, peer mentoring, or both.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

There are many theoretical perspectives that have been associated with student mentoring, three of those theories have been identified to guide this study. Schlossberg’s (2006) Transition Theory, Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) Theory of Identity Development, and Cross’s (1991) Theory of Nigrescence provide insight into mentoring and the role it plays in graduate experiences for Black graduate students.

Schlossberg’s Theory of Transition. Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson (2006) defined a transition as “any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p.33). This theory of transition first developed by Schlossberg provides an explanation and understanding of students as they move through a transitional period while they are in college. The theory of transition examines what establishes a transition, the types, the transition process, and the influences of transitions (Goodman et al., 2006). Schlossberg identified that the transition process consisted of a major set of factors which influenced the individual’s ability to
handle the transition. The four factors are known as the 4 S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Situation.** The situation factor focuses on examining the transition (Goodman et al., 2006). There are many areas within a situation that are considered important when examining the transition including: the trigger of the transition, the timing of the transition, the controlling of the transition, whether there is a role change within the transition, the duration of the transition, if the person has experience with a similar transition, if multiple sources of stress are present, and assessment of the transition (Goodman et al., 2006). With graduate students the objects of focus may be slightly different from those of undergraduate students. For example, graduate students may be more invested and involved in their graduate coursework because they have intentionally sought to be in a particular career field and further their knowledge in that area. Further, they may be in Graduate Assistant roles which require them to serve in leadership or role-modeling positions. In this case a mentor could assist the student in their transition from undergraduate to graduate school and understanding the new situations they find themselves in.

**Self.** The important factors in relation to self are categorized into two classifications: personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources (Goodman et al., 2006). Personal and demographic characteristics refer to how the individual views life. This includes socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity (Goodman et al., 2006). Psychological resources include ego development, outlook, commitment and values, and spirituality (Goodman et al., 2006). A Black male graduate student who may have spent four or more years at an institution
may be very comfortable with who they are and are knowledgeable about the culture at the institution. Then, they enter a graduate program at a new institution and need to reestablish who they are within the context of a new institution, new program, and new community. Having a mentor who understands these different areas that may challenge the student and helping them maneuver through these experiences would be beneficial to the individual’s identity development.

**Support.** The support factor refers to the help the student receives throughout the transition period (Goodman et al., 2006). Support refers to social support such as: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities. Functions of support consist of affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback (Goodman et al., 2006). Support is needed as the student transitions; a mentor could provide the student with all functions of support to assist in the transition by offering friendship, constructed criticism, financial support and simply someone to talk to when needed.

**Strategies.** The strategies factor refers to the coping responses (Goodman et al., 2006). The coping responses fall into three categories: modifying the situation, controlling the problem and assisting those in the need of help (Goodman et al., 2006). Individuals may also employ four coping modes: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Goodman et al., 2006). The student may start to find the transition hard, coping mechanisms would be useful to help with obstacles the student may be facing. Having a mentor to guide the student to useful resources such as; counseling, career services, or any resources that will assist the student in their transition would be beneficial.
Chickering and Reisser’s Theory of Identity Development. In 1993, Chickering and Reisser published the revisions of Chickering’s 1969 theory of identity development. The theory is based on research Chickering conducted between 1959 and 1965 with white male students at the end of their sophomore and senior years. In the 1993 revision both men and women were considered in the study along with more racial diversity. The theory of identity development uses seven vectors to explain how individuals develop their identity. The seven vectors of identity development include: developing competency, managing emotions, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. The seven vectors are used as a map to help students where they are and with what direction they are heading (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students move at different rates through Chickering and Reisser’s theory of identity, and they can be in more than one vector at a time (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Developing competency. Vector one of Chickering and Reisser’s theory of identity development is developing competency. This vector focuses on intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Intellectual competence is based on the ability to use critical thinking skills and create new ideas (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Physical and manual competence comes through athletic and recreational activities, and involvement in artistic and manual activities (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Interpersonal competence includes skills in communication, leadership, and working with others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Pursing a Master’s degree can be challenging, especially in the beginning stages as the student transitions into graduate school. The student may be questioning if they are
smart enough for graduate school, who their friends are, or adjusting into their graduate assistantship. During this time of development, the graduate student may ask a lot of questions to their mentor and seek guidance. A mentor may be able to assist a graduate student who is developing competence by providing them with support and resources that would enhance the skills they possess and help them develop new competencies.

**Managing Emotions.** The second vector, managing emotions involves an increasing awareness of the students’ feelings (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In this vector the student is recognizing and accepting emotions and appropriately expressing and controlling them. The student also learns to act on feelings in a responsible manner (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Graduate school can be a very emotional process for some individuals. Trying to balance academics, work, and developing social groups at the graduate level may be more challenging than anticipated. Individuals who decided not to attend their undergraduate institution for graduate school may struggle getting acclimated to a new environment. For a graduate student in the managing emotions vector a mentor can provide advice and outlets on how to manage those situations and their emotions.

**Developing Through Autonomy toward Interdependence.** Vector three, developing through autonomy toward interdependence focuses on developing interdependence when creating personal goals, identifying resources and problem solving (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). A student in this vector will start to make the decisions without needing approval from anyone. The student that decided to attend an institution different from their undergraduate institution may now be familiar with campus and the campus culture and ask less questions of a mentor. The student has gotten the support they needed from their mentor and they are now ready for development in other areas and
may seek out the mentor for more advanced developmental tasks (i.e. vocational direction).

**Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships.** The fourth vector, developing mature interpersonal relationships, includes development of intercultural and interpersonal tolerance and accepting differences, and the ability to have healthy intimate relationships with partners and close friends (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In this vector relationships are becoming meaningful to the individual. The individual in the vector is starting to realize that they can benefit from both cross-race and same-race mentoring. A cross-race mentoring relationship could expose the student to a different culture and assist the student in accepting the differences of other cultures. The relationships they are developing with their mentors may transition to a deeper level where they are seen as a confidant and trusted friend.

**Establishing Identity.** Vector five, establishing identity is based on the student’s experience and the ability to experiment with new decision making skills (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Some growth within previous vectors is required for the student to start establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). According to Chickering and Reisser (1993) identity includes being comfortable with one’s body, gender and sexual orientation, cultural heritage, lifestyle, being receptive to constructive criticism, and self-acceptance (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). A mentor could assist with this development by accepting the student as they are and helping the student to reject the identities that may be given to them, and support them in the process of establishing their new identity.

**Developing Purpose.** Developing purpose is vector six. In vector six the student decides what direction they want their life to go in through assessment and clarification
of interest, educational and career options, and lifestyle preference (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). It is often assumed that a graduate student may have an idea of what career they want to pursue, but this is not always true. Some may have an idea of what career field they would want to pursue, but may not be sure what exactly they want to do. For instance, the student may be interested in a career in Business, but cannot choose between management and accounting. A mentor could help the student understand how their interest relates to their career choices.

**Developing Integrity.** Vector seven, developing integrity allows for the student's core values and beliefs to provide the foundation for guiding behavior and interpreting experience (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Most individuals acquire their morals and beliefs from parents, school, church, and other sources. In this vector the students move away from value systems dictated by others and move toward establishing their own personal values (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). At this point in the mentoring relationship the mentor and mentee are equal. Both the mentor and mentee are comfortable enough to challenge each other's views.

**Cross’s Theory of Nigrescence.** William Cross introduced the Theory of Nigrescence in 1971. He reintroduced his theory in 1991 in his book, *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity*. The word nigrescence is a French term that refers to the process of becoming black. Cross believed that nigrescence was a re-socializing experience where an individual moved from non-Afrocentrism to Afrocentrism to multiculturalism. The theory of nigrescence is made up of five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization commitment (Cross, 1991).
Pre-Encounter. People in the pre-encounter stage hold attitudes that are generally race neutral. In this stage little emphasis is given to race and people focus on other aspects of their lives (Cross, 1991). There are some people who believe that being Black is very important, and others that may hold an attitude of anti-Blackness (Cross, 1991). People do not acknowledge race as something that has affected their lives in the pre-encounter stage (Cross, 1991). A Black male graduate student in the pre-encounter stage may be open to both same-race and cross-race mentoring, or the individual with the anti-black attitude may be resistant to mentoring from someone who identifies as Black. The student may test the mentor to see what the mentor has to offer, and depending on the encounter the student may or may not return to the mentor.

Encounter. The encounter stage happens when the individual experiences an event that shapes their views of their race (Cross, 1991). An encounter can be an unexpected situation, which can be one upsetting experiences or a series of events that prompts a turning point. A black male graduate student who has encountered a traumatic experience may now be resistant to cross-race mentoring.

Immersion-Emersion. The immersion-emersion stage has two processes, immersion and emersion (Cross, 1991). During the immersion process the individual will become deeply immersed in the black culture and develop a pro-black identity, which embraces everything black and opposes white culture (Cross, 1991). A Black male graduate student in the immersion will likely surround themselves by people who they can identify with, and may only seek out mentoring from individuals who identify as Black.
In emersion the individual begins their transition toward the internalization stage by reassessing the affective and cognitive aspects of black identity (Cross, 1991). The individual moves beyond the superficial characteristics of the immersion phase, and adapts a more selfless understanding of black identity (Cross, 1991). Although the immersion-emersion stage is the influential transition point, in some cases regression toward pre-encounter can occur when individuals have a negative experience. A Black graduate student in the emersion stage understands the importance of being mentored by someone of the same race and takes advantage of the benefits.

**Internalization.** In the internalization stage the individual is working through the challenges and problems of a new identity (Cross, 1991). The individual begins to critically think about their new found identity and how it shapes their lives. They are more secure and self-confident with their Black identity (Cross, 1991). A Black graduate student in the internalization stage may start to realize that they can benefit from both same race and cross-race mentoring, if it leads to further challenge, support, and development of the individual’s identity. The student will seek out mentors who will support their further development of an internalized identity and help them when they may be challenged by new perspectives and issues that cause them to slide back in to the immersion/emersion stages.

**Internalization-Commitment.** The internalization-commitment stage focuses on the long term interest (Cross, 1991). The individual is able to find and participate in their community in meaningful ways (Cross, 1991). They are also able to understand Black and other cultural group’s issues and act in positive ways to create change. Some individuals may reach the internalizations-commitment stage but remain in emersion. A
Black graduate student in the internalization-commitment stage may no longer look at race as a determining factor for mentoring, and they understand that they can benefit in many ways from any kind of mentoring.

Summary

The research presented has examined the experience of Black males in higher education. The research also explored mentorship, both same-race and cross-race, and mentoring relationships for graduate students. Schlossberg's (2006) Transition Theory, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Theory of Identity Development, and Cross's (1991) Theory of Nigrescence were explored to provide insight to the reason behind mentoring and the role it plays in graduate experiences for Black graduate students. The literature supports the importance and the need for mentor relationships for Black male graduate students. Black males face many obstacles in higher education, and mentoring has served as a strong resource for retaining and graduating Black males.
Chapter III

Methods

This chapter explores the methods of this study. This study utilized a qualitative approach to understand the role mentoring plays in Black male graduate student’s decision to attend graduate school? How Black male graduate students describe their mentoring relationships? How are mentoring relationships established and managed? How satisfied are Black male graduate students with their mentoring relationships? This chapter includes a detailed description of the study design, participants, research site, instrument, data collection, treatment of data, and data analysis.

Design of Study

This study used a qualitative approach to assess mentoring relationship for black graduate students. Qualitative research studies investigate the quality of relationships, activities, and situations which puts greater emphasis on describing the information (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). Qualitative researchers seek to understand the experiences that participants have to related studies. Qualitative research focuses on the quality of information rather than the quantity (Fraenkel et al., 2011). The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with Black males who are recent graduates of Master’s programs to get a more personal and in depth knowledge of their mentoring experience.

Participants

The target population for this study was Black males who completed a Master’s degree from a midsized Midwestern institution. The selection of participants was purposive to ensure that the sample suits the intent of the study. To be a participant in this
study the participants must have identified as: (1) Black or African American, (2) male, (3) a recent graduate (1-5 years) of any Master’s degree program at one Midwestern university, (4) currently or recently in a mentoring relationship. A list of recent graduates fitting this description was provided by the Office of Minority Affairs on campus who tracks students during and after degree completion. From the list, participants were randomly selected and received an email (Appendix A) invitation to participate in the study. Once they agreed to participate a copy of the consent form (Appendix B) was be sent to them. Participants printed off the consent, signed it, and electronically sent it back to the researcher prior to the interview. The researcher selected participants who received mentoring in graduate school, because they have experiences they can reflect on related to this study.

Five participants were selected to participate in this study. Participants received master’s degrees from a variety of programs offered at the institution. To protect their identity, each participant was provided a pseudonym. Participants included:

**Angelo:** is a Black male who was a 2014 graduate of the Training and Development master’s program in the Technology department at the institution of study. He also received his bachelor’s degree from the institution of study. Upon graduation Angelo received a job offer as a Human Resources Manager for a large retail corporation.

**Travis:** is a Black male who was a 2013 graduate of the College Student Affairs master’s program at the institution of study. He also received his bachelor’s at the same institution. Upon graduation he received a job offer as a fifth grade elementary school teacher at an all-boys school.
Corey: is a Black male who was a 2011 graduate of the Business Administration master’s program and a 2015 graduate of the College Student Affairs master’s program at the institution of study. He also received his bachelor’s degree from the institution. Upon graduation Participant 3 received a job as a manager for a home improvement center, and is currently an academic counselor at a Midwestern institution.

Charles: is a Black male who was a 2014 graduate of the Technology Management master’s program at the institution of study. He also received his bachelor’s degree from the institution. Upon graduation Participant 4 received a job offer as a counselor at a Midwestern institution, and currently is a housing professional at a different Midwestern institution.

Kenney: is a Black male who was a 2014 graduate of Kinesiology and Sports Studies master’s program at the institution of study. He was a community college transfer student and received his bachelor’s degree from the institution of study. Upon graduation Participant 5 received a job offer as an Academic Advisor at a Midwestern institution.

Research Site

Because research was conducted with individuals who are no longer located geographically in the same space, interviews were conducted face to face via an online application (i.e. SKYPE®). Participants were contacted through email, where the process for the interviews was explained and asked to participate. Those agreeing to participate were asked to complete a consent form that was then sent back to the researcher prior to the interview. A meeting time was set where the participant and researcher could speak in private and free of distractions.
Instrument

Qualitative researchers typically obtain data through interview, observations and focus groups (Fraenkel et al., 2011). Semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) were conducted with each participant. The researcher served as the interviewer, and therefore served as the instrument. Researcher’s bias was prevented by using bracketing. Research bracketing requires the researcher to set aside their own beliefs, values, and thoughts during the study (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). The researcher conducted interviews with all participants to gain a more in-depth view of the participant’s experience with mentoring. A consent form and (Appendix D) was given to all participants, followed by the interview that consisted of open ended questions guided by the research questions.

Data Collection

For data collection the researcher interviewed five participants selected from the target population via SKYPE®. Interviews lasted between 25-30 minutes, and the interview location was free of distractions for both the participant and interviewer. The interviews were video recorded, transcribed, and coded. The transcriptions will be used to find commonalities in student’s experiences with mentorship.

Data Analysis

The researcher reviewed each interview recording and created a transcript. Before reviewing the transcription, the researcher sent transcriptions to each participant to verify answers from the interview. After transcriptions were reviewed the researcher coded each transcription, and data was separated by theme. To do this, the researcher underlined words and phrases stated by the participants that supported the research questions, these quotes were arranged by content and common themes were developed from them.
According to Saldana (2013) a code in qualitative research is “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p.3). To reduce bias and receive a more accurate analysis of the participant’s interviews the researcher’s thesis chair also reviewed all transcriptions and independently coded the transcripts.

**Treatment of Data**

All data collected from participants over the course of this study was kept confidential and secured according to protocol listed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All information collected was stored and secured on the researcher’s personal computer. The computer was password protected by a code only the researcher knew. Additionally, each participant in this study received a pseudonym to insure confidentiality. The transcribed data from the interviews was only reviewed by the researcher, the thesis committee, and the participants.

**Summary**

This chapter explained the qualitative research method that was used to conduct research for this study. Participants of the study were purposefully selected to ensure the intent of the study. Each participant participated in a semi-structured SKYPE® interviews. Interviews were conducted to provide insight on the mentoring experiences for Black male graduate students. Chapter IV will provide the findings of the interviews.
Chapter IV

Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore the mentoring experiences of Black Male graduate students. This chapter discusses the findings from the study. The collected results were analyzed to understand how they would relate to the research questions. Four research questions guided this study: how did Black male alumni describe their mentoring relationships; what role mentoring played in Black male graduate student’s decision to attend graduate school; how mentoring relationships were established and managed for Black males in graduate school; and how satisfied were Black male students with their mentoring relationships while they were in graduate school? They will be analyzed below.

The Role of Mentoring in the Decision to Attend Graduate School

Each Participant was asked to share what role mentoring played in their decision to attend graduate school. All participants were in different graduate programs, meaning they came from different perspectives. Although they come from different viewpoints there were some commonalities in their responses regarding how they were assisted in the decision to pursue graduate school. These themes include: coached toward graduate school, unintentional influence, or fraternity membership

Coached. Participants discussed how they identified being coached by a mentor. Travis, who was working in the student activities office, shared a story about how his supervisor helped him make the decision to attend graduate school. On the drive back from a conference hosted by the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) a conversation took place between the two. He stated:
We were driving back from NACA my senior year, and we were talking about what I was going to do after graduation and I told her “I didn’t know, I’m an African American studies major, write a book.” She told me to look into the College Student Affairs program. If it wasn’t for her saying those words to me I wouldn’t have attended graduate school.

Angelo also mentioned that his mentor guided him to and coached him through his graduate program. He mentioned a phone call that took place between the two because he was about to graduate with his Bachelor’s degree and was unprepared for what was going to happen next. During the phone call they discussed career goals, and his mentor had the experience and resources to push him in the right direction. Charles stated that he had a mentor who encouraged him to attend graduate school, but also had other people who helped him realize that graduate school was the best decision for him.

Unintentional influence. Corey, who received his graduate degrees in both Business Administration and College Student Affairs, talked about his mentors having very little direct influence on the actual decision to attend graduate school. It is important to also note that the two advisors that Corey identified were both White men. Outside of career advice they never really had conversations about furthering his career. Although they didn’t have any influence on his decision, they influenced him in other ways. He shared:

They unknowingly influenced me to be a mentor to others, which ultimately led me to want to work in higher education. My professor, he made me want to teach in business because it took me so long to find a mentor as a young man of color. I
believe that had there been a professor of color I would have had a mentor much earlier.

Kenney also mentioned that his mentors had nothing to do with his decision to attend graduate school. All of his mentors were peers and he decided to attend before they did, so he became more of an influence to them in that aspect.

**Fraternity membership.** Four of the participants were members of historically Black fraternities as undergraduates, thus they identify this as having a major influence on their decision to attend graduate school. When participants were asked how a mentor was involved in their decision to attend graduate, they indicated that fraternity membership and peer mentorship through the organization was involved in some capacity. Charles shared:

I actually attended grad school before my mentor. I mean he always encouraged me to get my master’s degree, but eventually I became a member of his fraternity and there were different people in the organization who encouraged me to go to graduate school. There was one brother who was in graduate school at the time and he always encouraged younger brothers to go to graduate school. His goal was to get as many brothers as he could to attend graduate school.

Angelo shared how his mentor, who was a member of his fraternity, was a graduate of the same program. His mentor guided him to the program and assisted him with what he needed to successfully complete the program.

Kenney had a slightly different experience involving membership in a fraternity.

Two of my undergraduate mentors were in an organization that I wanted to join, but things did not work out, so I joined in graduate school. That wasn’t the main
reason I attended graduate school, but it was definitely a bonus. The fraternity had a graduate chapter and my mentors were members so that added fuel to the flame. Kenney identified that he was partially motivated to attend graduate school to become involved in the fraternity.

Defining and Describing Mentoring Relationships

In order to understand participants’ view of mentoring relationships as they described them, it was important to gain a better understanding of their definitions of mentoring. Participants were asked to first define what they thought it meant to be a mentor, then they were asked to describe their mentoring relationships. There were some similarities in how participants defined mentoring and how they described their mentoring relationships.

Defining Mentoring Relationships. Although defining mentorship was not a research question that guided this study, there was some interesting information that emerged through conversations with the participants. Each participant was asked to provide their definition of what they thought mentoring was, and although participants responded in different ways, there were some commonalities. The three themes that emerged from defining mentoring were: guidance, resourceful, and genuine.

Guidance. Guidance was the most common theme that emerged when defining mentorship. Four of the participants described guidance as a predictor of a good mentoring relationship. Angelo stated:

A mentor is someone I would say is an example professionally and academically that you look up to, someone you can see yourself within. Someone you can confide in and get advice from. Someone that could take you under their wing and
pretty much layout a possible blueprint for you and give you well educated
suggestions to where you should go in life professionally, personally and
academically.

And Corey shared:

I believe that a mentor is someone who is there as a support system to their
mentee. They help lead them down the path that would produce better results than
if they had not had someone there to assist them.

Travis stated “using your experience to guide and help someone else through theirs.” He
also gave an interesting prospective on guidance and mentoring. He stated:

Having a mentor can be a good or bad thing. People in the hood are mentored
every day you mean to tell me that guy who left school to sell drugs wasn’t
mentored by the drug dealer? He was mentored, it’s just about the type of fruit
you are giving people, you can either give them something to nourish them or kill
them off.

Kenney defined it from the perspective of being the mentor. Kenney shared, “mentoring
is providing guidance, resources, and accessibility. You know? Just a willingness to help
that person who reaches out to you for mentorship.”

Resourceful. Resourceful was another common theme that emerged when
defining mentoring. Angelo in defining the role of a mentor spoke about how the mentor
should be prepared and knowledgeable so they can be a good resource, stating:

Someone who’s professional and academic resume is worth looking at, they
actually did what they are talking about, they have the characteristics as well as
the experience to speak on those topics, if they don’t have it then there is no point in them leading you if they don’t have it themselves.

Kenney defined mentoring as “having the time and the ability to provide resources.”

**Genuine.** Genuine was another theme that emerged as participants defined mentoring. Participants spoke about how the relationship needed to be genuine and not forced where the mentor and mentee can be honest with one another. Corey stated:

I believe that a mentoring relationship is good when it is built genuinely and the mentee leaves the conversation with new knowledge and heightened motivation to succeed. Also, when both participants of the mentoring relationship are comfortable with the other and share openly and honestly the relationship can be beneficial to both.

Charles defined the relationship as “mentoring, I look at it as like an older sibling. Someone who can take you under their wing and not just show you things, but they walk a good walk too.” Travis also mentioned that a mentoring relationship should be like a relationship one would have with a family member. He also explained that a mentoring relationship should be based on honesty in order for it to remain genuine.

**Describing Mentoring Relationships.** Participants were asked to describe their mentoring relationships. Some of the themes that emerged from defining mentoring also emerged when participants described their own relationships. Empowering was also a theme that emerged when participants described their mentoring relationships.

**Guidance.** In describing mentoring relationships, Angelo stated “If I had any problems, troubles, questions, or I needed some advice about my personal life, academic life or professional life I would go to those individuals because I knew they would
provide me with the guidance I needed.” Corey mentioned that his mentors were extremely supportive in helping him choose career paths, provided him with access to professionals, and answering questions he had. Corey, who defined a mentoring relationship to be similar to a relationship one would have with a family member, described a story of how his mentor guided him. He stated,

I was about to get in trouble, I was doing things I shouldn’t have been doing in the residence halls. At the time I was young and I didn’t make the best decisions. It took for my Resident Assistant to sit me down and talk me through it, and for me to take college more seriously and to take rules more seriously. He didn’t take an authoritative role, he talked to me like a little brother. I held that near and dear, and our relationship developed from there.

**Resourceful.** Travis discussed all the resources that were provided by many of his mentors, but for one professor specifically he stated:

I was being proactive, so one day after class I went to talk to him and throughout my college career this dude helped me so much. From proofreading my papers and checking me on how I was writing, and even loaning me money.

Travis also stated:

That’s what helped me, seeking out older people on campus to help me navigate. I mean, you know being in the [college town] everyone is broke. I didn’t even know that you could charge dining dollars to your dining card and your financial aid would pick it up the following semester. I didn’t know that until someone told me that, so mentors are good for academic reasons, socially, mentally, and all around.
Corey discussed the career and professional development resources that his mentors were able to provide him with. He stated, “They were very helpful, helping me choose career paths, providing me with access to professionals, and answering questions I had.” Kenney discussed in general about how the mentor has the time and the ability to provide resources. He stated, “I would say a good mentoring relationship would be someone who is accessible, that’s number one. The mentor needs to be able to provide guidance and resources.”

**Empowering.** Empowering was the final theme that emerged from how participants described their mentoring relationships. Each participant shared descriptions of ways they had been empowered by a mentor. In their description they each emphasized how important it was for a mentor to empower their mentee. Travis sums this up best:

I thought about quitting a lot just because I felt like I had more to give the world than being in grad school at the time. My graduate school instructor, she shared a lot of stories. I doubted myself a lot in grad school. It’s a lot of work and especially my thesis, I spent hours in the library just doing papers. At times it felt like it would never end, and she saw me through it just by telling me I was as good as I was. Sometimes you need that, you need somebody to tell you that you are great and she did. She assured me that my idea for my thesis was great and like having somebody else agree with you with something you are doubting in your mind it’s a powerful thing especially somebody on her level.

Charles discussed how he went to graduate school right after graduating from the undergraduate level, and how he didn’t feel he should have been there. His mentors
helped by allowing him to grow in different capacities and putting him in leadership positions to assist him in doing such.

**Establishing Mentoring Relationships**

Participants were asked a series of questions to gauge how they established mentoring relationships. There were two themes that emerged from those questions; intentional selection and peer mentoring. Many of these relationships were started during the time participants were in undergraduate, but they lasted through graduate school and the completion of their master’s degrees.

**Intentional Selection.** Participants were asked if they’ve ever intentionally selected a mentor. Some participants indicated that they did intentionally select. Travis stated:

> Yes, I have intentionally selected a mentor, smart people do. A mentor of mine told me you want to hang around or associate yourself with people who are on your level or doing better than you. Not saying you should look down on people who are not on your level, but you want to have a benchmark to look at. So I intentionally sought out mentors at a young age.

Corey mentioned that he felt the need to seek out mentors after not having one for so long. He wanted more insight in his field of study and how to plan for life after graduation. Initially in his search, Corey sought out mentors of color, but due to the lack of faculty of color in the department he developed a relationship with a white professor. Kenney also indicated that he intentionally selected his mentors. He believed that you had to be intentional when selecting a mentor. He stated, “finding people who are in a career
field you aspire to be in helps guide you to that specific field, or if you are already in the field they can help you be more successful."

**Peer Mentoring.** Most participants mentioned that in establishing mentoring relationships they started with peers, but the relationships stuck throughout graduate school. Angelo stated that his mentors were peers, mainly people who were older than he was in the fraternity. He was attracted to these people because they were like-minded individuals who were in leadership positions on campus. Travis mentioned that many of his mentors were people who he looked up to and associated himself with on a social level. He described a mentoring relationship he developed with a fellow grad student who originally offered financial advice, but the relationship continued to grow.

Charles also spoke about his peers that participated in fraternity life who became his mentors. His Resident Assistant, who was his first mentor, was a member of a fraternity that he pledged shortly after their relationship developed. His membership in that organization opened the door for mentoring relationships both inside the organization, and with other members of fraternity and sorority life. Kenney talked about his experience as a transfer student. During his transition he got involved in different organizations on campus. In those organizations he met peers who were in leadership positions who he looked up to. After joining those organizations, those individuals soon became his mentors and those relationships continue today.

**Satisfaction with Mentoring Relationships**

Participants were asked questions to measure their satisfaction with their mentoring relationships, especially those developed and maintained during graduate school. Overall participants were very satisfied with the experiences they had with
mentors. When asked how effective they thought their mentoring relationships were to their educational experience, all participants attributed their success to mentoring. Angelo stated:

I can’t emphasize enough how if I didn’t have those relationships and bonds with any of those guys, I know for a fact that I wouldn’t be where I am today, and I probably wouldn’t have gone to graduate school.

Charles also attributed his success to his mentoring relationships, stating:

Without them I wouldn’t be where I am right now. I attribute a lot of my success to their interactions and taking the time out to help me be successful. I really appreciate everything they have done for me. They took in someone who didn’t know what he was going to do with his life and helped me to get here.

Kenney, who was a transfer student, also thought his relationships were very effective and explained:

I think they really helped me get to where I needed to go. To find people who believe in me was very impactful. So I think mentorship was definitely a major key in my success in college, both undergraduate and graduate.

Travis discussed his experience about being black and going to a predominantly White institution. Seeking out people who had knowledge and were successful made him want to push through. He stated “I never thought about dropping out because the people who were my mentors told me I was supposed to do what I was doing.” Corey talked about how satisfied he was with his mentors for guiding him in the right direction. He stated “They were helpful in giving me guidance and confidence in my decisions. Having
someone to talk things out with was really helpful, and having someone to point me to
the resources I needed was even more helpful.”

Summary

Chapter IV provided the analysis of the research questions that guided this study.
Participants were given the chance to reflect on their mentoring experience and the role it
played in their success through graduate school. Each participant had different
experiences, but there were some commonalities in those relationships. The results found
in this chapter will be elaborated upon in the discussion section in Chapter V.
Chapter V

Discussion

The intent of this study was to explore the mentoring relationships of Black male graduate students. The researcher examined how mentoring relationships are established and managed, how satisfied Black male graduate students were with their mentoring relationships, and how mentoring played a role in the students’ decision to attend graduate school.

Four research questions guided this study: how did Black Male alumni describe their mentoring relationships; what role did mentoring play in Black male graduate student’s decision to attend graduate; how were mentoring relationships established and managed for Black males in graduate school; and how satisfied were Black male students with their mentoring relationships while they were in graduate school? This chapter also provides recommendations for Black male students and student affairs professionals working with this population of students. This chapter will also provide suggestions for future research.

Black males face many challenges in higher education including poor retention and graduation rates (Cuyjet, 2006; Jenkins, 2006). There is a disproportionate representation of Black male students reporting negative college experiences. Even at the graduate level, the retention and success rates for Black male students remain low. Mentoring has been proven to be a resource that is beneficial in the success of college students, and serves as an important factor in increasing retention and graduation rates of Black males (Strayhorn, 2008). Mentors provide students with resources, motivation, support, and opportunities that retain them through graduation. It has been proven that
students who have more interaction with faculty and staff perform better academically, and these students also report having more positive college experiences (Strayhorn, 2008). The benefits of mentoring often include increased satisfaction and commitment. Blackwell (1989) stated that mentoring has encouraged Black males to continue in higher education, earn master's degrees and even become professors and student affairs professionals.

At the graduate level many students become mentors themselves, and it is often forgotten that these graduate students need mentoring just as much as the undergraduate students that they are now mentoring. Most of the participants in this study reported maintaining relationships with their undergraduate mentors. This could be related to the fact that all of the participants completed their graduate work at the same institution they did their undergraduate degree, which may be a limitation to the study but is also worth further investigation. Mentoring plays a role in success beyond the undergraduate level. Mentoring relationships at the graduate level are just as vital as undergraduate mentoring relationships. The mentorship process is often less formalized for graduate students, so many students attribute their completion of and satisfaction with their graduate education to faculty members in the graduate department.

The role of mentoring in the decision to attend graduate school. The results of this study revealed three themes related to mentoring and Black male's decision to attend graduate school: being coached, unintentional influence, and fraternity membership. As identified in Blackwell (1989) mentoring has encouraged more minority students to continue in higher education, earn master's degrees and even become professors and student affairs professionals. Most of the participants in this research reported being
coached by a mentor in their decision to attend graduate school. The participants who reported being coached also stated that they would have never known about their program or thought about attending graduate school if their mentor had not mentioned it to them. As undergraduate students, the participants established these mentoring relationships, allowing the mentors to get to know them and thus investing in them as people and encouraging them to seek out opportunities for further education. Travis was a student worker in an office when his mentor began to talk about what he would do after graduation; and, with no clear plan Travis’ mentor began talking with him about graduate school.

Four of the five participants of this study were members of historically Black fraternities, two of them were members as undergraduates and two became members during graduate school. Of the participants who were members of a historically Black fraternity each cited being coached by a mentor who was a member of a historically Black fraternity. The two participants who were members as undergraduate students joined the organizations because their mentors were also members, and those relationships continued, but they met other members who became mentors. For the two who joined during graduate school, the story was pretty much the same. They had mentors who were members during undergraduate, and those relationships influenced the participants to attend graduate school and then join the organization. These relationships play a major role in the participant’s decision to attend graduate school.

**Defining and describing mentoring relationships.** In response to the second research question the results revealed four categories that expressed how Black males described their mentoring relationships. The categories included; guidance, resourceful,
genuine, and empowering. The definition of mentoring that guided this study was “A process by which a person of experience counsels, guides and facilitates the intellectual and/or career development of the protégé” (Blackwell, 1989, p. 10). Although this research did not specifically seek to identify how participants defined mentoring, they were asked what their definition of mentoring was and their definitions aligned with the experiences they had with their mentors. When defining mentoring, participants in this study defined it as the mentor providing the mentee with guidance, resources and the relationship being genuine. Similarly, when describing their mentoring relationships, participants reported receiving guidance and their mentors being resourceful; rather than talking about the relationship as being genuine, participants described their mentoring relationships as empowering.

All participants talked about guidance when defining or describing their mentoring relationship. They shared examples and stories about how they could go to their mentors for advice about personal, academic, and their professional life and how the mentor would guide them in the right direction. Other examples of ways the mentors guided included providing career counseling and just helping them through personal situations they encountered. Some of the participants talked about how their mentor was a guide because they had been through the same or similar experiences and they could relate to one another through that experience. When talking about resources, participants described how their mentors were able to provide and direct them to resources.

**Establishing mentoring relationships.** Participants described how mentoring relationships were established for Black males through intentional selection and peer mentoring. The participants who reported intentionally selecting mentors understood the
importance of having a mentor early, and how it would benefit them not only in their academics but also in their personal life and career choices. Participants spoke of seeking out their mentors for various reasons, like needing someone to provide insight or support, or because they had mentors previously and knew the importance of having someone to guide them. For example, Kenney knew that he needed to find mentors in his career field to help guide him into success, so he intentionally sought out successful people in his area of interest. For other participants they stated that they wished they would have established mentoring relationships earlier.

Most of the participants shared that they had never participated in formal mentoring programs. They felt that formal mentoring relationships were not as organic as informal relationships and they did not last long. The participants in this study spoke about developing genuine relationships with individuals that led to intentional mentoring relationships. A few participants even described the relationship with a mentor as being equivalent to a family member. Charles talked about how a mentor should be like an older sibling, someone you would call a role model and look up to. Through this mutually established and genuine relationships participants felt that their mentors were then able to empower them. When the mentors took time to really know them as individuals they were then able to encourage the student to reach for goals they previously may have thought were unattainable. Participants spoke about being pushed through the rough times, being supported when challenged by graduate school, and seeking out leadership positions because their mentor was telling them to and supporting them through these experiences.
Satisfaction with mentoring relationships. Participants were asked how satisfied they were with their mentoring relationships. To say that they were highly satisfied would be an understatement. Majority of the participants attributed their success in graduate school and beyond to their mentors. They all shared multiple stories about how their mentor has gotten them to where they are today. The participants acknowledged that these relationships provided them with a sense of direction in their lives that they wouldn’t have had received otherwise. Along with the high satisfaction rates, participants also mentioned their continuous communication with their mentors. Most of the participants reported still having communications with their mentors and have maintained those relationships to this day. These mentoring relationships were not just a one-time one place thing, but an investment in a person and their career, their life and ultimately them as a human. These relationships continue on long after their undergraduate or graduate school days, and evolve into lifelong friendships and mutually balanced relationships. Additionally, all participants reported being a mentor to someone now. They had positive experiences, and they want to provide someone with those same opportunities.

Implications from this study

Mentoring relationships are an important aspect for graduate student success. These relationships are just as important as undergraduate mentoring relationships, but information about undergraduates cannot be applied to graduate students because of the difference in age, career stage, life circumstance, finances, and reason for pursuing an education (Cooke, Sims, & Peyrefitte, 1995). After reflecting on the findings of the current study, the following are implications to improve mentoring opportunities for
Black male students. The findings from this research can help both students and professionals understand the importance of mentoring, and ways to provide Black male students with opportunities to receive mentorship.

**Students**

- Black males must seek mentoring as early as possible. Black males are most successful when they seek out mentoring relationships. Seeking mentors as early as possible provides students with guidance and helps the student to have a sense of belonging and create success.

- Black males need to seek out organizations where they are more likely to be paired with a peer or advisory mentor, and become actively engaged. Many of the participants mentioned positive mentoring experiences in National Pan-Hellenic fraternal organizations, and these organizations provide Black men with a great network of people that will help them long after their undergraduate experiences. Participants also mentioned organizations like Black Student Union and NAACP. These organizations also serve as a support system for Black students.

**Faculty**

- Faculty and staff need to be intentional about establishing mentoring relationships. Faculty and staff must be strategic in creating organic relationships with Black male students. Compassionate and dedicated individuals within the university must seek to create and maintain these relationships until the student graduates, whether that be with a Bachelors or Master’s degree. Faculty and staff must seek to actively engage with Black male students and educate them on the
importance and benefits of mentoring. They should also recruit, educate and encourage other professionals and faculty to serve as mentors.

- Institutions need to seek Black faculty and staff. The number of Black faculty and staff at predominantly white institutions are few, and students have a slim chance of meeting professionals of color. Institutions must work to have representation of Black faculty and staff to attract and provide mentoring opportunities for Black students. Hiring men and women of color would result in an increase in retention of Black students.

**Student Affairs Professionals**

- Student affairs professionals need to develop and support institutional mentorship programs. Several institutions are now implementing Black male mentorship programs. These programs will give students unintentional ways of increasing involvement on campus and introduce faculty, staff, and peer interaction.

- Student affairs professionals need to provide leadership development for students and create ways to get Black students engaged in student organizations. Institutions need to insure that students of color have organizations such as NPHC organizations that will provide social integration.

- Institutions need to develop and support organizations for Black Graduate Students. Because the number of Black males attending graduate school is low, student affairs departments need to work with the graduate school to seek out and get Black males involved. Graduate schools need to have or create Black Graduate Student Associations to provide support for Black graduate students.
This also supports the development of mentoring students for graduate students even if it is peer mentoring.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should be conducted on Black male graduate students who are not affiliated with a fraternal organization. The current research did not intentionally seek Black males who were members of historically Black fraternities, but four out of the five participants were members. In addition to the current research, targeting individuals who are not members of these organizations would allow the researcher to get a better understanding of the population as a whole. Future research should replicate this study at different institutions such as, HBCUs and larger institutions. These institutions offer a variety of students who may have different experiences and a different perspective. Future research should be conducted on both Black and White graduate students, more specifically students who were affiliated with a fraternity or sorority during undergrad. The researcher should measure the mentoring experiences these students have within their organizations compared to the experiences of Black graduate students who were members of historically Black organizations. Future research can also be conducted on Black female graduate students. This research could also be expanded to consider other minority populations in higher education such as Latino, Asian American, and even international students.

**Summary**

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the mentoring relationships of Black male graduate students. This study sought to explore if mentoring played a role in the students’ decision to attend graduate school, how mentoring relationships are
established and managed, how satisfied Black male graduate students were with their mentoring relationships. The research captured the experience of five participants. Results showed that mentoring played a significant role in Black male’s decision to attend graduate school. These mentoring relationships provided the participants with guidance, resources, and empowerment that helped them to be successful during undergraduate and graduate school. One of the most significant findings was the role historically Black fraternities in the participant’s decision to attend graduate school. Their involvement in these organizations and the relationships they developed as a result of their membership led them to graduate school and through graduate school. Institutions need to find ways to continue to provide opportunities for mentoring relationships to develop to benefit undergraduate and graduate Black men.
References


Museus, S. D. (2008). The role of ethnic student organizations in fostering African American and Asian American students’ cultural adjustment and membership at
predominantly White institutions. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(6), 568-586.


Appendix A

Consent to Participants in Research
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Understanding Mentoring Relationships: The Black Male Graduate Student Perspective

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kwame Patterson, a Graduate student in the department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University, and Dianne Timm, an Assistant Professor in the department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a recent Black male graduate of a Master's degree program at Eastern Illinois University.

- PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand the mentoring experiences of black male graduate students.

- PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to interview via SKYPE® with the researcher to answer questions ranging from demographic information to their mentoring experience.

In this study, we are interviewing eight Black males who graduated from graduate programs at Eastern Illinois University.

- POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is not more than a minimal risk expected from participation in this study. Participants may feel uncomfortable sharing their mentoring experience.

- POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participants will have the opportunity to share their mentoring experience and what role it played in their success. Another benefit that may result in this study is gaining new a perspective of their own mentoring relationships.

- CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by deleting all audio used to record the interviews and typed transcriptions will be deleted and shredded as required by law. Recording of the interviews will only be viewed by the interviewer and will be promptly discarded at the end of the study.

- PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATOR**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Kwame Patterson  
Email: krpatterson@eiu.edu  
Phone: 773-372-5925

Dr. Dianne Timm  
Email: dtimm@eiu.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board  
Eastern Illinois University  
600 Lincoln Ave.  
Charleston, IL  61920  
Telephone: (217) 581-8576  
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant  
Signature of Participant  
Date
Appendix B

Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol

1. How important is it for you to have someone to help guide and support you?

2. What is your definition of mentoring?

3. Do you feel that mentoring is necessary for student success?

4. Describe what you would consider a good mentoring relationship.
   a. What does this person do?
   b. What do they provide to the mentee?

5. Have you ever intentionally selected a mentor?
   a. Tell me about that experience?
   b. Why did you pick that person?
   c. Are you still connected to that person today?

6. Did you have mentors before college?
   a. Tell me about this relationship.
   b. How did you meet this person?
   c. How much time did you spend with your mentor?
   d. Can you tell me a story about a time they made a difference in your life?
   e. In what ways did they challenge and support you?
   f. Are you still in contact?
   g. Why did you continue to participate in that mentoring relationship?

7. Did you have a mentor during undergrad?
   a. Tell me about this relationship.
   b. How did you meet this person?
   c. How much time did you spend with your mentor?
d. In what ways did they challenge and support you?

e. Can you tell me a story about a time they made a difference in your life?

f. Are you still in contact?

g. Why did you continue to participate in that mentoring relationship?

8. How was your undergraduate mentor involved in your decision to attend graduate school?

   a. How did your undergraduate mentor influence your graduate school experience?

9. Did you maintain a relationship with your undergraduate mentor while in graduate school?

   a. If yes, how did you make that happen (provide examples)

   b. If no, why not? (provide examples)

10. Did you have a mentor during grad school?

    a. Tell me about this relationship.

    b. How did you meet this person?

    c. How much time did you spend with your mentor?

    d. In what ways did they challenge and support you?

    e. Can you tell me a story about a time they made a difference in your life?

    f. Are you still in contact?

    g. Why did you continue to participate in your mentoring relationship?

11. Is your undergrad mentor and graduate mentor the same person?

    a. If they are different, tell me about how the relationship is different.
b. If they are the same how has the relationship changed from undergraduate to graduate?

12. Can you give me examples of how your graduate (or undergraduate mentor) supported your pursuit of a master’s degree?

13. What kinds of conversations did you have with your mentor during graduate school?

14. In what ways did your mentor impact graduate school your experience?
   a. What type of resources did your mentor provide for you?

15. How often are you in contact with your mentor since you’ve graduated?

16. How effective would you say your mentoring relationships have been to your overall educational experiences?

17. If you could go back and say something to your mentor(s) what would you say?

18. Are you a mentor to someone now?

19. Does your mentor(s) identify as Black or White?
   a. Does that question change your perspective on the questions asked in this interview? Why?