

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ROLE OF MENTORSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ACADEMIC
SUCCESS OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate the role of mentorship and its impact on the academic success of Black male students in higher education. Specifically, this qualitative study examines shared stories and experiences of six Black male professionals who have graduated from college and worked as professionals in higher education. These individuals shared their insights associated with attending college at Primarily White Institutions (PWIs). They discussed the impact of mentorship on their personal academic success and also the perceived impact of mentorship on Black male college students in general. The study examines both formal and informal mentoring relationships and the many dynamics associated with this important phenomenon on the lives of young Black male college students. Dominant themes represented in these narratives include Commitment, Trust and Support, Communication, and Same-Race Mentorship. Recommendations for applying these themes to enrich existing mentorship programs are included.

KEY WORDS: Black males, mentorship, personal stories

DEDICATION

I dedicate this journey to Cillia Ruth Chaney, Marion Chaney, Michael Anthony Chaney and Steve Taylor. May each of you rest in heaven. Also, to Dana Alan Chaney and my beautiful and loving daughter, Cydni Nicole Chaney, daddy loves you more than all the words in all the books.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The relative absence of Black men completing a college education, as well as the relatively small pool of academically well-prepared Black male high school students preparing to enter our colleges and universities has concerned educators for the past four decades (Cuyjet, 2006). Those Black male students who do enter higher education face many challenges in achieving academic success. Whether they attend community colleges or four-year institutions, many lag behind in achieving success by successfully entering their chosen fields of study, graduating, and earning a degree. According to Harper (2012), Black male students in post-secondary education have alarmingly low degree attainment rates compared to all other groups, even female students of the same race. Over the last quarter century, while most demographic categories have seen significant increases in college attendance and graduation, Black male students have experienced a decline (Farmer & Hope, 2015). In addition, many Black male students enter college with weak academic preparation and study habits. In many cases, they are encouraged to excel in sports rather than academics and are often challenged to find advisors and mentors who will encourage their academic success; as a result, many are not prepared for college-level work. The lack of preparation and motivation begins in the K-12 system, well before their arrival into the higher educational system (Farmer & Hope, 2015). According to a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016) study on graduation rates,

trends, and the gaps in access and persistence, during a six-year period, White males completed bachelor’s degrees 60 percent of the time, compared to Black male students at 34.3 percent. According to the study, the Black male demographic had the lowest college degree attainment rate compared to their White, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native counterparts (NCES, 2016). Table 1 illustrates the imbalances by race/ethnicity and gender.

Table 1: Bachelor’s Degree Completion Rates, by Race, 2009

	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	ASIAN/ PACIFIC ISLANDER	AMER INDIAN*	TWO OR MORE RACES	NON- RESIDENT ALIEN	TOTAL
Males	60.0	34.3	49.1	69.2	38.1	55.9	64.2	56.2
Females	66.1	43.2	57.0	75.1	43.6	61.7	74.1	62.1

Notes:

- *American Indian / Alaska Native.
- Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs.
- Graduation rates refer to students receiving bachelor's degrees from their initial institutions of attendance only; graduating within 6 years after start.
- Totals include data for persons whose race/ethnicity was not reported.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2002 through Spring 2013 and Winter 2013-14 through Winter 2015-16, Graduation Rates component; and IPEDS Fall 2009, Institutional Characteristics component. (This table was prepared October 2016.)

In order for institutions to improve the graduation rates of Black male students, they first must be intentional in their efforts to recruit and retain this population of students. Additionally, they must provide support programs that adequately address the needs of this population, understanding that Black male students, because of a variety of circumstances, may require specific supports and retention efforts. Many colleges have not adequately addressed the needs of Black male students in a way to ensure their success (Cuyjet, 1997 and 2006). Despite vast research and literature on college student achievement and the many contributing

factors associated with this endeavor, information about how achievement-related variables influence the college matriculation experiences of students of color in general, and Black male students in particular, has been conspicuously limited (Bonner II, 2010).

Studies by Strayhorn (2008) and Harper (2012), have shown that when colleges focus on student success, all students benefit. However, many factors contribute to the Black male students' dismal graduation rates, and the widening achievement gap at many institutions of higher learning. Some of these factors include under-preparedness, social isolation, low income, low social integration, and lack of mentorship or role models (Cuyjet, 2006).

Black male students continue to lag behind their White peers in terms of degree completion and, once enrolled in college, they often find themselves struggling to adjust socially and academically because of institutional factors that isolate them from the institutional culture (Saddler, 2010). Black male college completion rates have consistently been the lowest in comparison to both sexes and all racial and ethnic groups in the country (Harper, 2012). Black male students' low rates of four-year degree attainment, overall underachievement, academic and social disengagement, and dismal college enrollment are, and should be, among the most pressing issues in post-secondary education (Harper, 2012). According to Harper (2012), only 47 percent of Black male students graduated on time from high school in comparison to 78 percent of their White male counterparts in 2008. In essence, these figures define the achievement gap that begins in the K-12 system and continues through post-secondary education.

Black male students are often less prepared than other male demographic categories for the rigors of college work. In addition, Black men in 2002 comprised only 4.3 percent of college

enrollment, which was approximately the same percentage recorded in 1972. What continues to be most alarming is that degree attainment at the post-secondary level is still consistently low in comparison to other male demographic categories and their female counterparts (Harper, 2012). While support systems, including mentorship opportunities or mentoring programs, have become successful components to raising college retention and graduation rates, among undergraduate students, Black male students are less likely to have had a faculty mentor (Saddler, 2010).

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine how mentorship can impact the academic success of Black male students in higher education, particularly at predominately White institutions (PWIs). This study will chronicle the experiences and testimonies of a selection of Black male professionals who have worked at these institutions and with this student demographic category.

The issues related to the condition of Black men in American society are far-reaching and complex. Many researchers have addressed a variety of aspects of this broad topic, from the general social conditions that affect Black males, such as their lack of preparedness due to an inefficient K-12 system, to low socio-economic circumstances. In addition, many Black males are often first-generation college students devoid of any adequate role models at home and at the college level, a characteristic that also adds to the negative impact and contributes to their lack of academic success. Yet the condition of Black men in higher education seems to have received less attention than some other retention and student success topics, possibly because of the proportionally lower number of scholars who understand the dynamics of the issue.

Much of the work addressing the concerns of Black men in college environments has centered around faculty and staff rather than college students (Cuyjet, 2006).

In this study, the researcher applied a phenomenological qualitative research methodology, focusing on the essence of human experiences within a phenomenon as described by the study participants. Understanding others' lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a research method that involves a small number of subjects through interviews to develop relationships and meaning (Creswell, 2003). This research design best fit the researcher's aim to understand the meaning of a phenomenon through the views and experiences of its participants. This method means identifying a culture-sharing group and studying how it developed shared patterns and thoughts of behavior over time. This qualitative approach serves best to gain participatory knowledge through open-ended interviewing (Creswell, 2003). In a qualitative research study such as this, the researcher positions himself in a way to collect participants' meanings focusing on a single concept or phenomenon. The researcher attempts, through rich interviews, to bring personal values into the study and study the context or setting of its participants. Lastly, the researcher collaborates with participants and attempts to create an agenda for change or reform (Creswell, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that the researcher considers for this study is primarily the work of Tinto (1988) on persistence and retention and Chickering & Reisser's (1993) work on student development, particularly their theory on the seven vectors of development. Tinto (1988) asserts that there are three stages of passage in one's college career as it relates to institutional persistence. Those stages are designated as being separation, transition, and

incorporation. According to Tinto, a student must pass through each of these stages in order to graduate, and if a student misses one stage, this may lead to a decision to depart from the institution.

In the first stage called “separation,” the student will disassociate himself in certain ways from his previous communities, particularly as it relates to his local high school and neighborhood (Tinto, 1988). According to Tinto, in order for students to become fully integrated on a college campus, they have to disassociate themselves physically as well as socially from their previous communities. In a practical sense, for the student to remain in college depends on them leaving their former communities (Tinto, 1988). As a result, if the students do not attempt to separate, they may not be able to take full advantage of their new college environment for integration into its social and intellectual environment. In addition, the students may not be able to reap the full social and intellectual benefits that social integration into a college community brings (Tinto, 1988).

The next stage of institutional persistence for the student is the “transition” stage. It is described as a period that the student transitions from the old environment or the communities in which the student was raised to the new campus community. It also addresses the shift from the previous associations of their life to the anticipated new associations of campus life. In their attempt to separate themselves from their previous environment, new students have yet to adjust to the new norms and patterns of behavior that will assist in their integration into their new campus community. According to Tinto, the stress and their sense of loss, bewilderment, and even desolation that may sometimes accompany students’ transition to college can prove to be a serious challenge for students to persist in college and achieve

academic success. Often, when students do not have assistance from services offered on campus or from mentors who can encourage their persistence, they may drop out, typically early in the academic year.

Adjusting to the enormity of the change and the many factors associated with transitioning to the college environment can be overwhelming for many students, especially Black male students, particularly, when one contrasts the norms and behavioral patterns of the Black male students' neighborhood environment to that of the campus community. The experiences learned and gained from a student's home and local communities may not have prepared him for the life of being a college student living in a campus community, particularly if he did not come from a college-educated family. In summary, minority students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience transitional problems than majority students (Tinto, 1988).

The third and last stage of passage according to Tinto is the "incorporation" in college stage. When the student successfully moves through the separation and transition stage, the student is now challenged with achieving integration. In this stage, the student is attempting to move away from old habits, in an attempt to embrace the social and intellectual norms of the campus community. According to Tinto, social interactions are paramount for students to achieve integration to campus life and, as part of this process, students must build relationships with other students, faculty, and staff. When students fail to reach this stage, they run the risk of feeling isolated, again, a condition which could lead to a decision to depart from the institution.

Tinto's research and conceptual model supports the need for researchers to explore the role of mentorship in developing students, particularly Black male students, who tend to be the lowest performing demographic category in higher education. By having adequate contact with a professional mentor on campus, in addition to mentorship programs, residence hall associations, fraternities and sororities, extracurricular programs and other members of the campus community, this demographic category may experience integration and academic success (Tinto, 1988).

According to Chickering & Reisser (1993), human development should be the central purpose of institutions of higher learning. They suggest that universities and community colleges alike can have a major impact on student development along the seven major vectors they describe as (1) developing competence, (2) managing emotions, (3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (5) establishing identity, (6) developing purpose, and (7) developing integrity. Chickering & Reisser (1993) also contend that in order for students to develop effectively in each of these vectors, several institutional factors must encourage their development including institutional objectives, institutional size, student-faculty relationships, curriculum, teaching, friendships and student communities, student development programs and services.

In addition, Chickering & Reisser (1993) also argue that it is important to focus on student-faculty/staff relationships. The hypothesis is that when faculty and staff are committed to creating quality learning experiences that focus on mutual respect, caring, and authenticity, retention is positively impacted. In addition, when faculty and staff are willing to interact with students in a variety of settings, then student development is fostered, and academic success is

achieved. According to Chickering & Reisser (1993), faculty and staff have a major influence on students and, because of this, should utilize their influence with a clear focus and intentionality. They stress that faculty and staff are important components to student development as mentors, role models, scholars, teachers, and skilled listeners.

Mentorship relationships between a student and a faculty or staff member can be essential to helping students clarify their purpose, values, career and educational goals, and keep the student successfully on track. In addition, mentors are guides who help to lead students along the journey of their lives. They are trusted because they have been where the student is attempting to go. They embody the student's hopes, cast light on his way ahead, warn the student of lurking dangers, identify and interpret confusing signs, and point out unexpected joys along the way: "The mentor of adult learners is not so much interested in fixing the road as in helping the protégé become a competent traveler" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 322-323).

Research Questions

To discover the impact of mentoring on the success of Black male college students, this researcher interviewed successful Black male professionals in higher education, asking them about their own experiences, especially the impact of mentorship. The primary research questions are these:

- What role does mentorship play in the academic success of Black male students?
- What role does mentorship play in the adjustment of Black male students into college life, persistence in college, and completion of a college education?
- What are the characteristics of an effective mentor for Black male students?

- What are the characteristics of an effective mentorship relationship for Black male students?

Definition of Terms

In order to provide some clarity for the study, the following common definitions are used throughout this study.

Mentorship: an intentional action involving two or more individuals, which involves a nurturing process that fosters the growth and development of a protégé (Cuyjet, 1997). In addition, Cuyjet (1997) also defines mentoring in the following way: “mentoring is an insightful process in which the wisdom of the mentor is acquired and applied by the protégé” (Cuyjet, 1997, p. 44).

Student success: engagement in educationally purposeful activities, persistence, acquisition of desired knowledge, successful attainment of skills and competencies, satisfaction, attainment of goals, graduation, and post-college performance (Kuh et al, 2008). Tinto defines student success as the degree to which students feel a sense of belonging and support within the college environment, their willingness to attend college again, and their overall satisfaction with their experiences are precursors of educational attainment (Tinto, 1993).

Persistence: a student who enrolls in college until degree completion or the act by which the student continues towards an educational goal such as earning a bachelor’s degree.

Attrition: a student who leaves the college without earning a degree or the number of students who leave a college before finishing a program of study. Attrition rates are often used as performance indicators to higher education providers and decision makers.

Retention: when a student returns and enrolls each semester full-time and graduates usually between four and six years.

Summary

Although a significant amount of research has been done on mentorship programs and mentorship models to address Black male student achievement in higher education, very little research supports how important direct mentorship is to the recruitment, retention, and graduation of these students. This study adds to the research being done on how to support Black male students in an effort to encourage student success. The next chapter reviews the literature that pertains to the effects of mentorship as it relates to Black male student success in higher education, particularly at PWIs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Several factors are related to the success and/or failure of Black male students in colleges, especially PWIs. These factors include socioeconomic status, college preparation, acclimation to the college environment, student engagement while in college, financial stability, and race relations at the college. A review of the literature was conducted to gain deeper insights about the factors that impede Black male success in college and to gain a broader perspective on how mentorship and mentoring programs aid and support Black males in matriculation to and completion of college.

Mentoring Black Males in College

According to Dahlvig (2010), mentoring has a direct correlation with increased retention for ethnic minority students at PWIs. Dahlvig's research indicates that mentoring is a strategy of encouragement that contributes to the persistence of ethnic minority students and some scholars point to the benefits of having similar cultural backgrounds between the mentor and mentee (Dahlvig, 2010). Often, the challenges for Black students are that they may not have access to a mentor of color at PWIs, which makes it difficult for them to view the institution as a place where they belong. According to Dahlvig (2010), Black students often search for Black faculty and staff to serve as mentors at PWIs; however, they experience many challenges in finding one because of the relatively few present in their institutions. They seek these

relationships because of their level of comfort and because they feel less vulnerable to their feedback. Dahlvig (2010) asserts that, in a majority of cases, students of color believe that faculty and staff who are from similar backgrounds hold similar views of the campus environment.

The United States Department of Education (2006), reports that only 30 percent of all Black men who enter college persist and earn an undergraduate degree within six years. This means that most challenges that Black men face in higher education stymie our efforts to increase student retention and degree attainment (Strayhorn, 2008). A quantitative study was conducted by Strayhorn (2008) to measure the relationship between academic achievement (as measured by college grades) and supportive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. Three research questions guided the study: (1) What was the relationship between supportive relationships and academic achievement in college for Black men? (2) What is the relationship between supportive relationships and satisfaction with college for Black men? and (3) What is the relationship between supportive relationships and satisfaction with college for Black men, controlling for differences in background (i.e., age, parents' education, aspirations, classification, etc.) and college grades? In the study results, supportive relationships were positively related to satisfaction with college, and grades positively correlated with satisfaction of their college experiences. Although no statistically significant or direct correlation was discovered between supportive relationships and grades, there was a strong correlation between satisfaction: "Thus, understanding factors that influence Black males' satisfaction can assist us in structuring collegiate environments and learning opportunities that engender student success" (Strayhorn, 2008, p. 28).

A 1997 study by Grant-Thompson and Atkinson determined that mentorship is a very important phenomenon to the Black male student particularly at PWIs. Their qualitative study focused on 74 Black male undergraduate students and two students who identified as bi-racial at an institution in southern California. The study results indicated that these students benefit from mentorship relationships regardless of the cultural background of the mentor; however, they support previous research indicating that Black male students are most receptive to mentoring by an ethnically similar faculty member. The optimal faculty/staff mentor for a Black male student is one who is ethnically similar and culturally responsive. While their study supports the need for additional Black faculty and staff to mentor Black male students, it also highlights that White faculty and staff who are culturally competent can also be effective mentors (Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997).

Robinson & Reio, Jr. (2012)'s work emphasizes that mentoring has two beneficial functions for the Black male in higher education. There are benefits for both the protégé and mentor in the areas of career development and psychosocial development. Also, Black male students report that relationship satisfaction, interpersonal comfort, and psychosocial and instrumental support for protégés of color are important. This research may support the notion that race and ethnicity can be key when considering the experiences and outcomes of mentoring (Robinson & Reio Jr., 2012). Because of this connection between identity and effective mentoring, scholars assert that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs) may provide the most supportive and nurturing environments for Black college students; however, Black college students attend PWIs in much larger numbers (Harris & Smith, 1999; Brooms, 2016).

Limited research has been done on traditional mentoring approaches for Black male students in higher education. Much of the research in the field has centered on Black students in general in higher educational settings or on mentoring of predominately White students. A research study conducted by Levinson (1978) — with a sample size limited to 40 White male undergraduate students — is often cited by those interested in mentoring relationships. The study found that mentoring experiences are a significant component of a student's development as the result of shared wisdom, guidance, and better orientation of the mentee into the immediate environment (Levinson, 1978).

Traditionally, the primary focus of mentoring studies has also focused on the role of the mentor: faculty, staff, and administrators (Jacobi, 1991). Mentoring is seen as a support initiative or strategy that increases retention and academic success and reduces attrition. Making appropriate use of mentoring initiatives and programs in community-based organizations and academia is recommended to promote a collective vision for enhancing individual, social, and academic success (Harris and Smith, 1999). As mentoring and mentoring programs alike are increasingly being researched for their impact on student success, it is implied that the presence of Black faculty and staff on campus helps students in identifying influential individuals like themselves in positions of leadership at their institutions, consequently providing a more supportive environment for Black students (Brittian, Sy, & Stokes, 2009).

Barriers to Success

In 2013, Scott, Taylor, and Palmer conducted a qualitative study of 68 scholarship essays written by Black male students who were accepted to a four-year college or university. The

students came from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and various levels of involvement while in high school such as clubs, sports, band, student government, and other extra-curricular activities. The results of the study overwhelmingly indicated the need for additional Black male role models in key positions in high school, with the recommendation for providing similar experiences for the students once they are in college. Several of the students indicated that being motivated was important to their success and expressed that making connections with Black male instructors helped them increase their motivation to succeed (Scott, Taylor & Palmer, 2013). The results of this study indicate that a potential barrier to success for Black male students at PWIs may be the lack of interaction with Black male faculty or staff who they can identify with and draw inspiration from. Researchers, including Scott, Taylor & Palmer (2013) and Cuyjet (2006), indicate that this may prove to be a challenge at PWIs considering that most struggle with hiring adequate Black faculty and staff under the best of circumstances.

Another study conducted at three elite PWIs revealed the impact that issues around race and racism have on students of color. The study was conducted at two public Research I universities and one private college. Researchers conducted focus group discussions with 34 Black students (18 females and 16 males) and employed a qualitative design to highlight how Black students experience and interact with the racial climate on their respective campuses. The study provided a critical framework to the idea that race, racism, and micro-aggressions can negatively affect the success of Black students in a collegiate environment (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Micro-aggressions were defined as subtle insults, verbal, nonverbal, or visual, directed towards people of color, most often subtly or unconsciously. The study determined

that Black students are negatively affected academically and socially when responding to racial micro-aggressions and described the impact on the entire campus' racial climate (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The Black students in the study cited numerous faculty and student interactions as examples of racial micro-aggressions, highlighting the low expectations that faculty maintained for them as key. According to the study, racial micro-aggressions in the classroom and in social spaces have significant consequences, including a negative racial climate and Black students' struggles with feelings of self-doubt, frustration, and isolation. Many students in the study commented that racial micro-aggressions affected their academic performance in overt ways. These students reported that they were pushed to drop a class, change their major, and even withdraw from the university to attend an institution where they would feel more welcomed (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Other researchers have examined barriers to success that are more external. According to Brock (2010), the rates of college attendance for Black males are the lowest in comparison to all other demographic categories. Some of the barriers contributing to these low rates include college costs, the lack of adequate financial aid, lack of understanding on how to enroll, and a lack of student support services (Brock, 2010). In addition, the experiences and services that students receive once they are admitted to a college campus are as important as these external experiences. For these Black male students, the lack of positive interactions with their peers, faculty, and staff influence how well they adjust to the campus environment, particularly at PWIs. Also, organizational structures and cultural norms have an impact on student success (Brock, 2010).

Black Male Achievement in College

Several studies demonstrate that Black males perform at levels alarmingly lower than other racial groups, as well as their female Black counterparts (NCES, 2016; Washington, 2013; NCES, 2012; Harper, 2012). An array of factors contributes to this phenomenon, including the students' socioeconomic backgrounds, their K-12 experience, their college preparedness, standardized testing, financial instability, and poverty (Washington, 2013). The literature available on the causes and effects of the lack of Black male achievement in college is extensive.

According to Harper (2012), this focus on the lack of Black male achievement, retention, and the skewed achievement gap in some ways promulgates the very issue itself. In his 2012 study, *Black Male Student Access in Higher Education*, Harper focused his research on finding what works and what factors contributed to Black males successfully graduating from colleges and universities. Harper interviewed over 200 Black males who graduated from six different types of institutions, ranging from liberal arts colleges to private and public Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBU) to Comprehensive State Universities (Harper, 2012). Harper, using an anti-deficit achievement framework, reframed traditional research questions and areas of study on the lack of Black male achievement (i.e., underrepresentation, disengagement, and insufficient preparation) and reworded these areas so that researchers could discover and explore how Black males successfully navigate college and post-college endeavors.

In the study, 73.2 percent of those interviewed graduated from public high school and more than half were from low-income and working-class families (Harper, 2012). Significant to note is that over half of the study participants were raised in traditional, two-parent

households, and nearly half of the students' parents did not have a Bachelor's degree (Harper, 2012). In their responses, most of the participants said their parents did not have the resources for or knowledge of college; therefore, the parents sought assistance and direction from outside resources. Most of the men interviewed noted that their success in college was due largely in part to the efforts and commitment of their parents (Harper, 2012). Although the study participants did not refer to their parents as mentors, this data showcases the importance of having an advocate present in the lives of Black male college students, especially as it affects their success in retention and completion.

According to Harper (2012), Black male underachievement and disadvantage is real and pervasive in post-secondary education. However, he suggests that it is important for educators to conduct more studies on the successful Black male students and analyze their stories of achievement. Harper stresses that the success stories of successful Black male students are rarely solicited, and that it is important for educators and researchers to identify and learn from Black male students who are achieving academically in order to debunk the myth that all Black male college students are lazy, unmotivated, intellectually incompetent, and underprepared. Harper (2012) contends that educators should learn what motivates these students, what keeps them enrolled in school each year, what activities they are involved and engaged in, both inside and outside of the classroom, and what their study habits and strategies for success consist of. Most importantly, educators need to learn how they overcome the environmental, social, cultural, economic, and academic obstacles that may negatively impact their success. According to Harper, it is important to encourage these high-achieving students to lend their voices to the

institution in order to create a better sense of belonging and improve the overall success rates of all Black male students.

Another research study by Strayhorn (2017) focused on the context in which persistence, retention, and overall success of Black male students is achieved at public universities. He used data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and in-depth interviews to enrich his findings. He learned that faculty, staff, and peer support for Black male students were important success components. His research also indicated that close connections with the community were vital for Black males to thrive, particularly at urban institutions. Campus leadership activities and close meaningful bonds with faculty and staff also had a positive impact on Black male college students' sense of belonging and academic success (Strayhorn, 2017).

Achievement Gap, Black Male Enrollment, and Retention

The data related to the Achievement Gap have been collected and reported since the late 1960s. This persistent disparity in educational performance among various subgroups of U.S. students — as defined by socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, and gender — has been addressed through various educational initiatives over the past half century, and yet the disparity persists. As reported in a July 2009 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, White students on average scored higher than Black students in all assessments. The study further revealed that on a 0-500 scale, White students had average scores nearly 26 points higher than Black students in math and reading (NCES, 2009). Although this study focused on elementary aged

children, it demonstrates how far behind Black students remain in educational achievement measures.

In recent years, while there has been some improvement in Black male achievement in college persistence, retention, and graduation rates, there is still a long way to go to reach parity with their peers. The research still shows that Black males realize high disproportionate levels of underachievement in college in comparison to other demographic categories.

According to the United States Department of Education (2011) 34 percent of Black male students graduate from universities over a six-year period, which indicates the lowest level of degree completion of all races and genders. Moreover, the Black male graduation rate is alarmingly behind the national graduation rate for all males, which is reported at 55 percent in 2011 (Brooms, 2016). The data for Black male graduation rates remains consistent at all four-year institutions, whether private, public, or for profit. For many committed educators, attrition and retention are serious areas that need to be addressed for Black male students (Brooms, 2016).

Among the ongoing disparity issues: Black males matriculate and graduate from college at lower rates than other demographic categories (Cuyjet, 2006); Black males have the highest rates of college attrition among all races and genders (Harper, 2006); and, more alarming, Black males are more likely to receive the high school equivalency degree in prison than graduate from a four-year institution (Marshall, 2008; Roach, 2001). Several factors such as under preparedness and lack of role models contribute to the achievement gap, low enrollment, and attrition rates of this population. The literature also suggests that low enrollment numbers directly impact Black male retention rates (Marshall, 2008). Some factors cited that contribute

to low enrollment include the military, available employment after high school, discomfort and unfamiliarity with the college environment, and high numbers of young Black men who are incarcerated (Roach, 2001).

According to Snipe (2007), “as a society, we need to take a serious look at how and where resources are spent when it comes to Black males. There only appears to be two options for Black males — prison or outreach programs” (Snipe, 2007, p. 18). He continued, “there are currently more Black males in prison (840,000) than in college in this country (635,000)” (Snipe, 2007, p. 5). Snipe further contends that a way to address and correct this is to initiate collaborations between Black professionals regarding the plight of Black men, as opposed to focusing primarily on the plight of Black males. This position in many ways mirrors the position held by Harper (2012) and his anti-deficit achievement framework that calls for researchers to study and discover the factors that have helped Black males graduate successfully from college and perform well after college. Snipe (2007) stated that the goal should be to empower Black male students to become positive catalysts for change, something that can be nurtured, developed, and supported through mentoring and mentorship programs (Snipe, 2007).

Mentorship Programs

Academic success for minority students is often supported and achieved when students find meaningful mentors on college campuses and institutions successfully implement mentoring programs (Cuyjet, 2006). As a result, student affairs divisions and academic administrators on most college campuses are intentional in their efforts to enhance the collegiate experiences of Black male students (Cuyjet, 2006). Because of these efforts, many successful mentorship programs have been created to assist in the recruitment and retention of

these students. One representative program is the African American Faculty and Staff Association (AAFSA) Multicultural Mentor Project at California State University, Fullerton, which links first-year minority students with AAFSA members who have regular dialogue sessions with their students and point them to the right support programs on campus (Flowers & Shuford, 2011).

The Africana Mentoring Program at Duke University is another successful mentoring program, which provides academic support for Black first- and second-year students. Upperclassmen, faculty, and staff work together to ease the transition to college and to enhance the experiences of Black students on what is considered a predominantly White campus (Flowers & Shuford, 2011).

The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), created in 1990 at Georgia Southwestern State University, enhances the experiences of Black male students in college. The basic structure of SAAB includes six committees that cover the following action areas: (a) personal development, (b) service, (c) academic, (d) financial affairs, (e) spiritual & social enrichment, and (f) membership/public relations. The model has been so successful that chapters have been created at over 80 colleges and universities across the United States (Bledsoe & Rome, Sr., 2006).

Another successful program, the Meyerhoff Program, created in 1988 at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County (UMBC), focuses on helping Black male students and other students from underrepresented populations achieve academic success in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). This endowment-funded program provides a comprehensive summer bridge program and a personal advising and counseling component.

According to Baker (2006), in its infancy, 19 Black men experienced a “life-altering academic trajectory that catapulted them from the UMBC to the highest levels of the academy and research” (p. 266).

At Bowling Green State University (BGSU) a program was initiated entitled Black Men on Campus (BMOC) in 2000. It was created to ensure that the academic and social success of Black male students was realized at BGSU (Bailey, 2006). The success of the program centered on mentorship and creating a classroom environment that respected the students’ Black cultural legacies and created spaces to promote a positive self-image. The program consists of four concentrated areas referred to as TIPS, which are transition, involvement, persistence, and success. Four student affairs project directors administer the program and the three areas of operation to the program: (1) a culturally relevant classroom experience delivered in a freshman 101 course, (2) mentor/mentee relationship with a Black faculty or staff member, and (3) participation in a weekly dialogue session on what it takes to be a successful college student (Bailey, 2006).

The Black Men’s Collective Program (BMC) was created at Rutgers the State University of New Jersey in 1992, as a program to address the high attrition rate of Black male students at the university. BMC aimed to increase the dialogue as well as the interaction among Black male students on the topics such as academic achievement, life issues, retention, economic literacy, and empowerment (Catching, 2006).

At Arizona State University (ASU), the African American Men of Arizona State University (AAMASU) was created in 2004 to create a culture where Black male students could equal or exceed ASU’s average freshman persistence and the six-year graduation rates for all students at

the institution. The program was created to be a vehicle to address the low retention and graduation rates of Black male students. In addition, the program indicated that it wanted to play an important part in the school's efforts to address the national trend associated with rising high school drop-out rates and low college attendance of Black male students (Jones & Hotep, 2006).

These examples are only a few of the many support programs from across the country that all have a similar goal: to address the issues related to sub-par Black male student achievement at post-secondary institutions.

Summary

An abundance of literature highlights the factors that inhibit Black males from graduating from college and excelling post college. As this literature review revealed, there is no shortage of studies that highlight the need for institutions to pay closer attention to the needs of Black male student achievement in college. Some tell success stories that educators and researchers can learn from; however, considering the numerous studies that continue to show how far Black male students lag behind their peers, it stands to reason that institutions must continue to be even more intentional in their efforts to retain and graduate these students. One consistent theme in the literature is a call for increased outreach efforts that assist Black males in graduating from college, as well as a call for increased focus on the factors that lead to academic success.

Through this study, the researcher seeks to examine factors that contribute to Black male success in college, especially at PWIs, through mentorship and mentoring programs.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology and purpose of the study and presents the research questions that guide the focus and purpose of this research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Evidence supports the contention that students who feel a sense of belonging and connection on their campuses are more likely to achieve academic success and earn a degree (Tinto, 1988; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Strayhorn, 2008; Dahlvig, 2010; Harper, 2012). In addition, research and anecdotal evidence points to the importance of mentorship as an important component to this connection and to this success (Cuyjet, 2006; Flowers & Shuford, 2011). To further examine the role of mentorship on the success of Black males, this study focused on the experiences of six Black male professionals who attended predominately white institutions (PWIs).

This study uses basic applied research as a platform to understand mentorship as an important phenomenon and its correlation with Black male student success. By examining the impact that mentorship has on student success, the study can provide additional insight and clarity from an interpretive/constructivist epistemological perspective. The constructivist approach creates understanding, and allows for multiple participant meanings, social and historical construction, and theory generation (Creswell, 2003).

Current research on micro-aggressions suggests that there is a proliferation of negative images, verbal and nonverbal, that are embedded in our institutions and society. Because of the subtlety of these influences, it is important for minorities to be provided opportunities at

critical junctures during the educational process to challenge these (Flowers & Shuford, 2011). Strong mentorship has been suggested as one method for counteracting these negative interactions, connecting minority students with positive role models, and providing a network of communication that can challenge institutional systems. Additionally, mentors can give minority students an opportunity to engage in dialogue about issues they face on a daily basis (Flowers & Shuford, 2011).

Research Method

The purpose of this phenomenological study/inquiry is to investigate the role of mentorship on the academic success of Black male students in higher education. Specifically, this study shares the stories and lived experiences of six Black male professionals who have graduated from college and have worked on a college campus. These individuals shared their individual insights associated with attending a PWI; they discuss the phenomenon of mentorship and its impact, not only on their academic success, but also their perceived impact of mentorship on Black male college students in general. Their narratives provide evidence of both formal and informal mentoring relationships and the many dynamics associated with this important phenomenon.

Research Design and Rationale

This study is based on basic qualitative research. The central premise to qualitative research is that researchers construct reality in interaction with their social worlds. By applying a qualitative research method, the researcher hopes to understand the meaning a specific phenomenon has for those involved (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), “applied

fields of practice such as education, administration, health, social work, counseling, business, and so on, the most common ‘type’ of qualitative research is a basic, interpretive study” (p. 22). Merriam (2009) goes on to describe three important components to the qualitative researcher: “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). Basic qualitative research studies are used in many disciplines and applied fields of practice; in fact, they are probably the most utilized or common forms of research in education (Merriam, 2009).

Phenomenological research identifies the essence of human experiences concerning a particular phenomenon, as described and defined by the participants’ experiences. Creating an understanding of the lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a research method (Creswell, 2003).

Qualitative research in its basic form is fundamentally interpretive. This includes developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing the data for themes or categories, and finally drawing conclusions and making interpretations to extract personal and theoretical meaning. Qualitative data analysis is, however, personal and subjective; a researcher cannot escape the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell (2003), “the qualitative researcher views social phenomena holistically. This explains why qualitative research studies appear as broad, panoramic views rather than microanalyses. The more complex, interactive, and encompassing the narrative, the better the qualitative study” (p. 182). He goes on to describe the qualitative researcher as one who systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study (Creswell, 2003). This is a significant point as the study’s

researcher has a unique interest in the study's topic because he, too, is a Black male who currently works in higher education and has worked with Black male undergraduate students for many years.

Research Questions

The research questions that formed the foundation of this study were the following:

- What role does mentorship play in the academic success of Black male students?
- What role does mentorship play in the adjustment of Black male students into college life, persistence in college, and completion of a college education?
- What are the characteristics of an effective mentor for Black male students?
- What are the characteristics of an effective mentorship relationship for Black male students?

In an effort to collect rich qualitative data, participants were interviewed individually regarding the role that mentoring played in their professional development and level of academic success. A series of open-ended questions were posed regarding each participant's demographic characteristics (age, ethnicity, current and previous positions, current institution, years in position, years working at the four-year institution or community college, functional area, and credentials), mentoring experiences, and thoughts on the role of mentoring. Some of these questions included:

- Did seeing other Black male professionals who worked on campus motivate you to be successful?
- Do you feel that seeing additional Black male professionals or role models working on campus would have impacted your academic success?
- Did your institution have any mentorship programs aimed at supporting Black male student achievement or success? If so, were you involved, and do you feel that they were beneficial?

- What overall impact did mentorship have on your academic success? Do you feel that it is an important component to the academic success of Black male students in higher education?

Participants

Study participants consisted of six Black male educators: three hold master's degrees, two have earned doctoral degrees, and one is a doctoral student. Participants were identified and selected by the researcher through recommendations by colleagues in higher education. They were not randomly selected; instead, they were selected because of their significant experience working in higher education. In addition, the researcher was familiar with their work as educators.

Purposeful sampling was ideal for the study as it allowed the researcher to select individuals for the study who could purposefully inform the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). A general guideline for determining sample size in a qualitative study is, not only to study a few sites or individuals, but to also collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied. In phenomenology, the number of participants is not defined, but can range significantly (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling and using a small sample size can increase the utility of information collected, particularly when one wants to understand something about a phenomenon without needing or desiring to generalize to all such cases (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). In addition to being representative of the study's desired demographic — successful Black male educators — the six participants in this study represented a variety of experiences in higher education.

Table 2: Study Participants

NAME	AGE	TITLE	YEARS IN EDUCATION
Tyrone Collins	64	Coordinator, Multicultural Student Recruitment	38
Khalid el-Hakim	47	Entrepreneur / Teacher / Doctoral Student	23
Raymond Gant	56	Director, Minority Student Affairs (Retired)	31
Bobby Springer	53	Director, Pathways to College	26
Lumas Helaire	38	Associate Director, Office of Multicultural Initiatives	16
Arrick Jackson	48	Dean, College of Education and Human Services	18

Treatment of the Data

All interview responses were audio recorded by the researcher. A transcriptionist was hired to transcribe each interview in its entirety. The participants of the study indicated their agreement to participate by signing an informed consent document that outlined the purpose of the study. Each participant agreed to share their stories openly and understood that their names and titles would be used in the study.

Interview Process

Once the participants agreed to participate in this study, the researcher scheduled mutually convenient interviews. Interviews were expected to last approximately 60 minutes and were held in a neutral location — away from the participants’ office — to allow for uninterrupted time when possible. In most forms of qualitative research and study, data are collected through the interview process. All interviews were conducted face to face, and each participant was informed that additional contacts might follow if there was a need to clarify information or responses.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2003), for qualitative researchers, there are several ways to analyze data: “The process of analysis will include organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the data or narratives, organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (p. 190). The procedures of data collection analysis and report writing are not distinct steps in the process; however, they are interrelated and often happen simultaneously in a research project. Often, qualitative researchers learn by doing (Creswell, 2013).

In this research project the researcher used phenomenological analysis and representation to analyze the data. In this method of analysis, the researcher first describes the actual personal experiences (textual description) followed by how the experiences happened (structural description). The researcher then groups these statements into larger units of information or “themes” to identify significant clusters of experiences. Lastly, the researcher creates a composite description of the phenomenon, incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. This passage is referred to as the “essence of the experience” and represents the culminating aspect of the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher applied this analytical approach from a constructivist position, seeking to describe, interpret, and understand the experiences of the participants of the study (Merriam, 2009).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure a valid and reliable study, the researcher developed textural and structural descriptions of the participants and combined these into a composite description of the mentorship phenomenon. In addition, the researcher solicited feedback from the participants

to rule out any possible misinterpretations of the information as presented in the study narratives. A final strategy for ensuring validity, eliciting peer examination and review, solicited comments from peers familiar with the research topic (Merriam, 2009). These methods ensure that the findings in this study are clear and accurate, the information gathered is not misinterpreted, and no apparent misunderstandings of the data are included (Creswell, 2013).

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

The biases and assumptions within this study stem from the researcher's work as a Student Affairs professional with over 20 years experience working with minority students at a PWI. In this capacity, the researcher has observed a significant number of Black male students who never successfully made the transition to academia for a variety of reasons. The researcher has witnessed the high level of attrition by this population of students, which has been supported by extensive national research. Many factors may contribute to a lower number of Black male students completing their college education, including their socio-economic status, the geographic location or environment where they were raised, and their individual under-preparedness. The researcher has witnessed how well these same students perform when they have a sense of belonging on campus, are part of peer support groups, are nurtured and placed in leadership roles among their peers, and most importantly, are mentored by those who have a similar testimony. In the researcher's environment, Black male students in these instances are more successful in managing the rigors of college work. A major assumption of this study is that there is a direct correlation between mentorship and the academic success of Black male college students. This study was designed to explore this correlation further, collect qualitative

data supporting the assumptions, and provide examples to build or modify programs to support Black male success in higher education.

Limitations

Participants in this study varied in age, educational level, employment, experiences, and upbringing. However, the researcher and those reading the study must be cautious not to generalize the findings of the study to a broader demographic group or to make comparisons to other demographic populations. The participants in the study were all Black males with varying experiences in higher education; their experiences may be limited and, thus, making generalizations from these experiences must also be done cautiously.

Summary

This chapter describes the methodology used to interview six professional Black men for this study. Each of the participants have experienced the phenomenon of mentorship, some from both mentee and mentor roles. Chapter Four provides the narratives from the interviews. Chapter Five discusses the key themes identified from these narratives and provides an analysis of these themes. Chapter Six examines the implications of this study and provides suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE VALUE OF MENTORSHIP

Introduction

This phenomenological study on mentorship and its role and impact on the success of Black male students pursuing higher education is beneficial for those who want to see this particular demographic category succeed. Most literature on the subject states that, historically, this demographic category has been the least likely to enroll in college, least likely to graduate, and most likely to drop out. The following are the experiences of the six participants, as collected from the study's in-depth interviews.

The Mentor for Many: Raymond L. Gant

Raymond L. Gant is a 56-year-old Black man. He attended Ferris State University for his undergraduate degree and Central Michigan University for his Master's degree. Both institutions are considered PWIs. Gant was raised in a two-parent household and was not a first-generation college student. Currently, he is a consultant for Transformative Leadership Consultants; however, previously he had over 20 years working as an administrator at Ferris State University, serving as the founding Director of the Office of Minority Student Affairs, a department that was created in April of 1986. In addition, he also served as the Special Assistant to the President for Diversity and Community Relations for approximately seven years. His passion is helping others, and the majority of his professional work experience is in higher education.

Gant was born in Paw Paw, Michigan, and raised in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the early 1960s, at the beginning of the push for educational integration. Gant explained that, during this time, educational integration was called “bussing”: schools that were historically segregated were desegregated by bussing students of color to the city schools. According to Gant, bussing was an attempt to create an environment that was pluralistic, that was representative of a variety of cultures, backgrounds, and ethnicities, as opposed to having predominantly White and predominantly Black schools. This was a new experience for everyone involved, including Gant because he was living through the early years of the bussing initiative.

When he got to college, Gant saw his undergraduate experiences as some of the most exciting, eventful, and rewarding years of his life, and it was a phenomenal time for him. Gant described his first two years at Kalamazoo Valley Community College where he majored in data processing. He then transferred to Ferris State University and graduated from the College of Business with a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. According to Gant, even though his undergraduate experience was a wonderful time, it was also a little bit scary. The experience was frightening because he was leaving home for the first time and experiencing a new environment. However, he had the opportunity to meet individuals from all over the country. As an undergraduate, Gant was very involved in student life; he actively participated in intramural sports and fraternity life. He was offered a football scholarship but decided not to play for the team; instead, he focused on being a full-time student, giving him the opportunity to share, learn, and grow inside and outside of the classroom.

During his early years in college, Gant indicated that he was very close to his parents, and his father was a significant role model and mentor. However, tragedy struck, and his father

passed away right after he transferred to Ferris. Soon after he arrived at Ferris, he met the Vice President for Planning and Development. According to Gant, the vice president took a special interest in him as a young undergraduate student and served as a significant mentor during his developmental years and after he graduated. Although the vice president was White male in his mid-forties, Gant stated, “it doesn’t matter if you have a mentor of the same race; however, what you want in a mentor is someone who you can identify with and who can identify with you.” He stressed that you want someone who is not judgmental; someone who understands the significance of providing a pathway for you to follow; and someone who is willing to help develop you as an individual, both socially and professionally. Gant indicated that a mentor should be “an individual who has taken a genuine interest in your well-being and in your progress in your academic, professional, and personal trajectory, and someone who will be there to help guide you when you make mistakes.” He indicated that a mentor should be someone who will not judge your missteps. When asked if his mentor first identified him or if he identified his mentor, Gant said that his mentor saw something in him. He stated:

You know, what’s interesting is that he probably identified me initially. He was actually a professor of mine. He was an adjunct faculty and, as I mentioned a moment ago, he was the VP of Planning and Development. He taught an advanced management class and that’s where we initially connected. It was during that time that he took an interest in me as a student. I was just taking the class, and, to me, he was just another faculty member who I had to deliver for, as I looked to graduate from the university. But, he saw something in me that, quite honestly, I probably didn’t really see in myself.

In describing the formality of this mentorship relationship, Gant indicated that it initially started out as an informal relationship and then it became formal. It became more formal because Gant’s mentor hired him as a management intern and, thus, became his boss. Since there was a boss / subordinate relationship, they established an expected formal relationship.

However, according to Gant, there was an informal component to this relationship as well because the two did a lot of things socially as well, away from the professional environment. Because of this, Gant considered their mentoring relationship to be both formal and informal. According to Gant, “what’s most important to have is a relationship where the mentee has someone who he or she can look up to, admire, and respect. From the mentors’ perspective, they would like a student they can also respect and have an optimistic outlook for his future. Thus, it is important that the relationship has to be rooted in trust and respect.” According to Gant, the mentorship relationships can be fluid; they can develop into formal relationships or they may go from formal to informal. However, Gant indicated that the level of formality is not the significant part. Gant claimed that what is significant is an understanding between two people; they need to care about one another. He indicated that he does not know if one type of relationship is more important than the other; whether you define the relationship as formal or informal, “the most important tenets of the relationship have to be rooted in trust and respect.”

Gant described himself as having multiple mentors; although he talked primarily about one relationship, he indicated that most students should have more than one. He said that, hopefully during their college experiences, they should establish multiple relationships and have multiple experiences and establish more than one mentor relationship. However, Gant emphasized that he understands how some students, especially Black male students, may be challenged with the task of finding a mentor.

Gant’s interactions with his mentor with extensive and positive: he met with his mentor quite often, nearly on a daily basis, because after he graduated Gant continued to work for him.

Those daily interactions were positive and, in most cases, inspirational. Gant's mentor was always concerned about his academic progress; Gant indicated that his mentor encouraged him to go to graduate school. When Gant initially met his mentor, Gant was close to graduation, and his mentor encouraged and inspired him to finish his studies. Gant's mentor had earned a PhD, and this was probably why he encouraged Gant to continue to graduate school.

In addition to this key mentorship relationship, Gant contends that others also inspired him. Some mentors inspired him to achieve academic success while in college; others were "social mentors" because they helped him understand the social conditions, the social construct, and the pathway to navigate in a social environment. Then there were mentors who guided him through personal issues that he struggled with, or with specific challenges he had. According to Gant, several people served in different capacities: one person did not provide the mentorship guidance for him in all areas; different people provided in different ways.

Gant explained that it was important for him to see other Black male professionals who worked on campus. He indicated that seeing these professionals definitely motivated him to be successful. He vividly remembered the first Black faculty member he had at Ferris State University. This person was the basketball coach at the university who also taught an Introduction to Business class. Gant was fascinated by the fact that he had a Black professor for the very first time, and he indicated that it was an incredible feeling that he would never forget. Gant mused that this Black professor, even to this day, may not realize what impact he had just by serving in this capacity; however, the memory reminded Gant of the impact and that Black men in academia can have on students. He stated, "when you are working as a Black male in higher education, your job is routine to you, and you do not realize the impact that you may

have on the students that you serve, particularly students of color.” He indicated that having his first Black male professor was motivation for him to strive to do better. Gant also recalled the time he had an opportunity to meet a Black chemistry professor and a Black dean of the College of Education, and how inspiring it was to see these Black men in positions of leadership on campus, even though they were few and far in between. Gant remembered that seeing each of these men was an incentive for him to do better.

According to Gant, some Black male students may need to be motivated, particularly if they are first-generation college students. For these students, seeing Black male professionals in leadership roles on campus could impact their success significantly. Gant indicated that he knew he was lucky to be self-motivated as a youngster. His academic values were instilled in him growing up, and he was inspired and motivated primarily by his parents and siblings. In his household, it was not a matter of if you were going to college, it was a matter of what college were you going to. He was one of three children who went to college and graduated. Gant indicated that he did not want to suggest that his experiences — being on a course to be a college graduate and having an upbringing and foundation that was rooted in academic success — meant that all students fit this profile. Gant explained that having more Black professors would definitely have been a motivating factor for him and for the other Black male students as well. The few Black professors whom he did know and meet motivated him to want to succeed and do well and deliver because he did not want to let them down. According to Gant, seeing them in their positions at the university, wherever they were, gave him an added obligation, motivation, and incentive to succeed.

Gant explained that there were no formal university-based mentorship programs for Black male students at the colleges that he attended. Instead, the mentorship programs that existed at the university were rooted in student organizations. They were not developed out of the Student Affairs Division, or any of the student activities offices; instead, they were part of a fraternity. Gant recalled that the fraternities supported the Black men, and sororities supported the Black women. According to Gant, while there were no formalized support systems for Black students at the university, there probably should have been. The lack of support systems was one of the motivating factors for Gant to start the Office of Minority Student Affairs. Gant claimed, "Black students had to create their own network of support to encourage one another to persist through the rigors that academia presented." Gant felt that mentorship is absolutely an important component of Black male student success in higher education.

Without a doubt, it is. Often times, you don't realize the impact that being mentored had on you until after the mentorship experience has passed. When you've moved on, when your mentor has relocated or passes away, and when you're no longer in that environment. It's when you have an opportunity to reflect back upon those days, and you think wow, this person was really significant in my life. I didn't realize how important of a role they played until I left the environment. Upon reflection, absolutely, I mean, I can wholeheartedly say that it had a tremendous impact on my development, and absolutely it has an impact on the development of young Black males and females at the university, without question.

Gant claimed that formal and informal mentorship relationships are important success components for Black male students because often times they have a difficult time understanding the complexity of the educational system. They need someone who has been where they are and have been successful in that environment to help them navigate the challenges. It is also important that they have someone who has the experience to help guide and encourage them along the way. According to Gant, while many times students can do it,

they just need a little extra push; sometimes they need just a little bit of an incentive that the mentor can provide. He indicated that “mentors can help guide a student and provide constructive and positive feedback.” Sometimes the mentors’ comments can hurt the students’ feelings with their observations, but this information may be essential and helpful when developing students into being well-rounded human beings. According to Gant, all aspects of the mentor relationship are useful. He indicated that it is not always, “yes, you’re doing a good job; keep it up.” He said that sometimes it is, “hey, you’re screwing up; get it right! In some instances, the feedback that you get that is constructive but also hurtful, is just as impactful as the encouragement that you get when you tell the student that he or she is doing something right.” Gant also indicated that “the most important aspect of the mentoring relationship should be rooted in trust and respect and that should work both ways between the mentor and the mentee.” He contended that both negative and positive feedback are significant components of the relationship.

Having one mentor or multiple mentors in college is very important. Gant indicated that students might feel that they are strong individually, and that they may not need anyone; they may believe that they can do it all by themselves. But, the reality is that every single person needs someone who has the experience that they do not have themselves, someone who they can look up to, or someone who can provide a source of encouragement. According to Gant, we as individuals are very fragile, and we do not like to admit it, but we are: “Even the strongest person is extremely fragile.” In fact, according to Gant, “the most significant people, or the greatest leaders are the most fragile people. However, we all need mentors, and we all need to have that one person or those individuals in our lives who can guide us, even if it is only for a

season.” Gant indicated that the vice president who served as his mentor during his senior year in college and through his first two years working at the university was initially “only for a season,” but the impact he had on him during those 900 days was significant, and it still resonates with him more than 30 years later.

Gant does not feel that mentorship programs and individual mentors are mutually exclusive or that one approach is better than the other; he argues that they are both significant. He used an analogy to make his point by saying, “who is more important, W.E.B Dubois or Booker T. Washington?” He indicated often times we are forced to choose one or the other; however, he contends that both having mentors and having mentorship programs are significant, as both components are important to the development of the Black male student. Gant asserted that having a university-based organization or a formalized mentoring program can be significant and extremely important and so is having individual one-on-one mentors. He stated that there are many ways that universities can, and should, contribute to the overall success of Black male students. Having adequate mentors or role models on campus is certainly an important way to do so. He indicated that, while occasionally students may tell you how much you have impacted their academic success when you are working with them daily, most of the time mentors are not aware of the impact that they are having because they are simply doing work that needs to be done. He claimed that in his role at the university, he did not realize how important his role and identity were, but when he looked back and reflected upon his daily work and his commitment to the students, he realized how important those relationships were.

Gant wasn't sure which approach worked best: if a student should search for someone to serve as a mentor, or if a mentor should seek out a student. However, what is important is that "each person should seek out a person who they believe in and have trust in and someone who they are confident in," and that "individuals should look beyond color and look at the substance, character, and the profile of the person." He was confident that, if you looked around the university, "you will discover that there will be more Black male students being mentored by faculty, staff, and others." He indicated that "the challenges that many faculty and staff who are not minority have, and what makes them somewhat reluctant to engage in relationships with a Black male, is because color creates a boundary that many White folks do not know how to cross. Black students would be receptive in most instances to someone who genuinely cares about them, no matter the color." According to Gant, the challenge for Black students is determining what the mentor's real intentions are. Once they discover that they are genuine and authentic in their attempt to reach them, then the two can foster a healthy, meaningful, and lasting relationship, whether they are Black or White.

Gant briefly addressed the achievement gap, and if universities should be more intentional in their efforts to do more for Black male students. He stated that, "if universities are truly concerned about narrowing the achievement gap, then they absolutely should be doing more. However, if the university is only concerned about getting students through their doors to build their financial coffers and to just get the student body count up, then they will not do it." Gant argues that if institutions are concerned about closing the achievement gap, and they are concerned about trying to right the wrongs and create a system of balance and level the playing field, then universities should be actively finding mentors and creating

mentorship programs to improve the Black male existence on their campus. According to Gant, universities may never be able to do enough for the Black male student because things are changing all the time, but what institutions must do is recognize where they are weak so that they can change with the times. He indicated that, “you have to step out of your comfort zone as an institution in order to reach a population, or else you become obsolete; you become insignificant. You have got to change up what you do in order to meet the population where they are.” He claims that universities have to be on the cutting edge at all times, and being on the cutting edge, often times means coming out of your comfort zone.

According to Gant, “the role of a mentor is to provide constructive, positive, authentic, and genuine feedback to an individual, to help guide them on a course, not to tell them what to do, but to provide an insight and perspective that is based on experience and wisdom.” He stated that mentors should show students the way, share with the mentee their missed steps, let them know it was not always perfect for them, and that they also made mistakes. He asserted that it is important for mentors to encourage the students when they get down or begin to doubt themselves, or when they do not believe that they can make it. It is important for mentors to be a source of inspiration to the students, not to dictate, but to work alongside the students in a way to help them to achieve their desired results. Gant contends that the most important characteristic of a good mentor is to be authentic. A good mentor is also honest, consistent, and available. A good mentor is one who will not be afraid to tell the truth and will be sincere. According to Gant, “the most important aspect of the mentoring relationship is trust. Without trust there is no relationship. It does not matter whether it is a

husband and a wife, a sister and a brother, a brother and a brother, where there is no trust there is no relationship. You have to trust in order for the relationship to flourish.”

In closing, Gant indicated that mentorship is crucial for the development of Black men, but it is not the only thing. He stated that higher education needs to dedicate adequate resources to this population that has been historically overlooked, marginalized, and ignored. He stressed that education needs to do this, in order to right the wrong, narrow the achievement gap, and level the playing field. He indicated that it is also important for those who are mentored to return the favor to others, and to fulfill their obligation to other people. He explained that mentorship is not a one-way relationship where the students are the ones being mentored, and the situation stops there. Instead, it should be, “I was mentored, I learned, and now I have an obligation to mentor those that are coming behind me, a duty, and a responsibility to help uplift those that will be one day my replacement.” Gant stressed that being the recipient of a wonderful mentoring relationship is not the end; it only ends when you are now delivering the goods to someone else, helping them achieve.

The Museum Curator: Khalid El-Hakim

Khalid El-Hakim is a 46-year-old Black male who is currently a doctoral student at the University of Illinois-Champaign. El-Hakim attended Ferris State University for his Bachelor’s degree and Western Michigan University for his Master’s degree. He is a first-generation college student, raised in a single parent household. Each of the institutions he attended is considered a PWI. Previously, El-Hakim was a middle school teacher in the Detroit Public Schools system.

El-Hakim is a teacher, scholar, entrepreneur, activist, father, husband, and brother. However, he defines his main occupation to be an educator/entrepreneur, claiming that his most notable endeavor has been developing the Black History 101 Mobile Museum. This museum is a collection of artifacts that he takes across the country to teach Black history.

El-Hakim described his undergraduate college experience as rough in the beginning, because he grew up in Detroit, a large, predominantly Black city where his K-12 experiences were at predominantly Black schools. When he decided to attend Ferris State University, he did not know the demographics of the school or Big Rapids, Michigan, the school's location. He had to overcome what he termed "culture shock" while he made the adjustment to a very different environment. He described his first two years as being challenging. His grades were low his freshman year; going into his sophomore year, he had a better understanding of the expectations of college students and the obstacles of living in a new environment. During this period, he changed his major from criminal justice and decided to pursue a degree in education and social science. He became active in student organizations, and also wrote a guest column for the student newspaper. Some of his leadership skills were developed while serving in various student organizations. He uses many of those skills today in his own personal business.

El-Hakim did have a relationship with a Black male on campus who he considered his mentor. El-Hakim argued, though, that "it does matter if you have a mentor of the same race." In hindsight, he recognized that he had multiple Black mentors on campus, and he contended that those relationships developed organically. El-Hakim indicated that each of his mentor relationships developed differently. He said:

Dr. Jesse Huff, Dr. Cornett, Raymond Gant, and David Pilgrim were four of my mentors. I would say all four of them became mentors in a very non-traditional type of way, if that

makes sense. I didn't pursue them to become mentors and I never asked any of them to be a mentor, and none of them ever said to him, "you're going to be my mentee." And all four of those relationships happened organically.

For the most part, El-Hakim defined his mentorship relationships as informal. He said, "they offered themselves as individuals that I could reach out to if I had any kind of issues. On several occasions, I had to reach out to each of my mentors." He also said, "they all were very responsive, and I think that was one of the key things with all four of them, is that they were very responsive to what I needed at different points of time in my undergrad experience." According to El-Hakim, his mentors exchanged phone numbers, stayed in touch, and took him out to lunch when they would discuss his academics and social life. When it was time for him to secure recommendations, each of them was able to provide them.

El-Hakim defined informal mentoring relationships as more useful because the informality allows the relationship to be closer. He asserted that, if the relationships were formal and part of an institutional structure, there might be barriers to effective mentoring. Informal mentoring relationships allow the relationship to be more fluid and organic. Because his mentoring relationships were informal, "if I needed to call somebody at midnight, I could do that." Conversely, formal mentoring relationships may enforce limits: One may be able to call only between the hours of 9 AM and 5 PM, or only meet the mentor only in their office, while informal mentors might offer to meet at McDonalds. In terms of the importance of formal and informal mentoring relationships, to El-Hakim, they both are equally valid and important. He stressed that, even though his mentoring relationships were all informal, that did not make them any less official or valuable.

El-Hakim recalled that he met or talked to his mentors usually two to three times per week. His mentors also checked on his academic progress regularly, with conversations about his academic progress happening bi-weekly or monthly.

El-Hakim strongly believed that his mentors motivated him to be successful academically. Each one of them pushed him to pursue higher education and graduate school. They all had the expectation that he would complete a graduate program, and they supported him by writing recommendations letters for graduate school. In addition, they showed their support by passing along books and offering him connections to their professional networks.

Seeing other Black male professionals on campus was also a motivating factor for El-Hakim to be successful in his studies. He recalled: “prior to coming to the university, I had never met a Black man with a PhD. So, to be able to see Black men with PhDs, to be able to see and interact with Black men with PhDs, let me know that it was attainable, that there was another option for me.” He claimed that having someone who could help him map out a plan and show him what hoops he would have to jump through to achieve an education and attend graduate school was important. El-Hakim contended that additional Black male professionals or role models working on campus could clearly have a great impact on Black students’ academic success. He stated, “I think it is important for students to see people who look like them in all parts of the university.” He noted that none of his mentors were in the College of Education where he was enrolled, and he does not believe that there were any Black faculty or administrators in the College of Education. He expressed, “I would have loved to have seen and had a mentor that looked like me in the College of Education. I do not think there were even any Black women in the college.” El-Hakim was sure that he would have had a deeper sense of

belonging if he had a mentor who looked like him in his college. Going through his educational journey by himself, as the only Black male in his college, was challenging. El-Hakim stated, “when we think of the challenges of having Black males in education, a part of that is that Black men are not being socialized, molded, and mentored into education, and we need people who make those commitments.”

While completing his undergraduate education, he does not recall his university having any specific mentorship programs aimed at supporting Black male student achievement or success. However, he recalled viewing the Office of Minority Student Affairs as an important resource, knowing that he had a space to go to and people to talk to.

El-Hakim believes that mentorship was a key component to his overall academic success. He indicated that, because college was very stressful, without mentors encouraging him along the way, he is sure it would have been challenging for him to finish. He stressed how difficult it was “coming from the environment that I came from into a space that was a PWI and not having the support of people who look like me.... then not being able to find men in this space who I could trust and felt cared about my wellbeing, both personally and professionally. It would have been a lot more difficult for me to go through the process without that type of mentorship.”

According to El-Hakim, mentorship is important “simply because through any program that you go through, having someone who can help guide you, give you advice, and pull your coattail when you might be off track, or help mold you or shape you into the field that you are desiring to go into — having that type of mentorship helps out a lot.” He also acknowledged the

importance of, after graduation, being able to connect to his mentor's networks and resources to create opportunities for jobs and professional development.

Both formal and informal mentoring relationships are very important, according to El-Hakim: "they are important because students need to feel that there is someone they can trust who cares about their wellbeing. Again, for students who travel here and come to campus from urban areas, who might not have experience being in a rural area before, your mentor is your guidepost. It is that person who you can count on to bounce off ideas and ask for advice." He contended that because mentors have been through the process before, they can more effectively show their mentee the ropes. They can introduce the students to important people on campus and get them acclimated to campus life. The most useful aspects of the mentoring relationship, according to El-Hakim, include "just having access to people who I knew I could count on for whatever questions that I may have had as they relate to a daily challenge, an academic challenge, or a challenge in navigating the space I was in." He stated that "sometimes it's not even going to your mentors and bringing them a bunch of problems, but it's just knowing that you have someone there you can trust who would be willing to support you if need be." For many students, this is all that is needed: Knowing that someone has your back.

He stressed that it is critically important for Black male students to have mentors while in college. Mentorship programs aimed at Black male success, according to El-Hakim, are probably even more important than having one-on-one mentors. He states:

A program is more intentional; it's planned out, and you're using the resources of the university to make an intentional effort to address these issues for the students who are coming up from these different areas having different needs. So, for a university to make that commitment is very important. But for me, again, I went out seeking these relationships on my own, the university did not have a program, at least from what I saw that was doing that.

According to El-Hakim, having adequate mentors on campus would certainly contribute to the overall academic success of Black male students. He claimed that it is equally important for students to seek out their own mentors and for mentors to seek out students. In considering achievement gap trends of Black male students, he emphasized that universities must be even more intentional and strategic in identifying mentors for this demographic group. He stated that, because of the latest performance trends associated with Black male students, universities should be doing a lot more in creating mentorship opportunities and mentorship programs.

In conclusion, El-Hakim stressed, “the role of a mentor is to be a guide, to be able to recognize challenges a student might have, and to be able to be committed to helping that student through his academic process.” He continued by saying, “a good mentor makes themselves accessible and available to the students. They have good communication skills; they are resourceful, and supportive.” El-Hakim added: “the most important and, what I think is key, is Communication. Being able to state clearly what resources you can provide as a mentor. Communication in terms of accessibility, listening, and providing guidance or advice.”

The Recruiter: Tyrone Collins

Tyrone Collins is a 64-year-old Black man who has earned two Master’s degrees, one in counseling and the second in career and technical education. He attended college at Ferris State University, Central Michigan University, and Michigan State University, all of which are predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Currently, Collins is the coordinator of Multicultural Student Recruitment at Ferris State University. Collins is a Louisiana native but was raised in

Detroit, Michigan. Collins was raised in a two-parent household and began his undergraduate college career at Ferris State University in 1973.

Collins indicated that his undergraduate experiences were different from those who were not involved in social organizations. As a non-traditional student, he noticed that most of the Blacks at the university were involved in fraternities and sororities. He worried that, if he did not get involved in some capacity, he would be isolated and on his own as a student. Collins learned that communication was essential in meeting more people: "I learned early on as an undergraduate student to be willing to communicate with others. It was all about communication, so I bridged that gap and then met more people. That is what a lot of students at the university did; it was how willing you are to communicate with people to break down barriers."

Collins indicated that he had two or three individuals who were his mentors who identified him, or "selected" him, through casual conversations. All of his mentors were Black men. When asked whether it was important that his mentors were the same race, he said that it did not necessarily make a difference:

If you can find somebody who believes in you and has interest in you, and knows what you want to do, then by all means, work with that person. You know, color doesn't make you or that individual more special than the other; it's their attitude towards you that makes a difference.

His mentoring relationships had both formal and informal aspects. He recalled an informal experience from one of his mentoring relationships: While playing cards in the student center, one of his mentors saw him and asked, "What are you doing in the student center? Aren't you supposed to be in class?" He also recalled more formal contacts when his mentors would request that he visit their office, and they would share advice:

Look you ought to be here, because this may benefit you later down the road. So informally from the standpoint we played cards together and formally from the standpoint of them informing me what I need to know later on down the road.

Collins noted that having formal or informal mentoring relationships depends on the individual. In Collins' opinion, students need a combination of both formal and informal mentoring relationships: "Some people can relate to formal mentorship. They understand the nature of a formal mentorship. And then others cannot because they may think that the individual is too controlling, and they are not used to that coming up through their contact with their parents or other adults, so they are more geared towards an informal type."

Collins indicated that although he and his mentors did not have regularly scheduled meetings, his mentors did regularly check on his academic progress, most often when they saw each other in passing. Sometimes his mentors would probe a little deeper when they felt that his answers on how well he was doing were a little vague. They might say, "I see that you aren't doing as well as you say you are doing!"

Collins indicated that his mentors motivated and helped him achieve academic success by modeling how to interact with university administration and showing him that it is possible to exist on a predominately White campus. They showed him that you could be your authentic self as a professional Black male if you did it the right way. He also stated that it was inspiring to see other Black male professionals on campus, although back in the 1970s, there were very few. He could only recall two to four Black professionals, male or female: "I feel that in a way those who were here, and there were only a few that we did have, certainly would have helped those in need. The more that we could have had, the more they could have communicated through the different lives they had and the different struggles they had, to help me as a

student realize what it is that I should do to be a more professional black male.” He noted that seeing a person of color on campus motivated him to be successful because he understood that they went through some struggles to make it to that point in their career. Collins emphasized that seeing more Black male professionals on campus would most likely have impacted his academic success very positively.

When he was an undergraduate student, Collins’ institution did not have any formal mentorship programs aimed at supporting Black student achievement: “besides fraternities, the only thing that we had was the NAACP.” Yet Collins noted that mentorship could be an essential component to the academic success of the Black male student. He stressed that, because of the many struggles in the Black community and in some instances the lack of family development, young Black men need to see others on campus who can be role models. They need to see professionals and people who are willing to give them a helping hand. Otherwise, the old mentality of underachievement that has plagued our urban inner-city youth for generations would simply be reinforced.

According to Collins, the most useful part of the mentoring relationship is “just a conversation, understanding the Black male, what that individual wants, where they are, where they want to go, and how they plan on getting there, and then how the mentor can help them address those three areas. So, to me that was the most important part, the conversation between the mentee and the mentor.”

Collins asserted that the number of mentors an individual may need really depends on the student’s upbringing and his family life. The students’ needs may depend on their relationships with other male figures such as a father, grandfather, and whoever else may have

guided them to be mentally strong. Students may not need an abundance of mentors; one mentor may be sufficient. However, a student who may not have a strong family foundation may need multiple mentors during his college experience. It all depends on the student as an individual: "There is a definite need because of the struggle, the lack of family development that the young Black males experience. They need to see somebody on campus who is a professional, who is willing to give them a hand. Otherwise, it is the same old mentality that will follow them because they do not have a male leadership role in their life. So yes, a Black male role model I think is essential on anybody's campus."

Collins contended that both organized mentorship programs and individual mentors are important and that both are critical to the development of the Black male student: "Because the mentorship program, if it is an established one, may provide funding to do things with the mentee. A mentor may not be able to do some things that may be of a financial cost. That may limit their interaction outside of the institution." Collins argues that, without a doubt, mentors contribute to the overall success of the Black male student because they provide "somebody to relate to," "somebody they feel who cares about them. Then also too, hopefully the mentor would be able to have that person understand and learn about campus, know the connections so that as they go up the grade level, they get more involved in leadership roles that would help them in regard to job placement, internships, and things of that nature."

Collins emphasized that while it is important that mentors seek out students, particularly Black male students, it is equally important for Black male students to seek out their own mentors. He claims that institutions must develop mentorship programs to match students and mentors effectively and efficiently.

Collins noted that the achievement gap between Black male students and their counterparts is all the more reason why universities must be more intentional in their efforts to provide mentors or mentorship programs for this group of students, especially if the institutions claim to be interested in the academic success of Black male students. In addition, Collins stated, “I think that on a university level, we have to go beyond the campuses. We need to go into the high schools to establish mentors, because a lot of times we would lose them — the Black male in high schools — so therefore, they don’t make it to college to be mentored.” Collins emphasized that, by starting mentorship relationships young, the students could build on the process and, when they get to college, they already know about mentoring and mentorship programs. They would be more likely to seek out the campus resources that support their academic success. In Collins’ opinion, colleges should always be doing more in developing programs for Black male students that will encourage them to be successful: “There are some schools that I am aware of that do have such programs for Black males.” Collins recalled that in his college years “I think we did have a program or person. It was an Ombudsman at Ferris State in the 1970s, and we pretty much called him the Black guy, because he was one of those individuals who would walk around and talk to the students and ask them ‘How are you doing? What’s happening?’ He was one of those individuals who would talk to students and ask questions to show that he was interested in them; he informally kept tabs on the students of color.”

Collins emphasized that, while there are many aspects to good mentorship, the primary role of the mentor is “to encourage an individual to do better than what they think they can. The role of a mentor is to listen, to be able to make the person feel comfortable during their

conversation. The role of a mentor is to help an individual be successful in spite of themselves.” He also indicated that a mentor should not be “trying to make a mini-me. Basically, what you are trying to do is to make a better person or help somebody to become a better person.”

Lastly, Collins stressed that a mentoring program is most beneficial when it has a financial component to it that allows the mentor to take his mentee to a ball game or movie. With financial support, the relationship is not limited to just the classroom, but allows the mentee to be exposed to other environments. Collins recalled that Ferris State University was a comfortable place to attend college, a place that provided opportunities for growth; however, it does not matter what institution one attends, all students could use additional assistance to succeed.

College Access: Bobby J. Springer

Bobby Springer is a 52-year-old Black male who earned his Bachelor’s degree from the University of North Carolina Wilmington and a Master’s degree from Western Michigan University. Springer was a first-generation college student and was raised in a single-parent household; however, his mother and father lived in the same community. Both institutions Springer attended are considered PWIs. Currently, he serves as the Associate Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs at Grand Valley State University. Springer grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he attended the public school system. He was a sports fan and played sports throughout his school years, and he accredits his involvement in sports as the main reason why he was able to go to college. He explained that the reason he wanted to go to college was mainly because he wanted to play basketball at the college level. He claimed that his involvement in high school sports is also the reason he was only academically average but

achieved all-state honors for playing basketball. Springer started his college journey at Gulf Coast Community College in Panama City, Florida, where he received a full-ride scholarship to play basketball. Because he was an average high school student, he also felt that the community college route was the best way for him to build his academic skills.

According to Springer, the challenges he faced as a college student were going to school 1,000 miles away from home and entering college with weak academic skills. The community college gave him an opportunity to take remedial courses to improve his academic abilities, particularly in the areas of reading and English. In the end, Springer felt that taking these remedial courses was probably the best thing for him because it positioned him where he needed to be academically, helping him do well in his other courses.

Springer considered two coaches to be his mentors, the head basketball coach and the assistant basketball coach. The head coach was a White male and the assistant coach was a Black male. According to Springer, the assistant coach was an especially strong mentor, mainly because they had a lot in common, as the assistant coach played the same position in basketball when he was in college. Springer recalled that he gave him the support that he needed as an 18-year-old 1,000 miles away from home. The assistant coach also reinforced that Springer was going to college to better his life and provided a positive example each day for him and his teammates. His assistant coach was also only about 5 or 6 years older than the team members; thus, they shared similar experiences, and he became a great role model. Springer said that he did not know if he would have had success in college had he not had a person like his mentor in front of him. According to Springer, "it does matter in many ways if you have a mentor of the same race. It is valuable and very important to have someone who

can give you real life conversations, real life examples on the good and the bad.” He indicated that mentorship is critical and contends that Black male students who attend PWIs can certainly benefit from mentorship.

Springer indicated that he identified his mentor by playing basketball, but also his mentor took an interest to him and probably identified him around the same time. They also lived in the same housing area, making it very easy to connect with each other regularly. Having opportunities to be around his assistant coach through the basketball team made the connection easier for him and his teammates. He describes their mentorship relationship as being formal and stressed that his mentor was always there to give direction and guidance through the college process. Springer indicated, “for me to be successful in college, my mentor’s job was to pour into me and my teammates the recipe for success.” He claims that it was important for them to value his input, learn, and build upon the experiences so that they could be the best that they could be in college. Springer claims that formal and informal mentoring relationships are both valuable tools for the student and that sometimes mentorship can also work at a distance. According to Springer, while he does not get a chance to see some of his mentors all the time, when they do talk or come into contact with each other, even if it is only for 15 minutes, he states, “your mentor might pour into you a word that can carry you for the rest of the year.” For this reason, Springer argues, both formal and informal mentoring relationships are critical.

While in college, Springer met with his mentor quite often because they saw each other every day on the basketball court. Sometimes their conversations were longer than others; however, for the first couple of years of their relationship, the frequent contact each day was

very valuable. He claims that on some days they would touch base for an hour or more, and on other days they probably only touch base for five minutes. Springer recalled:

Just to know that you've got a person like that in your life when you're 1,000 miles away from home, you know that you are in a good place.

Springer indicated that his mentor also checked on his academic progress during midterms and at the end of the semester. He recalled that sometimes a professor may have shared some red flags or concerns with his mentor, so his mentor would discuss those issues with him and make sure he was doing what he needed to do to be successful. Springer stressed that his mentor was a strong inspiration to him and always emphasized the importance of taking class work very seriously and understanding that he was in school for a purpose, not only to play basketball, but also to earn a college degree. Springer noted that his mentor really stressed getting an education, probably because he had not earned his own Bachelor's degree, and that lack was probably the reason he could not move forward to become a head coach.

Springer indicated that seeing other Black male professionals who worked on campus also motivated him to be successful. He stated:

In particular, the one that came to mind most often was when I was working on my master's degree and my first professor was Black. That just kind of blew me away; first of all, that he had his doctorate degree, and he was teaching, not only myself, but also White students in my classroom. That was pretty powerful; just another reminder that if you work hard you can accomplish anything, and that example I'll never forget.

When recalling his undergraduate years, Springer indicated he never saw many people who looked like him, teaching classes, or in key administrative roles. While there were a few Black men and women on campus, Springer was sure that, if he had seen more in key roles, it would have been important to his development. He argued that this is the reason why Black

students who go to historically Black institutions tend to do a lot better because they have those examples around them all the time, reinforcing that they belong and that they can achieve.

According to Springer, none of the institutions that he attended had mentorship programs in place. The basketball team itself was probably the closest thing to a mentorship program because the team was its own community. Springer recalled that they had multiple assistant coaches, and while not all of them were the same race, they were a bridge to help them be successful on and off the court. Springer did not recall any of the institutions that he attended having formal mentorship programs targeting Black male students. According to Springer, having mentors or even mentorship programs is critical to the academic success of Black male students, especially because many Black male students come from very humble backgrounds. He states, “they need those spaces and faces to positively pour into them and let them know that they are in the right place and that they can be successful on campus and after graduation.” Springer stressed that mentorship was an important component to his academic success, even though a lot of his mentoring was centered on his sports career. Springer emphasized that he knew that if he wanted to continue to play, he had to do his fair share in the classroom; that became a driving force for him to succeed in his classes. His coach-mentor, though, showed him that he had a bigger purpose in college than just playing sports and taught him that when his basketball days were over, he needed to prepare himself for a professional career.

Springer contended that mentoring, both formal and informal, are important success components for the Black male student. He indicated that everyone needs examples of how to

make it through college, sometimes simply someone to tell us about their struggles. He explained that when students see professionals on campus, initially they may think that these professionals clearly made all the right decisions. However, if the students have an opportunity to talk to the professionals, they will learn about their struggles and how someone helped them to get to where they are. According to Springer, hearing these experiences reinforces the importance of having others around for help and guidance. He stressed that with mentors or mentorship programs, you know that you are not in it by yourself: “We all need a little help in order to get to the next level or opportunity.” Springer believes “it is critical for each one to teach one, because if it were not for one reaching back, helping another, then I do not believe that anyone would be able to make it through.”

Springer identified many aspects of the mentoring relationship that can be useful: “One important aspect would definitely be the one-on-one interaction, knowing that at any time when you need to talk or have interaction with your mentor it is possible. It is very important to know that this person really cares about you. Knowing that at any moment you can call or stop by or get help from your mentor is priceless.” According to Springer, for students on a predominantly White campus, knowing that they have someone in their corner helps them to keep moving forward year by year. Ultimately, the next thing they realize is, because of those experiences, they find themselves graduating with a college degree. College mentors are especially critical because it is difficult to do it alone:

It’s just much easier if you talk to people who have traveled down the path and you learn from their mistakes and successes to help you be the best student that you can be. So, I just think mentoring, taking advice from someone who can help you be successful, is one of the better things that can happen to you.

Both mentorship programs and one-on-one mentorships are both equally important to Springer. Mentorship programs offering involvement and group participation, and individual mentors “who are available to help” are also very important; “both are critical.” He stressed that “some mentors might not be able to give valuable time to a mentoring program, but their door is always open, and they are always available to connect and make time to talk or to meet with the student.” However, both types of mentoring opportunities can be effective and helpful for students. Springer noted that having adequate mentors or role models on campus would definitely contribute to the overall academic success of Black male students; however, often times there is such a small percentage of Black male mentors on campus, and they are busy doing other things, that sometimes they are readily available. Thus, college campuses clearly would benefit from more minority representation.

Springer noted that it is important for mentors to take the time to reach out to Black male students on campus, introducing themselves and letting them know who they are, but students should also seek out their own mentors as well. Mentors need to let the students know that they are available to talk or answer questions, and the students need to reach out to potential mentors to tap into the wealth of knowledge that they may offer. Springer stressed that if students avoid approaching potential mentors to find out what they are about, they are selling themselves short. Thus, Springer recommends both ways of meeting and making connections because the most important result is that they both need each other.

In discussing the achievement gap between Black male students and their counterparts, Springer stressed that universities must do a better job at addressing the issue:

We bring this small body of students on campus and we need to make sure that they have the resources and connections to be successful on campus. When you bring

someone out of their comfort zone into a brand new arena, that's a challenge for most individuals. But I think if universities admit students to campus, they need to make sure that they have things on campus in place for students to be successful. I think that's only fair.

Springer argued that there is always more to be done in terms of developing more mentorship programs or providing mentors for Black males. Springer noted that in most PWIs there is not enough minority representation or support. He indicated that, in general, the significant struggles of being a Black male are well known and researched. To add to those, just stepping on a campus is a challenge all by itself. Not to have support measures in place makes it even more of a challenge.

Because of these challenges, Springer emphasized that the key role of a mentor is "to be a listener, to be one to guide, one to help, one to show the way through many situations and scenarios. The role of a mentor should be one who emphasizes successes as well as identifies what causes failures, particularly when the mentee is not holding up his part of the bargain." Springer claimed that a mentor is someone who serves as an example of the right way to do whatever is at hand. The mentor's role is to just be a lighthouse helping the student to navigate during the good times and the bad times, and a good mentor shares the good and the bad. Springer emphasized that a good mentor has to show his mistakes as well as his accomplishments because the mentee needs to know that there are often times struggles before success. According to Springer, "it is important that the mentor shares all that they have, so that the mentee understands that it takes work, and it takes time to be that complete individual." He stressed that the most important aspect of a mentoring relationship is being respectful of one another and not holding grudges or holding on to things that can damage the relationship, being able to move past tough situations, knowing that the ultimate goal is to help

someone do better, to have more understanding, and to be wiser than before. Springer asserted that mentoring is critical to the Black male student, and that PWIs do not have a lot of examples for Black males. Black males need to have multiple individuals on campus who look like them and who want them to be successful, and they also need to have resources to help them on your journey. He applauded the universities and the individuals who are willing to go to bat to make those things happen for Black male students.

Precollege Professional: Lumas Helaire, Ph.D.

Dr. Lumas Helaire, a 38-year-old Black man, attended Morehouse College, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Atlanta, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology. He then attended graduate school at the University of Michigan where he earned his Master's degree and a Ph.D. in developmental psychology. Helaire was a first-generation college student raised in a traditional two-parent household. His post-secondary educational experiences included attending both an HBCU and a PWI. Currently, Helaire serves as the Associate Director of the Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Born in Louisiana, Helaire moved to San Francisco when he was about 10 years old. It was a significant move in his life; his parents explained to him that they were moving for better work and educational opportunities. According to Helaire, this taught him early in life that sometimes it is important to move in order to gain a better education. He decided when he was young that he wanted to return to the south to attend college; this prompted him to attend Morehouse. His decision was prompted because Morehouse is an HBCU and had a small student-to-teacher ratio. Helaire wanted to continue his education at an HBCU and also to be in

a warm climate. During his time at Morehouse, his first mentor was a faculty member with an earned Ph.D., who encouraged him to think about going on to earn a terminal degree:

You either go to Howard or the University of Michigan for your Ph.D. because U of M graduates the second highest number of Black Ph.D.s outside of Howard, and they have a lot of resources. It was the only place that I knew of that had a combined program in education and psychology, so I ended up at Michigan pursuing my degree in Education.

Helaire was intentional about not working in the K-12 school system because, while he was growing up, he and his friends were often told by educators that they could not learn. In his eyes, the school system attacked people who looked like him. As he grew older, he decided to go into education so that he could do something about changing the system.

Helaire positively described his undergraduate college experience, recalling that he was fortunate because his best friend from high school went to college with him. His best friend's father was the vice superintendent of their school district, and he encouraged them to enroll in good schools with other Black students. Helaire indicated that, if it were not for that relationship, he would not have known much about how college works or how to get into school. He described himself as an academically strong student, so earning good grades became his primary focus. Helaire did not focus on being a part of any organization or group or even having what others would describe as a "well-rounded" college experience. Helaire remembered that he met his future mentor through his best friend. His mentor happened to be college roommates with his father's friend. His relationship with his mentor was extremely valuable, eventually providing opportunities for Helaire to grow as a researcher, which in turn prepared him for and made him more competitive in graduate school.

Helaire's mentor, who had received his degree in public health at Emory University, had worked for the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and had served as a mentor for several

students who were in the public health field. Helaire explained that when his mentor exposed him to other doctoral and master's students his curiosity and interest in graduate studies were sparked. Helaire's mentor had served as the chair for many doctoral committees, so his experiences made him an especially strong mentor. As an undergraduate student, Helaire looked up to several other people on campus, from administrators to professors; however, his mentor was the only one who shepherded him, encouraged him to think about his future, and exposed him to research opportunities that gave him the necessary skills and made him attractive for future opportunities.

Helaire indicated that having a mentor from the same race mattered to him for many reasons:

The society we live in has made race a very real factor in how opportunities are shaped because of structural racism and because people buy into it. They see it when they see you. Having a mentor who looks like you reminds you that people who look like you can still navigate through that space, and then they can also advocate for you. So, it supports your own psyche to see someone who looks like you who has gone into certain spaces you are working to get into; they can tell you how to navigate that. Also, you and that person are going to have very unique experiences in this society; they understand what you are going through; they understand your struggles. So, in a lot of ways, you won't have to struggle to articulate your experiences. And it doesn't mean that just because we look the same, are of the same race, that we have had the same experiences, but it's more likely to be so.

He recalled that the dynamics of his mentoring relationship had both formal and informal characteristics. When they first met, Helaire was seeking an internship experience and that first meeting was very formal and official. His future mentor made it clear that he was serious about preparing students to be professionals, and also preparing them for the work of supporting other Black students. Helaire's mentor provided opportunities for him to make extra money by helping him to be hired as a campus tutor. Helaire described his relationship with his

mentor as “being put on his shoulders,” and being prepared to go forth and be successful. While their relationship had both formal and informal aspects, Helaire indicated that this balance was typical of similar relationships in HBCUs. He described it as follows: “In the formal sense of the mentoring relationship, the setting was professional and very intentional. In the informal sense, the setting was more casual and resembled the father/son and/or uncle/nephew relationship.”

Helaire indicated that, for him, the balance between formal and informal aspects really depends on the two men involved. When he needed advice or guidance from his undergraduate school mentors, the situations may have had a formal look and feel, but they were informal, comfortable meetings. In graduate school, these relationships tended to be more formal. In both undergraduate and graduate school, he typically met with his mentors about once a week.

Helaire recalled that “typically my mentors regularly checked on my academic progress at the middle of the marking period and at the end of the semester.” They would ask, “I know you have your grades; how did you do?” Helaire’s mentors knew that he was a strong student, so their questions often focused on how his week was going and less about his grades. They would inquire about his grades only a couple of times each semester: mid semester and at semester’s end. Helaire stressed that that his mentors motivated and inspired him to achieve even greater academic success. His mentor at Morehouse mentor required his advisees to maintain a specific GPA, stressed that school was a priority and that academics must come first. Helaire recalled that his mentor also made it very clear that, if something from outside was disrupting his schoolwork, then he had to fix it immediately. His mentor made sure that his job

had duties and responsibilities related to the skills he needed to be successful in school and that his work experience reinforced what he was learning in the classroom. Helaire remembered completing research projects for his mentor using the same skills that he later needed for his statistics class.

During Helaire's Morehouse experience, "seeing other Black male professionals who worked at the university definitely was a motivation for me to be successful." The many Black male professionals who worked at Morehouse were all different: "Some seemed to be quirky; some seemed to be a little weird; some were great speakers or orators; some were more afro-centric; however, they all operated in the same space and they were all committed to Black students." According to Helaire, seeing so many young men committed to the development of Black males was powerful. He recalled: "It was also powerful in my experiences at the University of Michigan to see Black men who were unapologetically Black and who unapologetically voiced the need to have Black people and Black faces in certain spaces." Helaire emphasized that, "it is always valuable to see professional Black individuals whether you attended an HBCU or PWI."

Because his educational experiences were enriched by these mentorship relationships, Helaire indicated that he was not sure if seeing additional Black male professionals or role models working on campus would have impacted his academic success. He could recall only one negative experience in approaching a potential mentor: he described the time he reached out to a person who did not do a very good job responding to him. Helaire described himself as someone who did not need a large number of mentors, but he needed people who were serious and committed to him and his success.

Helaire did not recall if there were any mentorship programs aimed at supporting Black male student achievement at Morehouse. They may have existed; he simply wasn't aware of them. He described mentorship as being woven into the fabric of the institution. Helaire recalled an initiative at Morehouse called the Crown Forum. Freshmen were required to attend once every week, sit in the chapel, and discuss issues that were relevant to Black males. Thus, Helaire admitted that this Forum possibly could have been considered a specific mentorship program. Helaire remembered those weekly discussions was very motivating and inspiring.

Helaire did not recall if the University of Michigan offered any mentoring programs specifically targeting Black males; however, he did remember an organization for people of color aimed at raising awareness and action around issues related to their respective communities. He did not recall if the organization was a university-run initiative, but he believed it received support and resources from the university.

Helaire emphasized that mentorship had a great impact on his academic success because his mentor pushed him into graduate school. Because of his research experiences and his summer internship with his mentor, Helaire was able to get into graduate school fairly easily. Helaire's mentor challenged him to complete research tasks that no other undergraduates were doing, developing his research skills and strengthening his resume. Helaire's mentor not only helped him get accepted into his doctoral program, but he also orchestrated the connection at the University of Michigan and was indirectly responsible for Helaire being in his current administrative position. He contends that his academics and career have been a direct result of following the wisdom of his mentor, who cultivated and developed him as a student and a leader.

Helaire argued that, without question, mentorship is an important component to the academic success of Black male students. He indicated that every single person needs a mentor and does not understand how successful people can resist helping raise up those coming behind them:

I have sight that you don't yet have because you haven't had these experiences. But I'm going to guide you through this experience so that not only do you not experience it as rough as I did, I've paved the way. I can also actually tip your hat to help you get more out of the experience than I was able to get out of mine. Sometimes when you enter things, you can't see them as fully as when you get on the other side. So, as you walk through that space, I can really let you see how to see more about yourself, the ways, the habits you have, and the way in which you can see the world is holding you back. I can also help you honor your gifts more. Maybe you have certain things about yourself you don't see as a strength. Maybe you're not confident in some things, or maybe you don't really see it as a gift because it's so natural with who you are. As a mentor, I can help you see all of those things, so I think mentorship is important for anyone who is trying to grow.

Helaire stressed that Black males in higher education are, in many ways, one of the most targeted groups. For this reason, he emphasized that it is even more important for them to have mentors: Black male students need mentors because they need protection, and, in large part, this is what mentorship is all about for this group. He argued that a mentor is someone who can "cover you" or "keep you focused away from people who will say negative things" or have negative influences. He claimed: "a mentor can help protect the Black male student from some of the racism that he may experience along his educational journey. The value of mentorship for Black males extends beyond the classroom; it is also ways that mentors protect them from the people who want to lock them out of certain resources and opportunities."

Helaire stressed that formal mentor relationships are important components of success for Black male students because these students need to be prepared to have formal relationships with people throughout their careers, and they need to learn what these

relationships can look like. Informal relationships are also important to help the students learn how to navigate relationships successfully. He explained: "It's just like when you have a boss: you can actually have a professional relationship with your boss, but you can also have a personal relationship outside of the office. You just don't take the personal relationship for granted. You still show up to work on time and do your job with a certain level of excellence." Helaire indicated that young people, because they are still learning, need to be mentored on how to walk that line between formal and informal relationships. He asserted that students need to be taught how to navigate these relationships, and that they learn these skills over time. Helaire explained that being a mentor is a very safe way for a person to help a mentee figure out the important things. Good mentors know the students; they know what is in their best interest; they know their potential; and they are more likely to be forgiving even during times when they need to be direct and firm. Helaire emphasized that both formal and informal mentoring relationships are important because the professional working world operates in this same manner: we do business formally, and then we hit the golf course in the evening.

According to Helaire, the most important aspect of the mentoring relationship is the mentor knowing their mentee as a person. Looking deeper into the person as a whole is important because it allows the mentor to understand their mentee on a personal level and understand their career trajectory. Over time, a good mentor should understand the mentee's skills and talents. A good mentor can also help the mentee see things about themselves that no one else sees, allowing the mentor to support the mentee in finding the right path. Helaire stressed that students need at least one mentor in college. Of course, it is possible for a student to get through college without one, but Helaire does not know if it is the most effective way for

a student to matriculate through college. In Helaire's opinion, if a student does not have a mentor, then he will have missed out on a great deal, and in many instances, will probably be a few steps behind his peers. This student may not be ready to lead, because a huge part of leading is knowing how to be humble enough to follow, and often times you learn how to follow by having a good mentor.

Helaire indicated that in his experiences, mentorship programs and individual mentors can both be valuable; it depends on the one-on-one mentoring relationship and the quality of the mentorship program. In his opinion, students can have both effective and ineffective mentors, and it is the same with mentorship programs. He stressed that many college mentorship programs are of extremely high quality, but other programs are weak and ineffective. Black male students, however, need to seek effective mentoring and to be involved in some type of mentoring relationship. Helaire agreed that having an adequate number of mentors or role models on campus can definitely contribute to the success of the Black male student. He believes this because all successful communities have effective mentoring relationships; whether in business, industry, or education, all of these sectors thrive because of mentoring relationships. According to Helaire, support yields stronger people.

Helaire stressed that, in developing a new mentoring relationship, both parties should be involved:

You know, there have been people who've approached me and they're like, I want you to mentor so and so, and I'm like, 'hey I'm with it.' What you find is that some people are not in the space where they are ready for mentorship. They can connect that person, and me, but that person, even when I am reaching out, they're not reaching back. Not every mentor has the capacity to reach out and find someone and know how to build that relationship. This is why sometimes programs are very good — because some people who will be great mentors don't necessarily have the structural concept of

how to build the relationship, learn someone, and guide someone. Some people do it naturally; many people don't.

Helaire described one instance where a young college student was struggling a lot with anxiety, and the student felt like he was not good at building relationships or finding support. Helaire had to point out to the student that he was great at networking and that he had a support network that was much larger than he realized. Helaire opened the student's eyes to the fact that he had an academic advisor he trusted, a relationship with counseling services for his anxiety, and at least four to five professionals on campus whom he had a relationship with. Helaire reminded the student that he set those networks up all on his own. Helaire used the story to illustrate that sometimes students feel they are weak in certain areas or that they lack support, but in actuality they have established mentoring relationships and support systems that they never realized.

Helaire discussed the difficulties surrounding the achievement gap among Black male students, arguing that a larger issue is that of systemic racism. He stressed that the achievement gap assumes that White men set the standard for areas where Black men should be striving to achieve. He claimed that Black men need support because forces are working against them to achieve at their highest potential. He also stressed that universities must do more to support this specific demographic. According to Helaire, the issue is not simply improving grades. Many students can be performing well academically, but their institutions are ignoring the students' mental and emotional health and their sense of belonging on campus. Helaire indicated that students may very likely be dealing with micro-aggressions that could impact their health and their lives, 5, 10, maybe 15 years in the future. He stressed that universities must provide more support because of the systemic racism and, in some cases,

hatred that these students experience regularly. Helaire emphasized that it does not matter if the students are performing at the highest academic level; if the issues of racism and micro-aggression have not been addressed, then the institutions are not effectively supporting the Black male students, and they are failing.

“Helping someone become more self-aware so that they can increase their excellence in reaching their goals is the role of a mentor,” according to Helaire. He also indicated that mentors need to be humble, thoughtful, and able to connect their mentee to valuable resources and relationships. Helaire concluded that a good mentor is someone “who is committed to excellence themselves, and someone who is critical in their analysis of the issues that Black people face in America.” The most important aspect of the mentoring relationship is knowing your mentee, and both the mentor and mentee knowing each other. Helaire stressed that it is important to help someone heal; a mentor who supports someone in that healing will transform lives; the most powerful mentors are people who know you well and allow you to walk you into healing.

From Military to Academia: Arrick Jackson, Ph.D.

Dr. Arrick Jackson, who has an earned doctoral degree, is a 48-year-old Black male. The institutions that he attended were the University of Alaska Fairbanks and Washington State University. Both of the institutions that Jackson attended were PWIs. Jackson was raised in a single-parent household and was not a first-generation college student. Currently, Jackson serves as the Dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Ferris State University. As a child, Jackson lived through some very challenging circumstances. He grew up in Saginaw, Michigan, where his mother was murdered when he was six months old and his father died of a

heart attack when he was nine. He was raised by his stepmother, whom he considers his mother. Because of that split in his family structure, he has family from three different parents: his father, his mother, and his stepmother. He has a very large extended family.

Upon graduating from high school, Jackson attended Delta College for one year. He ended up dropping out of college and joined the military, where he served for six and a half years. While in the military, he served in airborne artillery for three years and the remaining years in military Intel. After these six years of service, he realized he did not want to be a career officer, so he decided to leave the armed services. He recalled his Sergeant First Class telling him that, if he left the military, the only job he would be able to get would be flipping burgers. He remained steadfast in his decision to leave the military, telling himself that, even if he had to flip burgers, he would do what was necessary to take care of his family.

Jackson's first wife was also in the military and received orders to go to Alaska, so their next stop was to move there. They spent the next two and a half years in Alaska, when he received a scholarship for the Master's degree program in Criminal Justice at Washington State University. His initial goal was to become a police officer by completing their police academy. While he was successful in the program, he had difficulty with a couple of active-shooter scenarios. The experiences demonstrated that Jackson was reluctant to shoot people and, as a result, he never completed the training. Instead, he went back to Washington State to finish his graduate degree.

At Washington State, one day one of the deans called him into his office and asked him about his plans after completing the Master's program. Jackson replied that he planned to re-apply for the local police academy, hoping to eventually become a police officer. The dean said,

“Well, since we carried you for your Master’s degree, we are obligated to carry you for your doctorate.” For Jackson, this was a turning point, focusing his attention on the option of continuing his education to pursue a Ph.D. degree. Because of the financial support of the university and the ongoing mentorship of the dean, he decided to stay at Washington State and finish his Ph.D. in Political Science with an emphasis in International Relations, Public Administration, and Criminal Justice.

A few years later, one of Jackson’s professors left Washington State University to accept a dean’s position at Southeast Missouri State University. The faculty member contacted Jackson to see if he would be interested in teaching, because the university was looking to diversify their faculty. Jackson applied for the teaching position and remembered this professor as becoming a very helpful mentor. As a result of this relationship, he obtained the teaching contract, helping him finish his doctoral studies and his dissertation. He indicated that his colleagues at his new institution did everything they could to make sure he was successful. The only caveat to this support was that, after he completed his degree, he would owe Southeast Missouri State University three years of service. He actually remained at the institution for seven years.

Jackson’s next professional stop was Texas, where he served as an assistant professor and program coordinator of the Criminal Justice Program at the University of North Texas at Dallas. Because of some leadership changes at the institution, Jackson decided to move to the University of North Texas in Denton, where he stayed for about two years. At that time, he moved into a dean’s position at Tarrant County College. In that role, he supervised the Fire Academy and the Police Academy, as well as several programs including Criminal Justice,

Occupational Safety, Horticulture, Sociology, History, Political Science, and Geography. Jackson served in this role for about five years before becoming the Vice President of Community and Industry Education. Although the school's enrollment was large, and the position was challenging, Jackson was eager to move to a larger university with Bachelor's and Master's degree programs. Jackson then applied for the dean's position at Ferris.

Jackson described his educational experiences as starting with the night classes he completed while he was in the military. Initially, he completed one class at a time, then eventually decided to go to school full time. He recalled that while he was completing his undergraduate degree, he was married, and his wife was pregnant with their first son. His goal was to complete his Bachelor's degree before his child was born. He recalled that, as motivation for finishing his degree, he had a friendly competition with his younger brother. This competition fueled him to complete 19 credits during the fall semester, 21 credits in the spring semester, and another 19 credits in the summer semester, resulting in his completing about 2 years of college courses in one year.

Throughout his undergraduate career and into his graduate career, he had never been a traditional student: by then he had a family and lived in graduate housing. He and his wife were around 26 and 27 years old when they began graduate school and were very focused on their academics. Because of his varied experiences in the military, his travel, and his personal discipline, he knew that college was important. He and his wife saw the value of a college education in the lives of their friends and others they knew. As a result, when he arrived in the classroom, he was prepared and focused; this preparation and focus was reflected in his solid A and B grades.

During his college career, Jackson reflected that he had several important mentors. He remembered one, the president of Washington State University, as a “vicarious” or “indirect” mentor: he never met him, but he admired his career and began to model his career on his. Jackson had other mentors during his graduate career: one in particular directed him to apply to the Socioeconomic Sciences Research Center to work on his Master’s degree, rather than the Political Science Department. This mentor, knowing that several Black students had faced challenges working in the Political Sciences department, took Jackson under his wing and helped him in other ways as well, teaching him about effective survey and research design, and how to apply for and receive grant support. Later, they even published a paper together.

Jackson recalled two additional mentors, both also with their doctoral degrees, during this period: one was insightful and instructive; the other was warm and welcoming. Both men mentored and guided their students: “if you wanted to do the work, they always had work for you.” The mentor who eventually led him to his faculty position at Southeast Missouri State University significantly supported his dissertation work, sending him supportive emails, taking him out for an occasional dinner, and regularly checking on his dissertation progress. The information and guidance that this mentor provided remained with Jackson throughout his college and into his professional career. Even now, years later, Jackson asserted that he still has mentors who provide support for him when he needs it.

Jackson recalled that the majority of his mentors were White males; however, the former President of Washington State University, his “vicarious mentor,” was a Black male. Jackson indicated that

...to me it does not matter if my mentors were of the same race. I learned this during my military years when I was mentored by an older White male captain who taught me that

to be successful, you might have to leave your immediate family. Success requires that we sometimes separate ourselves from our families in order to be successful. As you learn through sociology and other things, those tight family groups and today's world don't give you the social capital that you need to start working throughout the world and expanding your network. Grandma, granddad, cousins, uncles, their network isn't very large, so, you have to break out of those arenas to expand your network and do some of the things that you may want to do or accomplish things you may want to accomplish. So, to your question, no; a lot of my mentors were White males.

Jackson recalled that his mentors — going back to his eleventh grade English teacher — typically identified or approached him first. His teacher had assigned the students to select a book and write a report on it. When Jackson selected his book, the teacher stopped him, pushing him to select a more challenging book: "I feel that you are a very conscientious young man; so, I want you to read *Animal Farm*." Jackson remembered the experience well; it was the first time that he read the book. Later, while studying political science, *Animal Farm* was instrumental in shaping his early beliefs. Jackson's eleventh grade English teacher was also a White male, so Jackson learned early on that "your mentor does not necessarily have to be of your same race and ethnicity." He asserted that "a good mentor just has to say and do something that inspires you and do something that is impactful that helps you change your life as well as the lives of others."

Jackson described his mentorship relationships as having both formal and informal aspects because they were centered on education and work. Jackson indicated that the level of formality depended on the individual's personality and the setting where they worked together. Jackson remembered growing up without his mother or father and, at nine years old, telling himself, "The only way I'm going to survive is if I do it myself." Reflecting on his youth, Jackson acknowledged that a nine-year-old should not be intending to make it on his own but should be relying on others to help him along the way. However, because of this upbringing,

Jackson admitted that informal mentoring relationships were probably more useful and appropriate for him: “I didn’t need the constant partnerships that some students need; I simply needed good guidance and words of encouragement that would set me on the right path.” Jackson admitted to being very independent. He also remembered being inspired by music, social consciousness rap, and reading. He read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the Bible, the Quran, and many history books —more than 1,000 Black history books. One of his first jobs after he left the military at Fort Hood was to monitor an African American bookstore. The books would come in, and because it was often not very busy, he would read the books.

Jackson recalled that most of his mentor relationships were informal: they would meet frequently, play racquetball, go to dinner, and, when he was older, go out for drinks. Some of his mentors would meet with him three to four times per week, and even if the meetings were not focused on his education, they provided important one-on-one engagement. Jackson’s mentors checked on his academic progress regularly, particularly when he was in graduate school working to complete his dissertation. He remembered one of his graduate school mentors checking on his progress at least once per week. Jackson indicated that his mentors both motivated him and inspired him to be successful academically. Especially significant was the memory of his eleventh grade English teacher inspiring him to read a book that changed his whole world and taught him how powerful books can be. Jackson admitted, however, that he did not realize how important mentorship had been throughout his life until late in his graduate career when one of his mentors offered financial support to help him complete his doctorate.

Jackson indicated that seeing other Black male professionals working on a college campus motivated him, and it felt good to see them. He felt this sense of pride even more while

in the military when he would see Black commanders, captains, and lieutenants who had just graduated from college. "Seeing them motivated you to be successful because they were just not plentiful at the time," he said. "When these lieutenants and captains came in and indicated that they just graduated from North Carolina or Utah, or wherever, you began to say to yourself, 'OK, it can be done.'" Jackson remembered the college campus in Alaska, where there may have been only one Black male faculty and maybe one or two Black male students in his class. At Washington State, there were only a few Black male professors, so seeing one on campus, or being lucky enough to have one as a professor was very motivating. Jackson recalled how difficult it was for Black faculty members to be awarded tenure, and, for this reason, changing jobs and moving to positions at other institutions.

Jackson asserted that seeing additional Black male professionals or role models on the campuses he attended would have very likely impacted his academic success. It would have been especially beneficial for him to study Political Science from Black males teaching it from their perspective. He was, however, able to draw from his experiences working at the bookstore and reading African American books to fill that void. Having been a professor himself, Jackson knows the impact his identity can have on students, particularly in terms of one-on-one engagement. He stressed that students are able to see themselves doing the very same thing that the professors are doing, imagining themselves in their position. Thus, he understands the value of having additional Black male mentors or role models in college.

Jackson recalled that the institutions that he attended had plenty of mentorship programs aimed at supporting Black male student achievement. However, he indicated that because he was a young parent and needed to pick up his son from daycare after classes, he

was not able to participate in those groups. Had his circumstances been different, he stressed that he would have been involved in several of the programs. Jackson recalled specific male mentorship programs — and the men who led them — offered at Washington State. In fact, one of Jackson’s best friends had a partnership with Washington State while working on his doctorate at the University of Mississippi. Mississippi allowed him to teach courses at Washington State while completing his dissertation writing. Jackson recalled that a special program paid his friend’s stipend and expenses.

Mentorship had a huge impact on Jackson’s academic success. If not for his mentors, Jackson stated, “I would not have gone on to complete my Ph.D. It was because my mentor said, ‘Hey, we have an opportunity for you to stay and get your Ph.D., we are going to take care of you.’” Had it not been for those words, Jackson indicated he probably would have moved on and missed the opportunity. A similar life-changing event was triggered by another mentor who said, “Hey, we have this great job for you. Nobody is looking at it, and we’re looking to hire someone from Washington.” In the process of being mentored, he was also led to numerous publication and grant opportunities; his mentors taught him the ins and outs of grant writing and academic publishing. Jackson asserted that mentorship is important to the academic success of Black male students in higher education:

It’s absolutely important; you need it because you don’t know how to navigate the system. You don’t know all of the ins and outs, and it’s important being mentored by somebody who has been there, who knows what’s going on, who can guide you and provide the information that you need. A lot of it is information: what do I need to do to be successful? Somebody will sit you down and say, “this is what you need to do,” and for a lot of people, you know, chart a course, show me how to get there, and then if I run into any obstacles, be there to sort of help me to maneuver around those obstacles. Particularly, if it’s for Black males, we all know the retention rates, and we all know the recruitment challenges. We all know the sociological challenges that get African Americans (or prevent them from) coming to school. Then to enter into an environment

where there's no one, or if there are any African Americans, they're generally female. However, there's nothing wrong with that; females can mentor the men too.

Jackson stressed that students need to know that they have access to mentors and role models on campus whether they are faculty, support staff, or anyone in some type of leadership role. Even if the students do not have day-to-day interactions with their mentors, just knowing that they are there provides the motivation to push forward and helps reinforce the message that it can be done. Jackson also emphasized that both formal and informal mentorship relationships are important success components for the Black male student. Every time he visits with students on campus today, he realizes how important establishing formal or informal relationships are to students — and to Black male students in particular. He argued that more important than the level of formality is how the mentor establishes and maintains the relationships. When he was a college student, he had both formal and informal relationships with faculty and staff. While some of those relationships were short, lasting maybe one or two years, some of his relationships lasted six to 10 years, and others are lifelong. What is most important to Jackson is to support those relationships and cultivate them as best you can. Jackson indicated that “when I think about it, it is not so much that I had these great, deep conversations, or that we hung out together or that we went bowling or anything like that.” He claimed that, instead, what was important is that “when I needed them at a specific moment, or had a question at a certain time, they were there to help guide me.” Just the presence of having a mentor, knowing that there is someone there to mentor you, often times can be just as valuable as the length of engagement or the structure of that engagement. Jackson emphasized that it is especially important for Black males to have mentors while in college:

You've got to have it, be it female, male, African American, White, Asian, Hispanic, as long as you have someone that you could look up to that has done it, completed it, and encourages you to complete it, it's going to be the greatest benefit to you at the end.

Jackson also asserted that a person serving in a one-on-one mentorship capacity could be just as important, if not more important, than a mentorship program. He stressed that mentorship programs are often times overly programmatic; many times, they are responsive to grants and their funding source, and this may cause them not to be as effective as they could be. He also noted that sometimes the premises for these programs and the motivation for their existence may not be beneficial to the students they are trying to serve and attract. Because of these factors, Jackson stressed that the success of any program depends on the program itself and its leadership. Jackson recalled that his former institution, the community college in Texas, offered several Black male mentoring programs. The community college serviced 100,000 students, of which approximately 40 percent were Black; however, one of the mentorship programs had only 10 mentors. He recalled that most of the students found their mentorship opportunities from a variety of different places, many of them not formal programs. Thus, while the programs were helpful, Jackson asserted that one-to-one relationships are often more beneficial.

Jackson believes that having adequate mentors or role models on campus will contribute to the overall success of the Black male student. He stressed that when an institution has adequate resources, it can have great mentoring programs, and if those programs have engagement, then the institution is fulfilling an important purpose for this group. He emphasized that when the Black male students participate in the mentorship programs, success levels will go up. The more students who are engaged in a college

environment, the more likely they are going to complete it. Participation becomes an important component to the completion process.

Based on his experiences, Jackson stressed that people wanting to serve as mentors must seek out the students they want to mentor: “If you leave it up to an 18- or 19-year-old to initiate the relationship, it may not happen; the mentor has to seek out the students because the students do not know how to establish these relationships on their own.” Jackson also noted that, “if you take a Black male student out of an urban setting, and you bring him to a PWI, and you stick this student in a dorm room, and you tell him to survive, you are probably not going to keep that student.” Having a program or mentors in place can show that student how to survive. The people running those mentorship programs know what it takes to survive in college; they know what it takes to be successful, and they know that young kids from Detroit, Flint, or Saginaw, or somewhere similar are challenged with understanding how to navigate within PWIs.

Jackson also indicated that higher education must be doing more to address the achievement gap that today’s Black males experience academically, technologically, and mathematically. He noted that a lot of issues with the achievement gap have to do with stereotypes of Black males and females: when these students get into a campus environment that is predominantly White, a lot of the racist stereotypes play out in their heads and may very well be a contributing factor to the achievement gap. Often times, he argued, their perception, their accepted mentality, may be that their counterparts are better, and then they may not succeed in the classroom. However, if the students’ perception is that they are equal to their counterparts, they will perform better. Therefore, programs or people have to exist in order to

make sure that these students are successful; there is no other way to do it. Because of the performance trends associated with Black male students, universities must do more to support these students. Jackson noted that most universities already provide important academic resources including tutoring, writing centers, and math labs, so it may be as simple as finding creative ways to get Black male students or underperforming students to utilize those resources. He argued that programs that are sensitive to ethnic and cultural issues should be coming in to fill in the gap wherever there are identified challenges:

For example, if I go into a math tutoring lab and I know, based on literature and research, that generally, math is not just a skill set, it's also a cultural thing. So, if I've been told all of my life that if I am Black, then I can't do math. Or, if I'm a female, as a Harvard President once said, I "can't do science." If I am being told that, and the university is aware of that culture, and they know that it exists, then, yes, create a program to fill in that gap. But in areas where there really isn't a challenge, then you may not be able to develop a program there.

I know that young Black males, and people of color in general, when they come to a predominantly white institution, many may have challenges with math. Often times, it has to do with the fact that they are at a predominantly White institution. Because if you're here [at Ferris], for example, or attending an advanced school, those students who passed the SAT did pretty well on the math test to get accepted, so they can do math. That's not our question: It's why did the students not do as well in this environment as they might have if the environment were predominantly Black?

There are a lot of challenges there. If there is an opportunity to fill in the gap with mentoring programs, you fill in the gap. But there are also many resources already provided that students can use to be successful, if for some reason they miss the mentoring program. They can still come to college and be successful. However, having mentors and programs alike are very beneficial and they help to fill in the gaps.

Jackson emphasized that Black students attending a PWI are expecting to be educated like everyone else. However, when faced with challenges, the students need to have mentors who can help them find comfort and help them understand how to adjust and navigate through those challenges. Jackson believes that one of the most important roles of a mentor is to be an

advisor, to impart experience and wisdom to the student. In addition, being patient is also essential because mentees will not always do what the mentor advises them to do, or they may get off track because life happens. Jackson also added self-awareness, experience, and a kind heart to the list of good traits for a mentor. He emphasized that simply having a good word — “you’re doing alright” — is important. A good mentor should not be afraid to give compliments, verbal rewards, or recognition through classes and campus activities. The most important aspect of the mentoring relationship is being present: “If you’re going to do it, you have got to be present.”

Summary

Through their stories and their experiences as undergraduate and graduate students at PWIs, the participants described how mentors motivated and encouraged them to be successful students, and, even more importantly, to graduate college. The participants in this study, six Black male educators, all attended undergraduate and graduate school where they earned Master’s degrees; two have earned doctoral degrees, and one participant is currently a doctoral student. All of the participants have worked in various positions in higher education and have successfully navigated the halls of academia, despite the challenges associated with being college students. The mentors that each described were faculty or administrators who, in many cases, saw something in them that they may not have seen in themselves. Through their stories, they describe how mentoring contributed to their success as college students, encouraged them to complete, and inspired them to pursue advanced educational credentials and positions.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to examine how the role of mentorship impacts the academic success of Black male students in higher education, specifically at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). The research study chronicles the experiences and testimonies of Black male professionals who have worked at these institutions and with this student demographic category, and who were also mentored during their educational journey. The researcher conducted structured interviews with six Black professional men with extensive experience in higher education.

The researcher met individually and face to face with each participant at a neutral location to conduct the interviews, which were approximately 60 minutes in length. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher employed a phenomenological approach to analyze the collected information. The researcher conducted a preliminary reading of the narratives, then identified and interpreted pertinent themes that surfaced in each of the interviews. In reviewing the data, the researcher identified four themes related to mentorship that were consistent in the six interviews: (1) Commitment (2) Trust/Support (3) Communication, and (4) Same-Race Mentorship. In this chapter, each theme is discussed and illustrated using excerpts and quotations from the participants' interviews to support each theme.

Theme #1: Commitment

Theme #1: Data Results

A theme that surfaced early on in the research was that of commitment. Each of the six participants indicated that he had someone he looked to on campus who was committed to his growth and development — both personally and academically. Most of the participants stated they had both formal and informal relationships with their mentors. From exposing them to new environments through outings and sporting events to checking up on grades to serving as a connection in securing a job and/or applying to graduate programs, the commitment by the mentor to see the mentee succeed was inevitable.

Raymond Gant

- “An individual who has taken a genuine interest in your well-being and in your progress in your academic, professional, and personal trajectory, and someone who will be there to help guide you when you make mistakes.”

Khalid El-Hakim

- “They offered themselves as individuals that I could reach out to if I had any kind of issues. On several occasions, I had to reach out to each of my mentors.”
- “They all were very responsive, and I think that was one of the key things with all four of them is that they were very responsive to what I needed at different points of time in my undergrad experience.”
- “The role of a mentor is to be a guide, is to be able to recognize challenges a student might have, and to be able to be committed to helping that student through his academic process.”
- “When we think of the challenges of having Black males in education, a part of that is that Black men are not being socialized, molded, and mentored into education, and we need people that make those type of commitments.”

Tyrone Collins

- “If you can find somebody who believes in you and has interest in you, and knows what you want to do, then by all means, work with that person. You know color doesn’t make

you or that individual more special than the other; it's their attitude towards you that makes a difference."

- "I think that on a university level, we have to go beyond the campuses. We need to go into the high schools to establish mentors, because a lot of times we would lose them – the Black male in high schools – so therefore, they don't make it to college to be mentored."
- "The role of the mentor is to encourage an individual to do better than what they can be. The role of a mentor is to listen, to be able to make the person feel comfortable during their conversation. The role of a mentor is to help an individual be successful in spite of themselves."

Bobby Springer

- "It is critical for each one to teach one because if it were not for one reaching back, helping another, then I do not believe that anyone would be able to make it through."
- "Some mentors might not be able to give valuable time to a mentoring program, but their door is always open, and they are always available to connect and make time to talk or to meet with the student."
- "The role of a mentor is to be a listener, to be one to guide, one to help, one to show the way through many situations and scenarios. The role of a mentor should be one who emphasizes successes as well as identifies what causes failures, particularly when the mentee is not holding up his part of the bargain."

Dr. Lumas Helaire

- "Some seemed to be quirky; some seemed to be a little weird; some were great speakers or orators; some were more afro-centric; however, they all operated in the same space, and they were all committed to Black students."
- "The value of mentorship for Black males extends beyond the classroom; it is also ways that mentors protect them from the people who want to lock them out of certain resources and opportunities."
- "Helping someone become more self-aware so that they can increase their excellence in reaching their goals is the role of a mentor."

Dr. Arrick Jackson

- "When I think about it, it's not so much that I had these great, deep conversations, or that we hung out together, or that we went bowling or anything like that. It's more that

when I needed them at a specific moment, or had a question at a certain time, they were there to help guide me.”

- “The mentor has to seek out the students because the students don’t know how to establish these relationships on their own.”
- “If you’re going to do it, you have got to be present.”

Theme #1: Analysis

Each of the six participants of this study included statements that implied or directly or indirectly spoke to the importance of commitment as it relates to mentorship. They spoke to a range of areas that support the theme of commitment. A few of those areas include attitude towards the mentee, good listening skills, being accessible even after normal business hours, having a general interest and concern for their mentee and their academic success, taking the time to help their mentee become more self-aware, and simply following up with their mentee on things like their grades and dissertation progress. Each of these areas exemplifies a form of commitment.

In addition, there is a factor of commitment that this research study does not mention but, according to the literature, is an important factor among Black male collegians. This support or lack of support stems from their parents and those community members who went to college and have not shared their stories on what it means to achieve academic success. Often the parents’ lack of commitment was due to factors of being a single parent and being consumed with paying bills and survival which has minimized the support of the Black male college student (Scott, Taylor & Palmer, 2013). In addition, there is a perceived notion that educators should motivate and be available and provide information to their mentees that will inspire them to graduate, which exemplifies true commitment (Scott, Taylor & Palmer, 2013).

While this study did not specifically address the challenges related to single-parent or non-traditional households, a few of their comments made mention of personal experiences related to their family situation. Dr. Arrick Jackson, for example, was raised in a single-parent household following the deaths of his mother and father. Bobby Springer and Khalid El-Hakim were both raised in a single-parent household; however, Springer noted that both parents played a significant role in his upbringing.

While many four-year institutions place the onus of engagement on the Black male students once they arrive to campus, it is unrealistic to think that the students will make important connections when they arrive in a new environment, especially a PWI. Therefore, postsecondary educators and administrators must make that first step by initiating and committing to the relationship. They must commit to a greater responsibility for mentoring and engaging Black male students in post-secondary education (Harper, 2012). The theme of commitment, particularly as it relates to the academic success of Black male students in higher education, speaks to the positive outcomes attained when there is a commitment to a nurturing environment, supportive faculty and administration, and a greater amount of culturally desirable engagement opportunities, many of which are found at HBCUs (Brooms 2016). This can be argued as a reason why HBCUs account for close to 20 percent of all undergraduate degrees and over one fifth of all first professional degrees awarded to the overall Black college student population. But, HBCUs only make up 3 percent of all colleges and universities (Amechi, Berhanu, Cox, McGuire, Morgan, Williams, Jr., & Williams, 2016).

This “presenting opportunity” to the mentee was evident to some degree in each interview and further highlighted the theme of commitment to the student’s success in school and beyond.

Theme #2: Trust and Support

Theme #2: Data Results

Perhaps the most important quality in any relationship, including the mentor-mentee relationship, is that of trust. In all of the interviews, a level of trust and the necessity for trust as a basis for the mentor-mentee relationship was inherent. For the relationship to be successful for both the mentor and mentee, a level of trust had to be established and present that in turn allowed the mentee to move forward even in challenging times during the course of their educational journeys. The trust allowed for greater transparency, which in turn created greater vulnerability and connection. As a result, the participants expressed how relationships that started out as formal became more informal and relaxed as the level of trust increased.

Raymond Gant

- “From the mentors’ perspective, they would like a student who they can also respect and have an optimistic outlook for his future. Thus, it is important that the relationship has to be rooted in trust and respect.”
- “The most important aspect of the mentoring relationship should be rooted in trust and respect and that should work both ways between the mentor and the mentee.”
- “Each person should seek out a person who they believe in and have trust in and someone who they are confident in.”

Khalid El-Hakim

- It was difficult “coming from the environment that I came from into a space that was a PWI and not having the support of people who look like me.... then not being able to find men in this space who I could trust and felt cared about my wellbeing, both

personally and professionally. It would have been a lot more difficult for me to go through the process without that type of mentorship.” “They are important because students need to feel that there is someone they can trust that cares about their wellbeing.”

- “But just knowing that you have someone there you can trust who would be willing to support you if need be.”

Tyrone Collins

- “Because they have somebody to relate to, they would have somebody they feel who cares about them. Then also too, hopefully, the mentor would be able to have that person understand and learn about campus, know the connection so that as they go up the grade level, they get more involved in leadership roles that would help them in regard to job placement, internships, and things of that nature.”
- “Because the mentorship program is an established one, there may be funding to do things with the mentee. A mentor may not be able to do some things that may have a financial cost. That may limit their interaction outside of the institution.”
- “I feel that in a way those who were here, and there were only a few that we did have, certainly would have helped those in need. The more that we could have had, the more they could have communicated through the different lives they had, the different struggles they had, to help me as a student realize what it is that I should do to be a more professional black male.”

Bobby Springer

- “Just knowing that you’ve got a person like that in your life when you’re 1,000 miles away from home, you know that you are in a good place.”
- “Knowing that at any time when you need to talk or have interaction with your mentor it is possible; it is very important to know that this person really cares about you.”

Dr. Arrick Jackson

- “I would not have gone on to complete my Ph.D. It was because my mentor said, ‘hey, we’ve got an opportunity for you to stay and get your Ph.D. We’re going to take care of you.’”
- “A lot of it is information: what do I need to do to be successful? Somebody will sit you down and say, ‘this is what you need to do,’ and for a lot of people, you know, chart a course, show me how to get there.”

- “When I think about it, it’s not so much that I had these great, deep conversations, or that we hung out together or that we went bowling or anything like that. It’s more that when I needed them at a specific moment, or had a question at a certain time, they were there to help guide me.”

Theme #2: Analysis

Trust is essential and necessary especially regarding the academic success of young black men. When trust is present in the mentor-mentee relationship, the mentee is likely to excel and perform better as he has developed a bond with the mentor, and he does not want to disappoint them. The mentee is aware that he has someone he can trust and, just as important, someone who will support him, or as Khalid El-Hakim stated, “Knowing that someone has your back.”

According to Strayhorn (2008), not having supportive trusting relationships on campus with faculty, staff, and their peers, adds to the challenges that are presented for Black male students and often lead to dissatisfaction with college. Moreover, the positive impact of strong supportive relationships that Black male students rely upon is grounded in Tinto’s (1993) student retention theory. This theory highlights the benefits of trust and support as it relates to academic and social integration, which leads to student success. The need for trust and support is magnified for the Black male college student (Strayhorn, 2008).

At PWIs, mentoring relationships rooted in trust and support has been connected to an increase in retention and student success (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). In addition, trust and support through active mentorship provides direction to mentees who may lack the exposure, foresight and intuition needed to ascertain their goals (Dahlvig, 2010).

Theme #3: Communication

Theme #3: Data Results

If trust is the most important aspect of the mentor-mentee relationship, then communication is the lifeblood that holds it together. Once trust is established, communication is a natural progression. Each of the six participants noted that, once the relationship was rooted in trust, it became easier to talk with his mentor about academics and also about the social and personal issues they faced. In many regards, as the trust deepened, so did the communication and vice versa.

Raymond Gant

- “Mentors can help guide a student and provide constructive and positive feedback.”
- “In some instances, the feedback that you get that is constructive, but also hurtful, is just as impactful as the encouragement that you get when you tell the student that he or she is doing something right.”
- “The role of a mentor is to provide constructive, positive, authentic, and genuine feedback to an individual, to help guide them on a course, not to tell them what to do, but to provide an insight and perspective that is based on experience and wisdom.”

Khalid El-Hakim

- “A good mentor makes themselves accessible — available — to the students. They have good communication skills; they are resourceful and supportive.”
- “The most important, and what I think is key, is communication. Being able to clearly state what resources you can provide as a mentor, communication in terms of again, accessibility, listening, and providing guidance/advice.”

Tyrone Collins

- “Would be just a conversation, understanding the Black male, what that individual wants, where they are, where they want to go, and how they plan on getting there, and then how the mentor can help them address those three areas. So, to me that was the most important part, the conversation between the mentee and the mentor.”

- “The role of the mentor is to encourage an individual to do better than what they think they can. The role of a mentor is to listen, to be able to make the person feel comfortable during their conversation.”

Bobby Springer

- “Knowing that at any moment you can call or stop by or get help from your mentor is priceless.”
- “It is important that the mentor shares all that they have, so that the mentee understands that it takes work, and it takes time to be that complete individual.”
- “It is valuable and very important to have someone who can give you real life conversations, real life examples on the good and the bad.”

Dr. Lumas Helaire

- They would ask, “I know you have grades; how did you do?”

Dr. Arrick Jackson

- “I didn’t need the constant partnerships that some students need; I simply needed good guidance and words of encouragement that would set me on the right path.”

Theme #3: Analysis

Each of the participants of this study shared how important communication is to the mentor-mentee relationship. Whether it was during one-to-one interactions, or their mentors sharing their stories of success, or them asking relevant questions to check on their mentees progress. Good communication between both individuals seemed to be paramount to establishing an effective mentor relationship.

Several participants talked about the benefits of communication facilitating the exchange of important information, such as sharing relevant resources and contact or networking information. In addition, effective communication allows for positive words of support and encouragement to be shared.

According to Wang (2012), communication skills that are important in peer-to-peer relationships are equally important in teacher or staff to student relationships, and good communication skills can lead to satisfying outcomes for the student. Many researchers have expanded on the subject of communication behaviors and how they contribute to quality interpersonal relationships with the student. Also, good communication facilitates caring, which includes the three factors of empathy, understanding, and responsiveness. These factors are promoted through effective communication and mentoring (Wang, 2012).

Research also suggests that most high-achieving students are successful because they develop healthy relationships with faculty early in their academic career. These faculty often act as socialization agents and are “groom” students by communicating their experiences and knowledge and passing on their professional legacies. Moreover, through good communication, faculty and staff enhance the mentoring experience by acting as institutional agents during the mentoring process, using their status within the institution to assist their mentees in networking and socializing to the institution (Fuentes, Alvarado, Berdan & DeAngelo, 2014). The men interviewed for this study all related experiences where their mentors guided them through the academic and professional journey, making their way smoother.

Theme #4: Same-Race Mentorship

Theme #4: Data Results

While research supports the importance and benefits of mentorship to increase the success of Black male students, there are differing views regarding the importance of same-race relationships in the mentor/mentee relationships. The participants in this study related similar differing views.

Raymond Gant

- “It doesn’t matter if you have a mentor of the same race; however, what you want in a mentor is someone who you can identify with and who can identify with you.”
- “The challenges that many faculty and staff who are not minority have, and what makes them somewhat reluctant to engage in relationships with a Black male, is because color creates a boundary that many White folks don’t know how to cross.”
- “Black students would be receptive in most instances to someone who genuinely cares about them, no matter the color.”

Khalid El-Hakim

- “So, to be able to see Black men with PhDs, to be able to see and interact with Black men with PhDs, let me know that it was attainable, that there was another option for me.”
- “I think it is important for students to see people who look like them in all parts of the university.”
- “I would have loved to have seen and had a mentor that looked like me in the College of Education, and I do not think there were any Black women in the college.”
- It was difficult “coming from the environment that I came from into a space that was a PWI and not having the support of people who look like me.... then not being able to find men in this space who I could trust and felt cared about my wellbeing, both personally and professionally. It would have been a lot more difficult for me to go through the process without that type of mentorship.”

Tyrone Collins

- “If you can find somebody who believes in you and has interest in you, and knows what you want to do, then by all means, work with that person. You know color doesn’t make you or that individual more special than the other; it’s their attitude towards you that makes a difference.”

Bobby Springer

- “it does matter in many ways if you have a mentor of the same race. It is valuable and very important to have someone who can give you real life conversations, real life examples on the good and the bad.”
- “In particular, the one that came to mind most often was when I was working on my master’s degree and my first professor was Black. That just kind of blew me away.”

Dr. Lumas Helaire

- “Having a mentor who looks like you reminds you that people who look like you can still navigate through that space, and then they can also advocate for you.”
- “So, it supports your own psyche to see someone who looks like you who has gone into certain spaces you are working to get into; they can tell you how to navigate that.”
- “Seeing other Black male professionals who worked at the university definitely was a motivation for me to be successful.”
- “It was also powerful in my experiences at the University of Michigan to see Black men who were unapologetically Black and who unapologetically voiced the need to have Black people and Black faces in certain spaces.”
- “It is always valuable to see professional Black individuals whether you attended an HBCU or PWI.”

Dr. Arrick Jackson

- “To me it does not matter if my mentors were of the same race. I learned this during my military years when I was mentored by an older White male captain who taught me that, to be successful, you might have to leave your immediate family.”
- “Your mentor does not necessarily have to be of your same race and ethnicity. A good mentor just has to say and do something that inspires you and do something that is impactful that helps you change your life as well as the lives of others.”

Theme #4: Analysis

The six participants of this study had mixed views regarding the importance of same-race mentorship. Half of the participants concluded that it was important to have a mentor of the same race. El-Hakim, Helaire, and Springer each thought that it was something inspiring and motivating to see someone and to interact with a mentor of the same race. The other three participants, Collins, Gant, and Jackson, claimed that the race of the mentor did not matter as long as the students have someone who believes in them and their abilities, someone they can identify with, and someone who, in turn, can identify with them. However, all six of the

participants interviewed thought that seeing Black faculty in the classroom and in leadership positions was important, inspiring, and motivating for the Black male college student.

One of the many challenges that Black male students face at PWIs was that of finding enough mentors and/or role models who look like them in leadership positions. This has been a challenge for many years in the past and still holds true today.

According to Dahlvig (2010), same-race matched mentorship relationships has shown increased gains in cumulative GPA and graduation rates as opposed to having mentors of a different race or ethnicity. However, Campbell & Campbell (2007) suggest the gains made in this area were negligible to a degree and more research needs to be done to analyze this phenomenon; however, they did suggest that there is enough evidence to support the benefits of same-race mentorship, particularly for students of color when possible (Campbell & Campbell, 2007).

Research suggests that Black male students, and Black students in general, seek out Black faculty and staff to serve as mentors because they feel more comfortable in their interactions and are more receptive to their feedback. This research also emphasizes that same-race mentors may hold similar views of the campus environment (Feist-Price, 2001). According to Brooms (2016), many Black males at PWIs feel unwelcome and are plagued by negative perceptions of their competence and intellectual ability, low expectations, prejudices, and biases. A welcoming campus environment is essential for students, so they feel that they matter and have a sense of belonging (Brooms, 2016). Robinson and Reio, Jr. (2012) also noted that students of color report same-race mentorship as providing more relationship satisfaction, interpersonal comfort, and positive psychosocial and instrumental support compared to

relationships with mentors of a different race or ethnicity. They also conclude that ethnicity, not just race, affects the long-term experiences and outcomes of mentoring relationships (Robinson and Reio, Jr., 2012).

Analysis Summary

Threaded throughout the experiences and stories of the participants, the themes of Commitment, Trust, Communication, and having a mentor of the same race are dominant. All participants talk about the importance of mentorship to their success, acknowledging the many challenges Black male students who attend PWIs face. Each of the participants spoke in detail about the inadequate representation of Black faculty and staff on their campuses. Conversely, and likely because of this lack of representation in their college careers, not all of the participants of this study argue that, to be effective, a mentor needs to be of the same race. These participants emphasized that, even if a mentor is of a different race, ethnicity, or gender, the relationship could be effective if there is proper communication, trust, and commitment. Although some of the participants emphasized that mentors did not have to be of the same race, all of them stressed that seeing additional Black faculty and staff on campus could serve to inspire Black male students, particularly for students from urban areas who lack exposure, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and first-generation college students (Brooms, 2016; Simmons, 2017).

Although significant evidence for each theme appeared in each of the participants' stories, communication and trust were clearly the two most important themes identified for successful mentor-mentee relationships. The participants noted that communication does not have to be a daily occurrence or even a weekly event. The frequency of communication is not

what is important; it is keeping the lines of communication open so that the relationship remains fluid. The participants also noted that communication does not have to take place in a specific or academic setting or have specific elements of formality or informality. Often an informal or organic mentorship relationship can build trust and longevity between the two participants. An informal relationship can create a more solid bond between the two, for example, because the mentor may be spending personal time playing recreational sports or attending sporting events to show his commitment to the student. The majority of the study's participants identified the importance of one-to-one interactions with their mentors because of the opportunity to share on a personal level. They appreciated the opportunities to have access to their mentors beyond office hours and in informal settings so that the relationship could be nurtured organically. These opportunities built more trusting relationships for both parties (Strayhorn, 2016).

Each of the participants also alluded to the presence of a sense of caring and a deeper interest in their relationships that was built on the foundation of trust and mutual respect. These experiences contrasted with the perceptions held by many researchers that mentors from different backgrounds may not understand the struggles and challenges associated with most Black male students (Feist-Price, 2001). Strayhorn (2008), for example, refers to the difficulties that Black male students at PWIs may in developing trusting relationships, particularly if the person does not look like them (Strayhorn, 2008). Several of the participants of this study, in fact, talked about how their mentors in undergraduate and graduate school molded and shaped their career path and aided, not only their academic success, but also

played key roles in helping them obtain jobs and experience, laying a foundation for a strong professional network throughout the duration of their careers.

Conclusion

Meaningful relationships between mentors and their mentee have been proven to be strong predictors of student success and also intellectual stimulation for the student (Johnson, 2007). Moreover, strong mentorship relationships in general have been shown to have a positive impact on student satisfaction while in college. Research has shown that the mentorship relationship provides intellectual stimulation, develops career focus, and provides a source of satisfaction for Black students (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Many scholars (including Cuyjet, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008, 2016; Harper, 2012; and Brooms 2016) emphasize the importance of closing the achievement gap and graduating more Black male students while pointing to the positive correlation between effective mentorship and the academic success of these students.

Each participant in this research study confirmed the importance of having college-supported mentors and mentorship programs. They stressed that, if these relationships could be allowed to develop and grow organically, they could be critical contributing factors to the students' success, not simply in undergraduate education, but also providing the motivating factors for Black male students to continue their education and secure meaningful internships or employment opportunities. The six men interviewed for this study built positive networks and established lifelong, meaningful relationships as a result of being mentored. Most importantly, each participant stressed that, because of their fruitful mentoring relationships, they all graduated.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

Black men are not adequately represented at the majority of our country's Predominately White Institutions of higher learning, and few complete their education by earning a college degree. A variety of issues may contribute to the dismal enrollment, retention, and graduation rates within this population, including Black male college students' socialization patterns, delivery of student services to Black males, low socio-economic factors, and limited social integration (Cuyjet, 1997). Finding solutions to address these issues has become an important goal for many in higher education who are committed to increasing these students' success.

Implications

Research has indicated that, as Black males aspire to achieve a college education, especially at PWIs, the ones who are successful tend to be those who have mentors, are made to feel welcome on campus, and are told they matter (Brooms, 2016). However, it is too common that on these campuses, Black male students may not readily encounter Black faculty or administrators who look like them and who are in leadership positions. This may present a challenge for these students to find someone they can learn from and aspire to imitate, someone who can answer important questions regarding what success looks like and how to achieve it.

The ultimate goal and function of mentoring comes with many broad definitions. Most often, a mentor is described as someone who shares advice and consultation and contributes to the overall personal and professional growth of the student being mentored. As noted in an early study by Campbell & Campbell (1997), these relationships come in different forms; however, most often they involve a veteran member of an organization who can share important information, advice, and guidance. It is evident there is value to Black male students who can see and interact with Black male professionals on campus. As a result, institutions should be intentional in their efforts to hire more minority faculty and staff to enhance the student experience on their respective campuses (Strayhorn, 2008; Simmons, 2017). In addition, campus leaders at PWIs should understand the benefits in creating successful mentorship programs. The research identifies many program models that have been successful in increasing retention and success for Black male students (Cuyjet, 2006). Campus leaders should take inventory of what programs exist on their campuses, seek to improve the ones that they have, or create ones that do not exist and assess their effectiveness (Harper & Harris III, 2012).

Limitations and Delimitations

Although this study makes a valuable contribution to the field of research on mentorship for young Black males at PWIs, it is not without its limitations. Initially, the researcher encountered difficulties in establishing interviews with Black men fitting the research profile, and, thus, identified alternative participants. During the interview process, two interviews were interrupted and had to be rescheduled; both instances may have impacted the responses and the quality of data received. One interview was conducted in a participant's

office and was interrupted interview multiple times; this, too, may have impacted the responses and the quality of the information gathered.

The study's delimitations center in the participants' characteristics and their selection for the study. First, the participants represent a limited spectrum of backgrounds and experiences. Including participants from other states and from a wider range of educational backgrounds may have enhanced the information collected. Second, only six Black male leaders were interviewed. A larger sample pool is necessary for the results to be more generalizable to the population. Third, the participants of this study were not randomly selected; instead they were selected based on their position, experience, and gender. In addition, they were selected based on prior relationships with the researcher. This resulted in a sample that was limited in breadth of age, background, position, and location.

Future Research

Based on retention and success data for college students, black male students appear to be the most forgotten or neglected demographic group when institutions are making choices regarding recruitment, retention, and time-to-degree attainment. Most data overwhelmingly indicate that Black male students have the lowest enrollment, retention, and graduation rates across the board, and this trend has continued for many years (Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Harper, 2012). If an institution is committed to the academic success of all of its students, it must identify solutions that address and reverse these trends. Further research, for example, should be done on the following topics:

- (1) The impact or implications associated with one-to-one mentoring. More studies are needed that provide rich data regarding the effectiveness of mentorship, particularly as

it relates to one-to-one mentoring. Most educators know that mentorship is effective; however, more scientific data is needed to balance and support much of the anecdotal evidence that is presently available. It is evident that mentorship is an important phenomenon that can serve to inspire students to push through the many challenges associated with being a college student.

(2) Mentoring Programs. Further research is needed to understand the dynamics associated with mentorship programs and their efficacy. Many mentorship programs are reported to be effective; however, more research must highlight the specific features that drive their success, so that they can be modeled and implemented on other campuses. Some programs work best on large, urban campuses; others on smaller, more rural colleges. These programs should be chronicled allowing similar institutions to identify the ones that may work best at their institutions. In addition, the benefits of these programs need to be compared to the benefits of one-to-one mentorship.

(3) The impact and importance of same-race mentoring and role models. Surprisingly, there is not an abundance of literature that focuses on the phenomenon of mentorship as it relates to students of color in higher education. Further research could examine same-race mentorship versus mentorship by any race to identify the impact on the success of the students involved. In addition, many of the participants of this study talked about the inspirational or motivating factor associated with seeing minority faculty and staff inside or outside the classroom at PWIs. The value of same-race examples both in mentoring relationships and in role models has not been adequately explored in the

literature. More research could be done to determine how significant this factor really is to student retention and success.

(4) Institutional Academic Success. Institutions should seek to research and learn more from successful Black males who have achieved academic success and those who have successfully navigated the challenges of higher education. More studies similar Harper's 2012 study of Black male college achievement, which studied academically successful Black male students, are paramount. Additional research should also examine other characteristics prevalent among today's Black male college students: the impact of being a first-generation college student, or being raised in a single-parent household, or having low socioeconomic status, and how these issues impact the success of Black male students.

(5) Broader research methods. Because this qualitative study was limited in scope because of sample size and participant selection, similar research should be completed that would broaden the research approach to yield additional rich qualitative and quantitative data. It is evident that mentorship is an important phenomenon that can serve to inspire and students to push through many challenges associated with being a college student. Further research aimed at making the topic more generalizable to the student population would assist post-secondary institutions in their efforts to retain and graduate all students.

(6) Types of mentoring relationships. Participants in this study talked about formal versus informal mentorship and which aspects they preferred or from which they gained the most. Further research could examine specific types of mentoring relationships in more

depth to determine when formalized mentoring relationships are most effective, who should initiate these mentoring relationships, and if these factors impact the overall success of the mentoring relationship or the students' academic success.

Black Male Network: Modifying an Existing Mentoring Program

The stories and experiences related by the participants in this study provide rich resources for colleges and universities that wish to develop new mentoring programs or enrich existing programs to address the retention and completion issues faced by Black male students. To illustrate one approach, the researcher has applied their advice and guidance to a specific program at his current institution.

The Black Male Network Program was created at Ferris State University to address retention, graduation rates, and student success challenges faced by Black male students at the institution. Ferris State University is a state-supported PWI located in rural west Michigan with approximately 14,000 students. Over 300 of the students are Black males. In 2006, the four-year graduation rate for Black male students was 8%, compared to White male students' at 34%. The six-year graduation rate was 27% and 54% respectively. In 2012, the six-year graduation rate for Black male students enrolled in Ferris' four-year degree programs was 23%, compared to their White counterparts at 56% (FSU, Institutional Research and Testing, 2017). This disappointing — and alarming — evidence of the achievement gap is typical at four-year institutions across the country.

Ferris' Black Male Network Program has been an attempt to develop students as leaders and encourage them to achieve academic success. Over 30 students are consistently active in the program and are mentored by two full-time Student Affairs professionals. The program

leaders facilitate discussions twice a month on a variety of topics aimed to support the students' academic success. In addition, the program highlights important campus resources and connects the students with these resources.

In this research study, the participants talked in detail about the organic nature of their college mentor-mentee relationships. Their relationships seemed especially valuable because they grew and developed naturally. In most instances, their relationships grew because of the commitment, trust, support, and effective communication patterns they established. In some instances, the mentorship of a person of the same race also added value to the relationship. Also evident in these stories was the clear inference that mentor-mentee relationships were more valuable when they were not forced or planned relationships.

Student service professionals who design and provide support services for college students face many challenges in doing so effectively. Most college students lead busy lives; many work multiple jobs to pay for college; and many have family commitments outside of their college classes. Most have little time to commit to established programs, especially if they appear to be time consuming. One could hypothesize that more "organic" and less programmatic activities, thus, are likely to be more appealing to current college students.

The research from this study indicates that even minor changes to the existing Black Male Network program could improve and enrich it. First, the program could identify and create more opportunities for faculty and staff from across the campus who have a vested interest in the academic success and graduation of these students to serve as mentors. Two staff mentors are not enough to positively impact the 30 students active in the program and the over 300 Black male students enrolled on campus. Potential mentors could be identified and

educated on how best to serve and support these students. Campus-wide information sessions for faculty and staff could educate the university community about the alarming statistics that exist at Ferris and make a compelling argument for intentional efforts to support these students, close the achievement gap, and increase retention and graduation rates.

New mentors should then be provided a foundation of training, education, and support to help them understand the problems these students are facing. They will need, not just the theoretical framework to understand the students' lives, but also the tools and awareness of the essential components of effective mentorship. The theoretical frameworks of scholars such as Tinto, Chickering, Harper, and Strayhorn would help them understand that students who have a sense of belonging and who have support, guidance, and role models are more likely to succeed. Stressing the importance of commitment and providing tools for developing trust and maintaining effective communication would also be important components of this training.

Once prepared, these mentors could be paired with the active participants of the Black Male Network. The Network leaders would continue to coordinate the bi-weekly whole-group sessions to engage students on critical academic-success topics. However, the key to improving this program would be developing and supporting quality, "organic" relationships outside of the structured and formal aspects of the program. As illustrated in the narratives from this study, more natural, organic relationships seemed to build stronger commitment and trust between the mentor and mentee and provide lasting influences on both members.

A final, important component of a solid mentorship program would be comprehensive assessment measures that would not only document the improved retention and graduation

rates within this target population, but also provide rich examples of successful mentorship relationships to inspire the next generation of mentors and mentees.

Summary

It is hoped that this study can provide useful information for college leaders and decision makers who have a vested interest in ensuring that all students are successful at their institutions. Leaders must be aware of the challenges faced by their students and invested in making a difference for the lowest-performing students, those who are least likely to be retained, or those who are unlikely to graduate on time. Unfortunately, these characteristics all describe the Black male college student.

The results of this study support the importance of having mentors who advocate and believe in the Black male student, mentors who recognize and cultivate the students' abilities and talents and motivate them to successfully navigate the college experience through to graduation. This study, through the experiences recounted by six Black professional men in higher education, clearly identifies the value of mentorship, especially at PWIs, where Black male students face difficult circumstances and issues in adjusting to a new culture and norms. These challenges, if not addressed during the first year, can lead to dropout and/or failing grades. While same-race role models and examples motivate and inspire, as three of this study's four major themes — commitment, trust, and communication — indicate, same-race mentorship is not necessary as long as these elements are present in the mentor-mentee relationship. There is much work to be done as institutions seek to close the achievement gap. In this age of declining enrollment and shrinking budgets, institutions win when they provide solutions to retaining and graduating all students at comparable and acceptable levels.

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