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Mentoring: The Factors that Contribute to Persistence to Graduation for African American Males in Predominantly White Institutions in Missouri

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Abstract

Due to several decisions by the United States Supreme Court in the 19th and 20th centuries, African Americans were granted access to PWI's of higher education. However, African Americans still face challenges in obtaining post-secondary education. For example, in 2019 – 2020, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2021), 13.1% of African Americans graduated with master's degrees. Additionally, in 2020, 19% of African Americans attained a post-secondary degree in Missouri (Towncharts.com, 2021).

Despite access, the number of African Americans obtaining degrees remains low. And, when the lens is focused on African American males, the numbers are dismal (U. S. Census Bureau, 2021). The purpose of this study was to investigate how mentoring enabled African American males to persist and obtain master's degrees in PWIs in Missouri. Tinto's conceptual framework was used to explain what higher education institutions can do to retain and assist students in persisting to graduation. Tinto emphasizes the importance of higher education institutions being committed, intentional, and structured to establish forms of action that involve faculty, student affairs staff, and others to promote student retention and student persistence. Six African American males participated in the study. They ranged in age from 28 to 63 years old. Four of the participants were married. All but one had a degree in education. Five participants attended a public PWI. Using thematic analysis, three themes emerged: *Academic Support Aspects*, *Relationships*, and *Mentoring Aspects*. Categories identified were *Personal*, *Academic*, *Professional*, and *Students*. Recommendations for future research include a study of a team of cross-functional

faculty, students, administrators, and support staff whose function is to oversee institutional planning and student success at PWIs and conducting a nation-wide study of African American males who obtained master's degrees who received mentoring.

Keywords: mentoring, persistence, engagement, PWI, conferment of master's degrees, African American males

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to God, family, professors, and friends. Thank you, God, for blessing me in completing this doctoral process. To God be the glory! I thank my husband for his love and prayers through the years to finish my doctoral degree. I thank my mother, who is in paradise now, for her encouraging words, "Dr. Miller, speak things as though they were" (New International Version, 2778/2012, Romans 4:17). I thank my father, who always had encouraging words for me to never, ever give up, no matter the turbulence! I thank my committee members for their commitment and support in helping me through this process of completing my dissertation. In memory of Dr. Boyer and Dr. Davis, thank you for sharing your knowledge, and for your encouragement, and motivation. A special thank you to Dr. Isaac and Dr. Woodhouse for your support, friendship, and dedication.

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While we can ask colleges and universities to do much more than they are now doing to make higher education more accessible and achievable for African Americans, it is clear that other efforts are needed as well….there is a need for incentives to motivate students to aspire to high standards of academic achievement and high levels of attainment. (Epps et al., 1991, p. XVI)

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Systemic racism permeates throughout the United States and the world at large which has caused inequities in access to education, employment, housing, health care, and other industries which have impacted all minority groups. Specifically, racism has affected African Americans in all aspects of life and has placed barriers on livelihoods impacting multi-generations. African American males have been stigmatized because of their ethnicity and race. Stemming from slavery and even in the 21st century, African American males have been characterized as a threat to society. They have been denounced for being *Black* while driving or being *Black* while jogging in the wrong neighborhood. They have been identified as not belonging or being characterized as unequal citizens, not having the same constitutional rights as other U. S. citizens. Due to racist underpinnings and policy and practice disparities in the criminal justice system, studies have shown that Blacks have been incarcerated nearly five times that of Whites per 100,000 population in the United States (Carson, 2020; Nellis, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). According to Bonczar and Beck (1997), African Americans were 30 percent more likely to become incarcerated than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States. This was based on the 1991 trend analysis report of first incarcerations, which were illustrated by age, race, and Hispanic origin (Bonczar & Beck, 1997). Additionally, it has been found that African American males have a greater than 1 in 4 chance of going to prison in their lifetime compared to white males who have a 1 and 23

chance of serving time in their lifetime based on a hypothetical population of 100,000 (Bonczar & Beck, 1997).

Because of racial injustices and inequities in the social structure, this research study is important since it expands the discussion on building a stronger equitable society by incorporating mentoring. This study is also essential because it addressed how mentoring would contribute to the persistence of African Americans graduating in higher education. Through the intentional support of institutions, the goal is to encourage more discussion and institutional action to work as a catalyst to mitigate historical systemic racism through mentoring.

There is limited research on the overarching impact mentoring has on persistence which contributes to retention for African American males in higher education institutions. Particularly, there are limited studies on African American males, who have acquired advanced degrees. At PWIs in the United States, African American males are not a part of the majority of graduate students who obtained master's degrees. According to NCES (2021), African American students acquired master's degrees at a significantly lower rate than white students (see Figure 1.0). Although in 2010, there was a slight increase in the conferral of master's degrees for African American students at private and public postsecondary institutions (NCES, 2021). In comparison, white students obtained master's degrees over 50 percent higher than African American and other minority students.

From 2010-2020, there were slight differences in the conferral of master's degrees between African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian/Pacific Islanders (see Figure 1.0). According to NCES (2021), there was no conferral of master's degrees reported for

Asian/Pacific Islanders. Thus, Table 1.0 shows that for the last decade, there were

inequities in the conferral of master's degrees, especially advanced degrees in the United

States. Inequities in advanced degree attainment were aligned with the United States'

history in higher education access; in particular, with African Americans' access to

higher education.

Figure 1.0
Percentage of Master's Degrees conferred in the United States, 2010-2020
by Race/Ethnicity

Year	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander
2010-11	71.8	12.5	7.3	6.7
2011-12	70.6	12.9	7.6	6.8
2012-13	69.4	13.4	8.1	6.8
2013-14	68.3	13.6	8.6	6.8
2014-15	67.5	13.6	9.2	6.9
2015-16	66.5	13.7	9.7	7.1
2016-17	65.8	13.6	10.2	7.3
2017-18	65.0	13.5	10.7	7.4
2018-19	64.3	13.4	11.3	7.5
2019-20	63.5	13.1	12.0	7.7

Note: This graph shows a significant gap in conferral of master's degrees between white and black graduate students. National Center for Education Statistics. Adopted Digest Table (2021).

This study focused on African American males who have persisted to graduation

and received master's degrees. As discussed later in this chapter, African American

males have a lower persistence rate than African American females in advanced degree

attainment. This is the reason why males are the focus for this study. There are limited

studies that focus on African American male graduate students, and the differences that

they experience by gender. In retrospect, African Americans have not always had access

to higher education. The purpose of this study is to elaborate on how mentoring can be a

contributor to African American males' persistence once in higher education institutions in Missouri.

In the 20th century, African Americans began to make significant strides in accessing higher education institutions (Kaplin & Lee, 2007b; Sass, 2011). For more than 100 years, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) provided almost the only access to higher education for African Americans, due to the Morrill Land Grant Acts, enacted in 1862 and 1890, which, among other things, appropriated grants of land to each state and established 16 Black colleges (Freeman, 2000). Because of desegregation and the passage of civil rights laws, African Americans and members of other underrepresented groups are now admitted to other colleges and universities, and the establishment of 16 Black colleges has caused stiff competition to recruit minority students (Freeman, 2000). Recruitment, retention, and mentoring efforts must be enhanced for students to complete undergraduate degrees (Freeman, 2000).

Some of the most significant civil rights victories that provided African Americans access to postsecondary education were: The U.S. Supreme Court landmark case, Brown v. Board of Education of 1954, which declared that state laws establishing separate schools for White and Black students were unconstitutional, and it overturned the Separate but Equal doctrine and US Supreme Court decision of Plessy v. Ferguson of 1896; and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, and national origin (Kaplin, & Lee, 2007b; Sass, 2011). These significant 20th-century historical events provided higher education access for African Americans and other minorities in the United States.

Retention Efforts

As a result of the legal strides of equal access to higher education for African Americans, retention and recruitment of African Americans became essential and competition among higher education institutions in the United States developed to attract this population of students (Freeman, 2000). Retention efforts encompassed mentoring relationships or mentoring programs to support African Americans to persist to graduation (Freeman, 2000). Mentoring became a caveat in retention and recruitment efforts to assist African Americans to persist and obtain degrees (Cross, 2007). African American males became a vital focus for higher education institutions due to their lower persistence rates in comparison to African American females in the United States (*African Americans Continue*, 2008). According to *African Americans Continue* (2008) and Cross (2007), African American female students were more likely to complete college than African American male students due to decades of strong increases in persistence over males. In other words, African American female students remained at the same higher education institution until graduation and obtained degrees at a higher rate than African American male students at the same higher education institutions that were surveyed (*African Americans Continue*, 2008; Cross, 2007). According to Frierson, Pearson, and Wyche (2009), African American female persistence rates were higher than their African American male counterparts. This is because African American males are largely invisible and excluded from mainstream society.

First, a major invisibility factor was that African American males performed at a lower rate academically than African American females, which masked the lower academic performance of African American males (Frierson et al., 2009). The higher academic performance levels of African American female students impeded access to assistance

programs and agencies that may have been available to facilitate better study habits for African American males (Frierson et al., 2009).

Another factor of invisibility that Frierson et al. (2009) documented on PWI campuses included African American males *hiding in plain sight*. Administrators failed to recognize and accommodate the variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and community characteristics of marginalized African American males. They were *hiding in plain sight* was about Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), which indicated that succumbing to a *cultural my phobia*, signified that members of a majority culture easily recognized members who assimilated to the majority culture; however, those same members were unable to see others around them that exhibited different cultural behaviors (Frierson et al., 2009).

Frierson et al. (2009) and Strayhorn (2012, 2017, 2019) concluded that higher education administrators have general perceptions that may cause them to fail to recognize and accommodate the variety of backgrounds and community characteristics of African American males on PWI campuses. Some of these perceptions of African American males would utterly avail them to being *invisible*, such as having lower academic expectations and being academically underprepared for college, being from lower socioeconomic neighborhoods, and having an affinity toward recreational physical activities (Frierson et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2012, 2017, 2019). Frierson et al. (2009) concurred that these general perceptions of African American males attributed to the phenomenon of invisibility, which spurred higher persistence rates to graduation rates for African American females.

Finally, another invisibility factor, marginalization, causes lower persistence rates among African American males (Frierson et al., 2009). Marginalization frequently

happens on PWI campuses when there is a plurality of African American males that have a common characteristic, such as most African American males who may belong to fraternities or athletes (Frierson et al., 2009). *Nonfraternity* members or *nonathletes* may be ostracized because they are not members of those common groups, thus being socially marginalized and excluded from the mainstream (Frierson et al., 2009).

Statement of the Problem

There is a shortage of qualitative studies dedicated to the mentoring experiences of African American males who persisted to graduation in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) Sedlacek (1999). As reported by the National Center of Education Statistics (2008), some of the reasons for the shortage of research studies regarding mentoring perceptions of African American males and why they persisted to graduation may be due to lower retention rates in elementary, secondary, and higher education institutions in comparison to other ethnicities and genders. Additionally, NCES (2008) reported that there was a lower conferring of master's degrees to African Americans than to Whites. In addition to the NCES reports, the type of research conducted is a reason for a shortage of mentoring perceptions of African American males on why they persisted in PWIs. Before 1999, a predominance of research studies had been more descriptive, and more quantitative excluding the impressions of others (Sedlacek, 1999). Sedlacek (1999) also pointed out that before 1999, there were limited studies that focused on some of the impressions of African American students concerning the factors that contributed to persistence in PWIs. Although these studies were limited, they were qualitative. Before researchers progressed to investigating the perceptive factors of persistence, they began on a descriptive basis. Descriptive research is helpful, but it does not focus on change

(Sedlacek, 1999). Qualitative research focuses more on interpretation and meaning-making to bring about change (Merriam, 2009). In contrast, descriptive research did not focus on the change regarding the study of minority students, but on all students (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). The basic focus of descriptive research has been on White students, since higher education institutions initially were created to meet the needs of white students, and black colleges and universities were created to meet the needs of African American students (U. S. Department of Education, 2010).

As reported by researchers (Freeman, 2000; Furr & Elling, 2002; Haring, 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007), mentoring has been a factor that contributed to African American male persistence in PWIs. This is the reason why it is imperative to increase the lines of communication among students, educators, and higher education policymakers to better assess the needs of African American male students regarding mentoring. Higher education policymakers need to reconceptualize the needs of African American males by being accountable and supportive of high academic achievers, as well as those who are low academic achievers. Harper (2006) also recommended that policymakers acknowledge *self-reports of success* from high-achieving African American males to conceptualize the needs of African American male students. He felt that his national survey of 200 high-achieving African American male students with grade point averages of 3.0 or better would be a significant example of how higher education policymakers and educators could restructure support programs to align them to the needs of African American male students, who are high achievers and low achievers in higher education institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine the mentoring perspectives of African American males and the role of mentoring as a factor that contributed to their persistence and obtaining master's degrees. Six African American males were interviewed and expressed their mentoring experiences while attending Predominantly White Institutions in Missouri (PWI).

Research Questions

My research questions that formed the basis of this study were as follows:

1. What are the overarching mentoring persistence factors that contributed to retention for African American males in PWI?

2. What mentoring support systems (e.g., family, peers, colleagues, instructors, etc.) did African American male students perceive as necessary retention elements at PWI?

3. What was the impact of informal or formal mentoring on their persistence?

Many research studies focus on the retention rates in secondary or undergraduate educational programs; however, this study has addressed the gap in the literature regarding mentoring as a persistence factor for African American male students in graduate school. The percentage of first-professional degrees conferred to Asians/Pacific Islanders (6 %) was higher than percentages of first-professional degrees conferred on all other racial/ethnic groups, including Whites (3%), American Indians/Alaska Natives (3%), Blacks (2%) and Hispanics (2%). The percentage of doctoral degrees awarded ranged from 1% to 2 % of all degrees conferred in 2007 for each race/ethnicity (NCES, 2008). Studies have shown that African American males completed fewer advanced

degrees than other ethnicities. Additionally, there is a gap between the number of

advanced degrees conferred to African American males and African American females.

African American males again have less advanced degree attainment than African

American females. In 2008, African American females received master's degrees at an

average rate of 2% higher than African American males although there has been a slight

increase of African American males, who received master's degrees at higher education

institutions since 2005 (NCES, 2008).

Significance of the Study

This study has elaborated further on the topic of mentoring as it related to African

American male student persistence and graduate degree attainment. Specifically, this

study has examined African American male impressions regarding mentoring as a factor

that contributed to their persistence in graduation in post-secondary education. This

study has addressed the gap in the literature regarding African American male persistence

in graduate school, particularly in PWIs. Studies have shown that African American

males have fewer advanced degrees than Whites (NCES, 2008).

African American male degree attainment across all levels of postsecondary

education is significantly lower than female counterparts (Harper, 2012). Harper also

cited the U.S. Department of Education (2010), which indicated that Black men were

conferred master's degrees at 28.2%, and Black females were conferred master's degrees

at 71.8%. Regarding the increase in postsecondary degree conferral, African American

men for a 30-year research study of 219 participants (1977-2007), experienced a 109%

increase in post-baccalaureate degree attainment in comparison to African American

women who experienced an increase of 253% attainment of post-secondary degrees in

predominantly white universities (Harper, 2012). Thus, this study has added to the body

of literature, as it has enhanced our understanding of how the role of mentoring

contributed to persistence among African American males in PWIs. Additionally, this

study may provide benefits of mentoring programs or mentoring practices that can

compel African American males to be actively engaged in post-secondary PWIs on

campus and off-campus, which, as Harper (2012) contended, led to persistence and

success of degree attainment for African American males. For this research study,

persistence means the successful completion of a master's degree program in a PWI.

Delimitations

Per Roberts (2010), delimitation is what researchers control in their study.   In this

research study, convenience sampling was conducted; therefore, the researcher controlled

the limits of the sample size (Merriam, 2009). Along with convenience sampling, the

snowballing technique was utilized for a referral to other participants, as this strategy

implied the recommendations of other study participants (Merriam, 2009). Additionally,

the sampling of six African American males was based on time, money, Zoom virtual

video conferencing access, and the availability of respondents (Merriam, 2009). Most of

the participants were peers who have similar educational backgrounds.   Due to safety

preventive measures for the COVID/Coronavirus pandemic, all interviews were

conducted by using the virtual conferencing tool.

Those interviewed in this study only included African American males over 27

years old that received master's degrees at PWIs in Missouri. Additionally, the central

aspect of this research study focused on the role of mentoring or mentoring programs as

contributing factors to persistence because there have been many contributing factors that

would encourage African American males to persist in higher education. Therefore,
participants would have experienced some type of mentoring relationship. Lastly, this
research study may not be generalizable for a different population in Missouri, in another
state, or setting.

Assumptions

This research study may be beneficial to open discussion to enhance the retention
efforts for minority groups at PWIs or other higher education institutions.   Over the past
four decades, retention has been a major concern for educators and administrators in
higher education (Kerby, 2015). This concern was based on the prediction of whether
students would persist in higher education. (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1979; Spady,
1970; Tinto, 1975, as cited by Kerby, 2015), these predictive measures were developed
by researchers who presented the earlier retention models; these models tended to explain
and measure the college dropout process. For example, Tinto, one of the major
researchers of persistence defined retention as a longitudinal process that included the
academic and the social support systems which influence academic performance (Kerby,
2015; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). In Chapter II, the progression of Tinto's model is
explained on how it also merged with other researchers' retention and persistence
models.

This research study is important for the enhancement or implementation of new
retention programs at higher education institutions. This study may also influence the
increase of not only African American males receiving master's degrees, but all students.
Persistence experts such as Tinto (1975, 1993, 2012) believed that minority retention
programs should be mainstreamed to meet the needs of all students. His perspective

evolved from covertly *blaming the victim* or the student if they did not graduate to moving the obligation of student success more with the institution. Tinto's framework will be explained further in Chapter II, Literature Review. Perhaps, this research study will help to reinforce mainstream retention programs, so that institutions could be more accountable to all students.

This research study has also included assumptions regarding the research participants. One assumption is that the responses received from the African American male student interviews accurately reflected their educational experiences. It is also assumed that the participants would answer all the interview questions openly and honestly, and the characteristics of mentoring relationships would be common across all research participants (Roberts, 2010). Additionally, since the participants received their master's degrees, it is assumed that they would remember their mentoring educational experiences.

As indicated for this study, Chapter I was the background of this research study. Chapter II was the review of studies that incorporated Tinto's conceptual framework, and how it evolved with other research studies that addressed mentoring as a contributor to persistence to graduation. Additionally, Chapter II explained why Tinto's conceptual framework was important for this research study. Chapter III explained the data collection methods of interviewing, collecting artifacts and documents, and audio taping using virtual Zoom conferencing with participants. This chapter also included how the convenience sampling technique was utilized, and how the snowballing strategy was determined. It also provided an analysis of the data, and it entailed the method of how the data was analyzed. Otter.ai transcription software was utilized. Open, axial, and

selective coding was implemented.   Chapter IV provided a review of the findings. The literature supported the findings of this study. Lastly, Chapter V provided conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research along with a bibliography and appendices (Roberts, 2010).

Definitions

Egotistical Suicide - A form of suicide that arises when individuals were unable to establish membership within the communities of society (Tinto, 1993a).

Integration - Membership in either the academic or social system in a higher education institution comprised of one's peers (Tinto, 1993a).

Membership -Tinto defined membership as students integrating into the higher education social and academic system. He conceptualized higher education institutions as a subculture, like subcultures in society (Tinto, 1993a).

Mentor - A mentor can be a peer or someone who provides academic and career guidance, inspiration, encouragement, psychosocial, and support (Simon, Perry, & Roff, 2008).

Mentoring - Mentoring was defined as an act associated with someone who is a peer or someone who provides academic and career guidance, inspiration, encouragement, psychosocial, and support (Simon, Perry, & Roff, 2008).

Mentoring program - An official program established by a higher education institution to provide transitional and academic grooming and networking opportunities (Haring, 2000).

Model of Student Departure -Tinto (1993a) described the student departure model as forced or voluntary student departure from a higher education institution. He related it to

students' forced or voluntary departure from either the social or the intellectual system of a higher education institution.

Retention - Matriculation through graduate school and earning a master's degree. Additionally, retention was described as the effort and commitment of higher education institutions to keep students from dropping out (Tinto, 1993b). This is a term used by institutions to refer to the rate at which an institution retained and graduated students who first entered the institution as freshmen at a given point in time (Tinto, 2012, p. 127).

Retention programs – Retention programs were utilized interchangeably with mentoring programs because mentoring is a retention program, which provides students with a support system in remaining in higher education until graduation (Tinto, 1993b).

Persistence - The decision to remain in an institution in which the student originally began the study and was measured by whether the student has remained within the original institution (Munro, 1981). Tinto (2012) described persistence as the rate at which students began higher education at a given point and continued in higher education until graduation. Tinto (1975, 1993; Furr, &Elling, 2002) labeled persistence through the concepts of social integration and academic integration; involvement, and engagement in academic-related activities (Tinto, 2012).

Organization of the Study

The organization of this study will be as follows:

1. Chapter 1: Introduction

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

3. Chapter 3: Research and Design Methodology, Data Analysis

4. Chapter 4: Review of Findings

5. Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations for the Study

Bibliography and Appendices (Roberts, 2010).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Racial injustice has been at the forefront of United States history. There are new Jim Crow policies and practices which emulate the past. Trending educational institutions are demanding that critical race theory be deleted from curriculums and all historical references. Illusionary policies have been augmented to bridge the gap in inequities. Massive incarceration of African American males is the new norm. The war on drugs has become a profitable market.   Legal systems profile African American males as instant felons even with frivolous charges. These new Jim Crow processes have taken the place of the old Jim Crow practices. A civil rights advocate, Alexander (2020) argued the following about the new Jim Crow caste system:

We had recently birthed another caste system—a system of mass

incarceration—that caged millions of poor people and people of

color and relegated millions more to permanent second-class status.

Yet we were in deep denial that a new system of racial and social control existed,

and most of us—even those who cared deeply about racial

justice—did not seem to understand that powerful racial dynamics

and political forces were at play that made much of our racial

progress illusory. (Preface section)

 According to Alexander (2020), the massive incarceration of African American males was the new form of Jim Crow enforced by political influences. The progress made from the old Jim Crow has been masked by the ongoing inequities of the current legal system in the U. S. To improve the current social structure, social advocacy would

be beneficial to help reform Jim Crow practices.   Higher education institutions can assist in building social advocacy by supporting mentoring to increase student persistence.

he purpose of this literature review was to explore the models and theories of persistence and mentoring among African American males who attend predominantly white institutions (PWIs). It begins with an historical background and then explores mentoring and the various models and theories related to it.

Historical Background

Although in the late 19th century Blacks were making strides due to the abolishment of slavery with the 13th Amendment, the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau in 1865, and the 14th Amendment that guaranteed the rights of citizens and equal protection under the law in 1866, the period of 1890-1920 was a significant period of nadir, which is defined as a lower point for Blacks' participation in higher education (Kaplin, & Lee, B. A., 2007a; Sass, 2011; U.S. Constitution Online, 1992). Specifically, this period was a lower point for Blacks because although the Civil Rights Act of 1875 passed, banning segregation in all public accommodations did not resolve the issue of separate and unequal facilities in education.

Homer Plessy, an African American challenged the state of Louisiana's Separate Car Act arguing that it violated the 13th and the 14th Amendments (Kaplin, & Lee, 2007b; Sass, 2011; U.S. Constitution Online, 1992). The U. S. Supreme Court ruled in the Plessy vs. Ferguson case that separate but equal was legal. This court case was used to justify other segregation laws. Along with the Plessy vs. Ferguson case, in 1890, the Second Morrill Act was enacted, and it fueled the debate regarding the principle of separate but equal. It provided a more complete endowment for separate but equal

facilities for Blacks, and it helped to increase the growth of black colleges (Kaplin & Lee, 2007b; Sass, 2011). Additionally, in 1855, the establishment of Berea College assisted in establishing the first inter-racial college and the foundation for black college growth (Nelson, 1974; Wilson, 2006). The Berea College inter-racial program has been attributed to the increase in Black student enrollment and conferment of bachelors and advanced degrees (Nelson, 1974); Wilson, 2006). According to NCES (2019), beginning in 1940, it was reported by the decade that Black students' attainment of bachelor's or higher degrees maintained a steady increase. This increase in degree attainment by Blacks occurred by an average of .6 % percent each decade from 1940-2019 in higher education institutions in the United States (see Figure 2.0).

Figure 2.0

Percentage of Black Student Bachelor or Higher Degree Attainment in United States Higher Education Institutions

Note. This chart shows the overall growth of Black student bachelor or higher degree attainment in the United States, 1940-2019. National Center of Education Statistics, 2019.
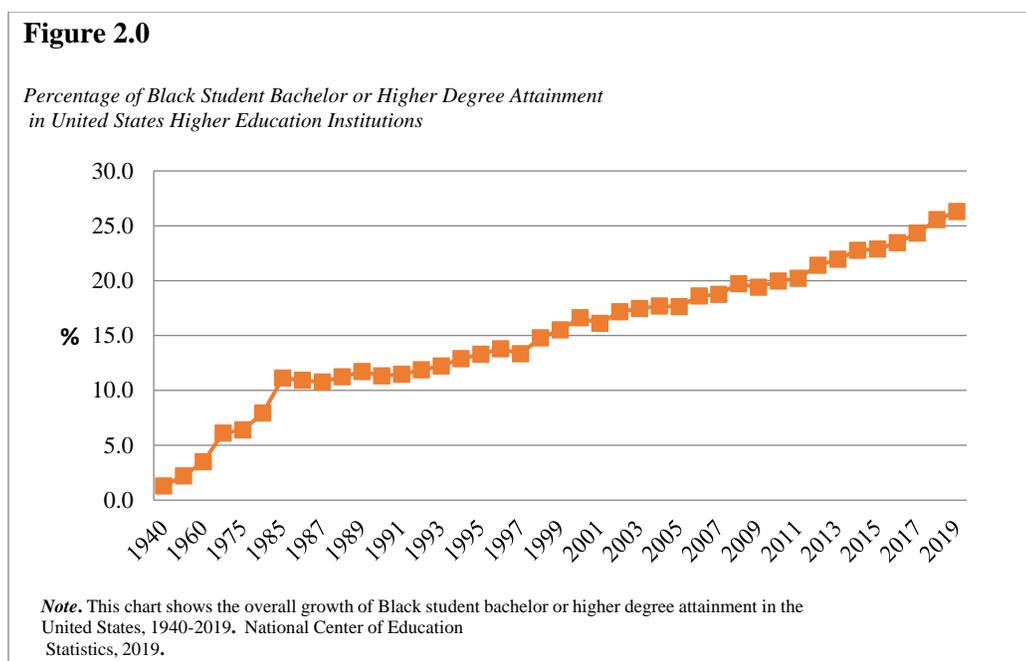
Another event that was part of the nadir period was the Day Law of 1904; House Bill No. 25 which was instituted by Representative Carl Day impacted Berea College. This law prevented Blacks from being co-educated at Berea College (Sass, 2011; Wilson, 2006). House Bill No. 25 was entitled "an Act to prohibit white and colored persons

from attending the same school" (Laws of Tennessee, 1901, Ch. 7, House Bill No. 7, p. 9; Wilson, 2006). The Day Law and President Frost of Berea College helped to enforce segregation that moved Black enrollment out of Berea College to another land-grant black higher education institution (Nelson, 1974; Wilson, 2006). The Day Law was the impetus that made Berea College's enrollment all-white. The Day Law and President Frost also spearheaded the creation of Black land grant colleges such as the Lincoln Institute with the contribution of a $400,000 grant (Nelson, 1974; Wilson, 2006). This grant helped to ignite the beginning of black colleges and helped to increase enrollment in the southern United States (Nelson, 1974, Wilson, 2006).

The positive upturn for Blacks in higher education was through the U.S. Supreme Court landmark case, Brown v. Board of Education, which declared that state laws establishing separate schools for White and Black students were unconstitutional (Kaplin, & Lee, 2007b; Sass, 2011). This case overturned the Supreme Court decision of Plessy vs. Ferguson (Kaplin, & Lee, 2007b; Sass, 2011). Additionally, the Brown v. Board of Education case agreed with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, and national origin. Along with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Higher Education Act of 1965 increased federal aid to higher education and provide scholarships, financial aid, and student loans, and in 2003, the Higher Education Act is again amended and reauthorized, expanding access to higher education for low-income and middle-income students and providing additional funds to graduate students and increasing accountability for equity in education (Kaplin, & Lee, 2007a; Sass, 2011). Although the Higher Education Act expanded access for African American males of

different socio-economic backgrounds in the United States to attend higher education institutions, there are still inequities in access to higher education.

Inequities in higher education are due to systemic racism. African American males experience universal racism that has a predetermined negative view of Black men, and the false perception of their limited learning potential (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 79). According to Strayhorn (2012), they are often perceived as being intellectually inferior or not worthy of obtaining an undergraduate or a graduate degree. Additionally, the systemic racism African American males face daily sometimes will counteract them from obtaining any degree (Strayhorn, 2012, 2017, 2019). Thus, there are still higher education accessibility challenges for African American males in the United States.

Although there have been challenges for African Americans for access to higher education in America, significant historical events provided higher education access increasing enrollment for African Americans and other minorities in the United States. As shown in Figure 2.1, the overall enrollment for Blacks has shown a slight, constant increase of 0.5% on average from 1970-2016 for a bachelor's degree or higher attainment in most decades in the United States.

Figure 2.1.
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Higher Education Institutions by Race, by Decade in United States

Note. The graph shows increasing college enrollment for all racial groups in the United States 1970-2016, National Center for Education Statistics,. Adapting from Table Digest Table (2017) 302.60
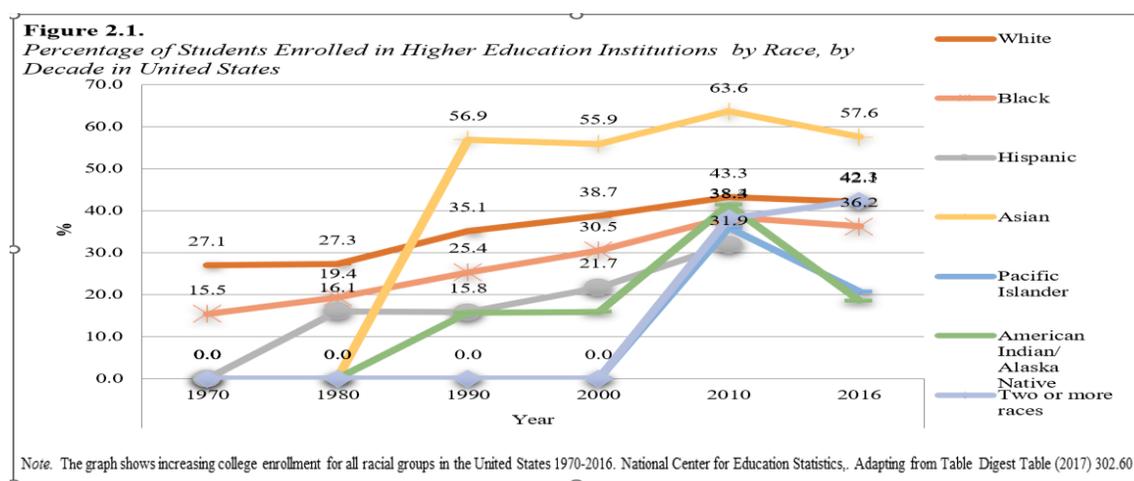
In Missouri, in 2020, all racial groups except for Native Hawaiian acquired more bachelor's or higher degrees than Blacks. It also indicates that Whites are the largest demographic that has less than high school education at 90%, which is higher than all racial groups in Missouri; however, Whites and Asians have higher educational attainment in the bachelor's or higher degree level (Figure 2.3). Studies have shown that there were reported only 8.2% of recipients of master's or higher degrees, ages 25 and above (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2.

Missouri Education Attainment (Ages 25+), Year 2020

Degree Level	Percentage
Doctorate Degrees	1.3%
Professional Degrees	1.8%
Masters	8.2%
Bachelor	18.0%
Associate Degree	7.9%
Some College Not Graduate	22.2%
Highschool or GED	30.6%
Less than Highschool	9.3%
No Schooling	0.8%

Note. Missouri Education Attainment. Figure 2.2 indicates that overall in the state of Missouri, there are more people, who have only graduated from Highschool or received a GED. There are less people in Missouri that have acquired Masters, Doctorate or Professional Degrees (Towncharts.com, 2021)

This study focused on African American males obtaining master's degrees in higher education institutions in the State of Missouri. As aforementioned, United States Census survey studies (2020) have shown that in Missouri, only 8.2% or less of the overall population have master's degrees or above (Figure 2.2). In Missouri, there were inequities in bachelor's degree or higher degree attainment for Blacks in comparison to other racial groups (NCES, 2019; Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3

Percentage of Missouri Education Attainment, By Race Year 2020

■ Bachelor or Higher Degree   ■ Highschool Grad or GED

■ Less than Highschool   ■ Some college or Associates Degree

	White	Black	American Indian	Asian	Native Hawaiian	Hispanic
Bachelor or Higher Degree	30%	19%	20%	59%	19%	22%
Highschool Grad or GED	31%	33%	30%	13%	30%	27%
Less than Highschool	90%	14%	15%	12%	19%	26%
Some college or Associates Degree	30%	35%	35%	16%	32%	26%
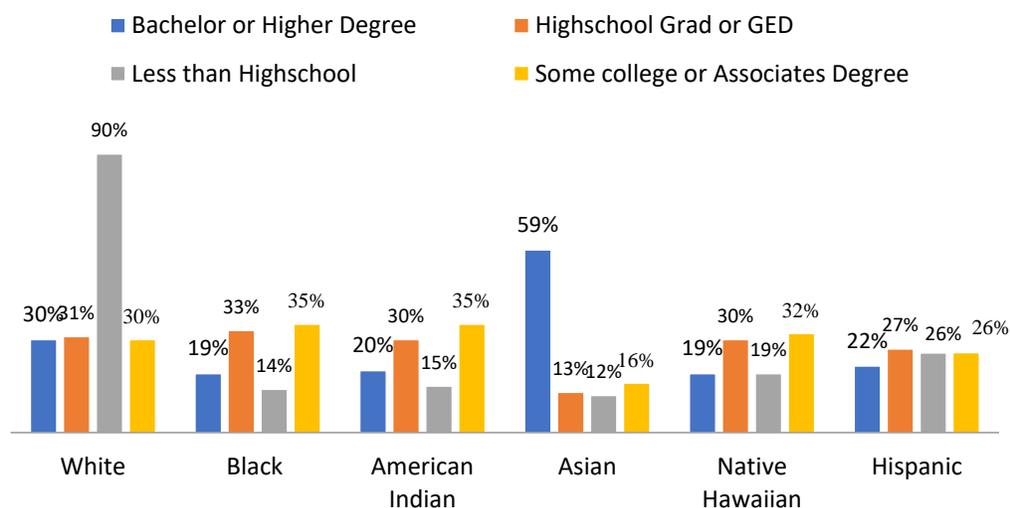
Note. This chart indicates that in Missouri, in 2020, all racial groups except for Native Hawaiian acquired more Bachelor or higher degrees than Blacks. It also indicates that whites are the largest demographic that has less than highschool education at 90%, which is higher than all racial groups in Missouri; however, whites and Asians have higher educational attainment in the Bachelor or Higher degree level (Towncharts.com, 2021)

Studies have shown since 1940, Blacks began to make strides in higher education degree attainment (Figure 2.1; NCES, 2019); however, their increase in receiving bachelor's or higher degrees, even in 2020, was less than all aggregated racial groups, specifically in Missouri (Figure 2.3). This study focused on the master's degree conferment to African American males at higher education institutions, at private and public universities. According to the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD) (2021), at Public A university, between 2006 - 2009, there was a 25% increase in master's degrees conferred, and between 2010-2013, there was a drastic decrease of 85% of master's degrees conferred to African American males. In 2014, there was a slight increase of 9% in degrees conferred to African American males (see Figure 2.4). Private B university, in comparison, there was a significant decrease of 100% of master's degrees conferred to African American males between 2006-2011 (see

Figure 2.4). Between 2012-2014, at Private B university, there was an average of an 11%

increase in master's degrees conferred to African American male graduates. In

comparison with Public A and Private B universities, with Private C university, there was

a 1% slight increase in master's conferred between 2006-2007; however, there was a

steady decrease between 2008-2012 leading to a significant decrease in 68% of master's

degrees conferred since 2006. According to DHEWD (2020), since 2006, although there

have been increases in master's degrees conferred to African American males, there have

been drastic decreases in degrees conferred between 2010-2013. The data shows that not

all African American males persisted to graduation and acquired their master's degrees in

public and private universities (see Figure 2.4). Figure 2.4 illustrates that there were a

small number of African American master's degree graduates in Missouri. This report

aligned with the explanation that although African Americans have access to higher

education, not all have completed their degree programs.

Figure 2.4

Master's Degrees Conferred to African American Males at Public and Private Universities in Missouri

Note: The x-axis denotes the number of Master's degrees conferred to African American males at Public and Private universities in Missouri. The y-axis indicates each year the Master's Degrees were conferred. (dhewd.mo.gov/datastatsum/)
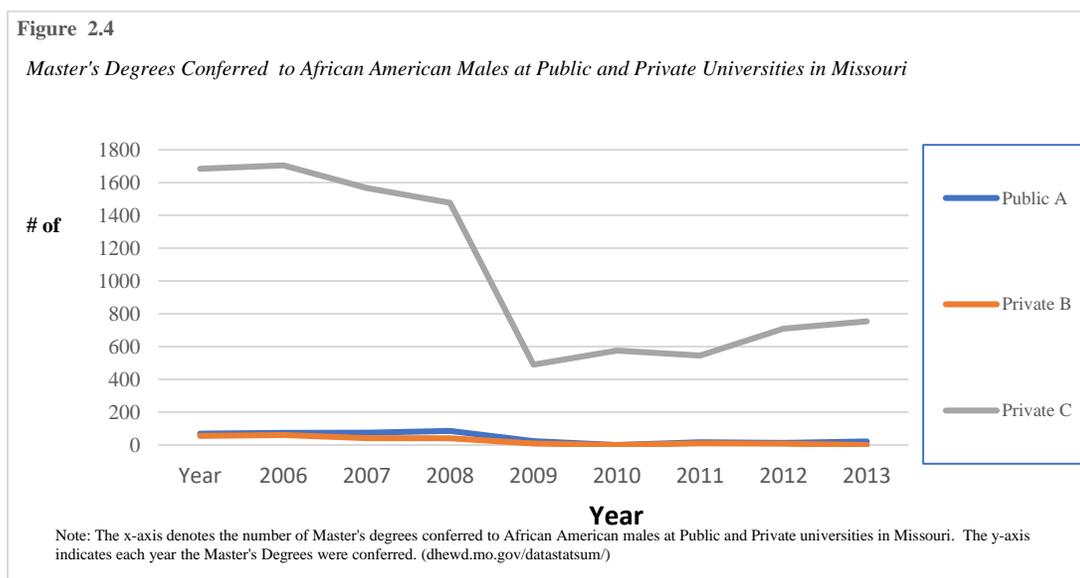
According to Tinto (2012), institutions must be proactive in ensuring students

receive the assistance they need for their retention and their graduation (p. 6). Institutions

need to do what they can to make students stay at the same institution and persist to graduation. In association with Tinto's (1993, 1997) evolving framework, Munro (1981) and Crisp (2010), concluded that persistence in the institution is defined as the decision to remain at the original higher education institution in which the students began to study until graduation. Tinto (2012) posited that persistence also meant that students continued in higher education even if they went to different institutions to graduate. Furthermore, national studies have shown that persistence in institutions included mentoring as a factor that contributed to the successful completion of advanced degrees, which would be discussed later in this chapter (Harper, 2006, 2007, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012, 2017, 2019). Thus, studies have shown, that the lack of mentoring decreased the incentive for African Americans to persist in higher education institutions (Munro, 1981; Crisp 2010, Tinto, 2012; Tight, 2020).

Mentoring

Mentoring was defined as a symbiotic relationship that occurred in various environments including academia, corporations, and civic organizations (Waldeck, 2019). (Kalbfleisch, 2002, as cited in Waldeck, 2019), stated that mentoring is a mutual, personal relationship between a more sophisticated mentor and a less advanced protégé. This means that a mentor is usually a person with more experience or expertise, whereas a protégé is someone with less experience. In academia, a mentor may take any form, a faculty member, a peer, or other students that may have expertise in a certain area (Waldeck, 2019). This study focused on the academic perspectives of African American male protégés, and how mentoring assisted them to persist to graduation and acquire master's degrees.

Additionally, this study addressed different types of mentoring; formal or informal mentoring because the mentees or protégés may have experienced both types of mentoring relationships (Allen et al., 2008). As studies have shown, formal mentoring programs usually occur within organizations where structured knowledge transfer is essential for productivity and tends to promote career growth and development, whereas informal mentoring can be spontaneous, and unstructured (Karkoulian et al., 2008). This study explored by comparing the processes of formal versus informal mentoring among African American males' perspectives.

Mentoring Programs

Historically, mentoring programs have been a caveat of retention efforts to support African Americans to persist to graduation to be achieved (Freeman, 2000). Among these retention efforts, African American males' persistence to graduation became a vital focus for higher education institutions due to their lower persistence rates in comparison to African American females (Cross, 2007). Per Cross (2007), African American female students were more likely to complete college degrees than male students due to decades of strong increases in female student persistence over that of males. Cuyjet (2006) stated that nationally, African American male students hold the lowest college completion rate (32.8%) among both sexes and all racial and ethnic groups in higher education.

Retention Programs. According to The National Center of Public Policy and Higher Education (2004), persistence in higher education is critical for students because holding a college degree increases an individual's income level; however, less than 50% of first-time, full-time college students complete an associate degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years at their original institution. According to Pontius

and Harper (2006, 2007, 2012), the achievement of persistence in the graduation of students is essential for higher education institutions to retain talented and qualified students and preserve enormous amounts of time and money invested in students through assistantships, fellowships, and professional development initiatives.

Models and Theories of Persistence Supporting Mentoring

The models and theories of persistence were explored to understand why African American students persisted in higher education institutions. Tinto's research model is most popularly referenced due to his explanation of why students persisted in higher education institutions. Tinto's (1975, 1993, 1997) earlier Model of Student Departure helped to establish the foundation of why African American males persisted in graduation from higher education institutions. His model also explained social integration, and the reasons why students persisted, which included mentoring aspects Tinto (1975, 2012). Furthermore, Tinto surmised that if students were more involved on campus, and interacted more with their peers, faculty, and the social campus environment, they were more likely to persist. Additionally, from the earlier stages of Tinto's model, his perspective began to evolve from *blaming the victim* to increasing the obligation of the institutions for student retention to graduation. Tinto's Model of Student Departure was further appended to include institutions' accountability to all students. This model involved "A Framework for Institutional Action: The Conditions for Student Success" (pp. 6-9). Tinto's new framework has been explained later in this chapter.

Other researchers such as Strayhorn (2012, 2017, 2019), posited Tinto's (1993, 1997, 2012) framework further by incorporating Maslow's Model of Hierarchy of Basic Human Needs (e.g., Self-actualization, Esteem, Belonging, Safety, and Physiological)

into his hypothesized model of college student's sense of belonging. Strayhorn cited

Maslow (1962) "If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified,

then there will emerge … belongingness needs (p.1)." Belonging is a basic human need

because it is a strong human motivation to be accepted and to feel valued. This

validation was what Strayhorn stressed led to success in higher education.

Researchers such as Hurtado and Carter (1997), Sedlacek (1999), Harper (2006,

2007, 2012), and Strayhorn (2012, 2017, 2019), have expanded on Tinto's research

regarding African Americans' persistence in higher education institutions by focusing on

specific areas of mentoring that have shown to increase African American males'

retention rates. Although these researchers investigated different mentoring areas that

led to persistence, most findings articulated that mentoring directly led to persistence to

graduation. These areas were discussed further in this literature review.

Tinto's Research Models

Although Tinto was one of the most prominent American researchers, who

studied retention beginning in the late 1960s, he aligned his Student Departure Theory

with Durkheim's theory of social cohesion or most popularly known as the suicide theory

(Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1997). Durkheim's theory of social cohesion was about how core

institutions had norms and values in common with society. When these belief systems

were shared, Durkheim (1951) posited that this caused social integration or social

cohesion. Otherwise, when individuals were insufficiently integrated into society, they

were more prone to suicide (Durkheim, 1951; Kerby, 2015). Durkheim's suicide model

proposed a sociological framework for the dropout process which included five variables

being viewed as direct contributors to social integration: (a) academic potential, (b)

normative congruence, (c) grade performance, (d) intellectual development, and (e) friendship support (Durkheim, 1951). Beginning in the 1970s, Tinto used Durkheim's suicide theory and applied it to explain why students dropped out. Since higher education institutions were viewed as social systems with their structures and values, then student dropouts were viewed as analogous to academic suicide (Spady, 1970).

Tinto's models were used for this research study to explain the factors that contributed to persistence in higher education. Some of the major concepts in the 1970s that resonated regarding persistence were social interaction and integration. These concepts were explained further as they pertained to the mentoring aspects that the research participants experienced in Chapter IV, Review of the Findings (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1997, 2012). According to Tinto, when students were involved and perceived a sense of inclusion, they were more likely to persist in higher education than students who did not. Tinto also stated that insufficient integration into the social system of college would produce dropouts due to the lack of social interaction. Social interaction producing social integration was Tinto's major premise for persistence.

Tinto's Framework for Institutional Action. Tinto's perspective on persistence was updated from *blaming the victim* to obligating higher education institutions to engage students (Kerby, 2015; Tight, 2020; Tinto, 2012). Tinto felt that institutions should have a call to action to retain and graduate students. He believed that institutions were responsible for student success, and he developed "A Framework for Institutional Action: The Conditions for Student Success" (p. 6). In introducing this framework, Tinto believed that to improve retention and graduation, institutions must focus on their behavior by establishing those conditions on campus that were known to promote student

success. These conditions were expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and

involvement. Tinto reiterated that students were more likely to persist if all four

conditions were present.   He considered all conditions essential for student persistence to

graduation.

First, Tinto (2012) believed that student persistence was supported by the students

themselves. They had to have the self-determination to believe that they could succeed

and have high expectations. Tinto believed that student success was due to high

expectations of themselves. Second, Tinto believed that institutions needed to provide

support to students to help them achieve high expectations. According to Tinto, this

support may be academic, social, emotional, or financial support (p.7). Third, Tinto

explained that institutions needed to assess student performance and provide continuous

feedback in ways that enable students, faculty, and staff to promote student success.

Lastly, Tinto expressed that the most important condition for student success was

involvement, or what now is more commonly referred to as engagement. Tinto surmised

that the more students that were academically and socially engaged with faculty, staff,

and others on campus the more likely they would persist in college.

Historically, Tinto's (1993, 1997) research has been geared toward students in

higher education without attention to cultural or socioeconomic needs. He did not

disaggregate students by specific needs by race or by socioeconomic status.   His research

on the Student Departure Theory and the Framework for Institutional Action: The

Conditions for Student Success was not specifically geared toward African American

students. Due to Tinto looking at students as a whole, his research was limited because it

did not hone into the detailed socialization, nor did it focus on minority groups, especially

with African American students having a sense of belonging with clubs, sororities,

fraternities, or mentoring activities.

Expansion of Tinto's Research Model. Tinto's research model of 1993 was

aligned with several research models (Bean, 1983; Milem & Berger, 1997; Sedlacek,

1999) in which his model was expanded to other perceptions of social interaction about

mentoring aspects. Several of Sedlacek's variables related to Tinto's (1997) social

interaction theme, which included community service, the availability of a strong support

person, and understanding and dealing with racism. Per Sedlacek, these variables were

imperative for African American students to deal with racism and face difficult

adjustments to predominantly white universities. Students must adjust to the dimensions

of these variables, and along with them, faculty and staff would determine the success or

failure of this adjustment. As with Tinto's original model, there were limitations with

Sedlacek's model not utilizing conventional categories such as admissions and student

activities that would relate to any higher education setting. Sedlacek's adaptation to

Tinto's model alluded to mentoring programs by suggesting the development of a strong

support system to help students deal with racism and with facing difficult adjustment

issues encountered at PWIs.

Milem and Berger's Research Model

Milem and Berger (1997) attempted to clarify the relationship between Astin's

involvement theory and Tinto's 1993 modified version of the interaction of student

departure theory. Per Milem and Berger (1997), Astin (1984) and Tinto (1975, 1993,

1997, 2012) emphasized the factors contributing to persistence that were associated with

students' involvement in college life. Tinto further supported the student involvement

theory with retention in his interactionalist model and the Framework of Institutional

Action: Conditions for Student Success by indicating the need to better understand the

relationship between student involvement in learning and the impact that it had on

student persistence; learning is linked to persistence and is part of the process of

incorporation, which is contact with family, faculty, staff or other students. Contact with

family, faculty, staff, or other students is all a part of the mentoring process (Freeman,

2000). Astin expanded Tinto's view of incorporation when he explained that after

students were successfully incorporated, they were able to identify and adopt new norms

and behavioral patterns that were appropriate to the specific context or university. Tinto

suggested various ways incorporation or how integration occurred at many institutions

through involvement in various activities on campus (i.e., Greek life, residence hall

activities, student union activities, contact with faculty, intramural sports, and a variety of

curricular, and extracurricular activities. These activities of involvement included

mentoring aspects. Thus, it was noted that the limitations of successful integration

activities do not necessarily ensure persistence to graduation.

Some studies of persistence, which supported mentoring, have been effective in

providing information that could improve higher education retention rates for African

American students. Several studies (Davis, 1994; Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson,

1999; Museus, 2008; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2018) have conceptualized

social support systems, which led to social interaction for African American students,

produced persistence. These social support systems consisted of family and friends,

faculty or staff, ethnic student centers, programs aimed at facilitating the development of bicultural identity, and counseling centers. These social systems embodied mentoring aspects or mentoring programs.

Cross's Model

Along with other mentoring studies to improve the retention rates of African American males, Cross (1991,1995), Strayhorn (2012, 2017, 2019), Harper, and Quaye (2007), acknowledged that having a sense of one's own black identity supported Tinto's social interaction theory of 1993. Cross's Black racial identity development model was based on his Nigrescence (Racial Identity) Framework which described the ability of Black males to interact comfortably with Whites while maintaining a sense of one's own black identity.   The five sequential stages of Cross's framework are the following: (a) a *preencounter* stage in which the individual possesses a White normative standard and is pro-white and anti-Black; (b) an *encounter* stage in which the individual has experienced a racial derogatory event with Whites, and Blackness is glorified and Whiteness is hated; (c) an *immersion-emersion* stage where one's blackness is appropriated and negative attitudes toward Whites are remembered, but have diminished; (d) an *internalization* stage where a resolution of the conflict between (new) Black and (old) White world racism views and a non-racism perspective emerges; (e) a *commitment* stage for focusing on Black affairs and a possible plan of action stage (Hocoy, 1999). The last stage signifies one's developed Black identity, and attention is focused on serving one's community. As identified in Cross's Nigrescence Framework concluded that African American male students must enter the growth and discovery process to have positive racial identities which would enable them to interact effectively with others because they

understand their blackness. Thus, African American males being equipped with a developed black identity would also enable them to receive or give informal or formal mentoring in PWIs to empower others to persist.

Harper and Quaye's (2007) study which coincided with Cross's model identified with the foundation of Tinto because social interaction was a contributing factor in Black male students persisting in higher education. Strayhorn (2012, 2017, 2019) found that Black male students having a sense of belonging gave them a sense of community, which influenced their involvement with mentoring programs and other support systems. Thus, Black males, who were involved in student organizations, were expected to persist due to the mentoring aspect of being in a socially interactive setting that was supportive.

Cross-racial mentoring theories. Several studies have embraced the idea of cross-racial mentoring because due to the representation of limited minority faculty at PWIs, it is often hard to match mentors of the same race with students (Simon, Perry, & Roff, 2008; Lee, 2000; Dahlvig, 2010; Reddick & Pritchett, 2015). According to Simon who conducted a study at the University of Alabama with 10 African American females in a social work academic program, the race of the mentor was not as important as having a mentor. The effectiveness of the mentoring relationship relied on Thomas's cross-racial mentoring model because the persistence of the students in the program was predicated on the mentors' approach to dealing with racial issues in a similar way as the protégés. Having this similarity in handling racial issues assisted the students to persist to graduation. From the studies by, cross-racial mentoring was advocated for PWIs due to a shortage of the same race mentors. The increased growth of Black students since the 1980s has created a deficit of same-race mentors and has caused *cultural taxation* for

Black faculty. According to Reddick and Pritchett, cultural taxation obligated Black

faculty to take responsibility for the welfare of students of color. Studies have shown that

Black faculty members were the minority, and the obligation of mentoring Black students

could become over burdensome.   Although studies have discussed the perceptions of

mentors, there was a lack of perceptions of African American students regarding the

elements necessary within mentoring relationships to enhance persistence to graduation.

Conceptual Framework

The models of persistence were studied to better understand how mentoring

influenced African American male students in persisting to graduation in higher

education institutions. As aforementioned, Tinto's latest updated framework,

Institutional Action: The Conditions for Student Success of 2012, and Tinto's conceptual

framework, the Model of Student Departure of 1993 was most popularly referenced due

to his explanation of why students departed or persisted in higher education institutions

and what were the institutional conditions needed for student retention and engagement

(Tinto, 1993a; 2012). Tinto's model was conceptual because it highlighted the core

interrelated concepts of integration, interaction, and involvement in the higher education

institutions' social and academic systems (Roberts, 2010).

Tinto also adopted theories from Spady (1970), who first applied Durkheim's

study of suicide to the Model of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993a). With this analogy, the

deviant behavior of suicide is compared with students being isolated in some way from

interacting with the social or academic system in higher education institutions. Per Tinto,

egotistical suicide is the premise for student departure from higher education institutions

because it is the form of suicide that ascended when individuals were unable to become

integrated and established membership within the communities of society. Establishing

membership within communities of society means being integrated into the social and

academic systems in higher education. Students being isolated or not a part of the

membership of either the academic or the social system at their higher education

institutions may depart from their higher education institution. Membership in an

academic system and a social system of some form means that students were integrated

into that environment. According to Tinto, students meeting with their advisors or

faculty to pursue better grades would be an example of membership or integration in the

academic system stressing the sharing of values that were held in common by other

members of society. Additionally, Tinto reiterated that this integration into the

institution's academic system would enable the students to interact with advisors, faculty,

and peers; thereby, helping them to become recipients of mentoring and encouraging

them to persist. Students being involved in daily routine interactions on campus such as

residence hall meetings, fraternities, sports, and other activities would be considered

members of the social system of the higher education institution which would encourage

personal affiliations and routine interactions among different members of the higher

education community (Tinto, 2012). As Tinto explained, some degree of integration or

membership in the social system is a large part of the formal condition of persistence.

For this research study, persistence was measured and defined by the student's decision

to remain in the original institutions in which they began study until graduation.

The researchers such as Bean (1983), Sedlacek (1999), Harper and Quaye (2007),

and Strayhorn (2019) have expanded on Tinto's (1975, 1993, 1997, 2012) research

regarding African Americans' persistence in higher education institutions by focusing on

specific mentoring areas that have shown to increase African American males' retention rates. Although these researchers investigated different areas that led to persistence, most findings articulated that social integration is an element of persistence and within this support system, mentoring aspects were apparent. Even Tinto emphasized that for minorities to persist, higher education institutions must ensure that mentoring programs be mainstream and not separate from other higher education retention programs by marking them for the economically or academically deprived. Instead, Tinto recommended the following types of retention programs to meet the needs of minority students: a) advising and counseling, b) social support, and c) community membership. All the areas of academic and social support were areas in which Tinto confirmed were important to retain minority students due to their underpinnings of mentoring. In congruence with Tinto's recommendation regarding retention programs that would assist minority students, (Furr and Elling, 2002; Harper and Quaye, 2007; Rogers and Summers, 2008) reiterated that social interaction assisted with African American males persisting in higher education due to being involved in social support programs, which incorporated mentoring aspects. This research study focused on the role of mentoring or mentoring programs as contributing factors to persistence. Tinto stressed that mentoring is a mechanism for building personal social support, especially for students of color. According to Furr and Elling, as proven by a longitudinal campus climate study conducted at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte of 183 African American students involved in mentoring or mentoring programs were more likely to be retained. Mentoring aspects or mentoring programs were discussed further in the literature review.

Mentoring of Minorities

According to Haring (2000), the goal of most mentoring programs at colleges and universities was to support the recruitment and retention of minority students to enter and achieve success within higher education. Additionally, Haring reported that the goals of these higher education institutions were to close the demographic gap between the percentages of minorities in the general population and those with college degrees. Haring argued that higher education institutions would be even more successful in retaining minority students if they provided a conceptual base for minority programs instead of having similar programs. She also reiterated that mentoring programs can be designed with a conceptual base by (a) building on a strong and explicit definition of mentoring, (b) addressing a myriad of mentoring roles that have been identified in the literature, and (c) building on an articulated model of mentoring that was consistent with the goals of the program.

Haring (2000) posited two different mentoring model perspectives that were suggested as a starting point for higher education institutions that designed mentoring programs for minority students. Haring reported that the first model, grooming mentoring, was the most common formal mentoring program, which utilized informal mentoring programs and represented the classical conception of mentoring based on Greek mythology. Additionally, Haring found that with the grooming model, a mentor was paired with a protégé to enhance the protégé's possibilities of a successful transition. In contrast, Haring stated that network mentoring, which was a new concept, departed from the traditional definition of mentoring because there was an expectation that each person in the network must contribute something to others' success. The goal of the

networking model was to encourage change in institutions through the contributions of newcomers. Haring encouraged higher education institutions to blend the models with careful planning to promote African American persistence to graduation.

   Mentoring African American Males. Many higher education institutions offer mentoring programs for African American males in the United States. Some of the programs have been phenomenally successful due to increases in retention rates and others have not been as successful in increasing retention. This literature review presented some of the successful mentoring aspects for retaining African American males in PWIs. From the review of literature, there is little about how mentoring differs between genders, or how the role of race plays in mentoring for graduate African American males. Mentoring has mostly been referred to African American undergraduate students instead of for graduate students (Epps et al., 1992; McCabe, 2009).   Through the researchers, Furr and Elling (2002), Freeman (2000), Lee (2000), and others, mentoring is reported as a successful aspect of undergraduate student retention for the formal mentoring programs listed below:

   The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Furr and Elling (2002) identified multiple sources of institutional information that can help administrators identify mentoring factors that contributed to persistence.   Furr and Elling provided a longitudinal study which followed 183 African American freshmen for seven semesters at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte that reported significant differences between persisters and non-persisters. The persisters were the freshmen, who remained at the university; whereas the non-persisters were the students, who did not remain at the university. From the results of Furr and Elling's 183 African American students' campus

climate survey, they found during the freshmen's first year revealed the importance of retention programs as significant contributors to student success. From this group of students, it was illustrated that African American freshmen participating in mentor programs were more likely to be retained and to participate in campus organizations and other campus activities. Furr and Elling helped to affirm that mentoring programs contributed to the persistence and academic success of African Americans at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Peabody College of Vanderbilt. Freeman (2000) conducted interviews with high-achieving African American male students, and what she discovered is that despite being talented in academics, African American males must have mentors. In her study, she found that the mentoring relationship was extremely important for both genders because of their initial adjustment to higher education institutions or their work environments. Furthermore, Freeman discovered that African American high-achieving students can and often do face crises during which they could greatly benefit from a mentor. Additionally, Freeman stressed that African American students at HBCUs felt that the whole campus was a mentor for them, which is a difference in comparison to PWIs. Thus, as Freeman found, the HBCUs were where African American students felt the whole campus was a mentor were institutions that made them feel as though they could overcome obstacles such as difficult exams. Other evidence that Freeman discovered was that high-achieving African American students needed mentors because they have carried the internal pressure to continuously perform at a high level. Freeman concluded that those African American students have been designated as high achievers; therefore, mentoring would help them reach their potential.

The University Transition Program (UTP).   UTP is an example of how a higher

education institution facilitated mentoring programs to encourage African American

students to persist to graduation (Lee, 2000). Lee reported that The University Transition

Program at North Carolina State University's goal was to facilitate the transition of

academically underprepared African American students into the university environment

so that their chances of academic success were enhanced by providing an array of special

courses and counseling services during the freshman year as a means of promoting the

future academic performance of students.   Lee surmised that some of the objectives of

the University Transition Program (UTP) was to enhance skills in basic mathematics,

writing, critical thinking, and academic survival.

Lee (2000) presented the findings that African American students reported that it

was less important to have an African American faculty mentor than a mentor in their

career field. According to Lee, students felt that they could make cultural connections

outside the campus environment; however, students agreed that the UTP director's

hands-on approach was beneficial for their student performance. Lee reported that the

UTP director was an African American male administrator that took the role of a mentor.

Additionally, Lee stressed that as part of the administrator's mentoring role, he observed

students in their classes, and he told them that he expected them to graduate.

Lee (2000) recommended that higher education institutions incorporate diversity

on university campuses to cultivate multiple perspectives and to aid in students' growth

beyond their comfort levels. He also advocated cross-cultural mentoring to enhance the

mentoring experiences of African American students, and non-minority faculty would be

encouraged to mentor African American students. Additionally, Lee encouraged PWIs to

cross-culturally mentor African American students because both the mentee and the mentor could benefit.

The University System of Georgia. Hafer (2007) reported that The University System of Georgia's African American Male Initiative (AAMI) program at Kennesaw State University was a mentoring program specifically geared toward the retention, recruitment, and persistence of African American males.   He also found that after a research study was conducted to organize the AAMI mentoring program, key recommendations resulting from the study included the need for: a) tracking more African American males into the K-12 college preparatory curriculum; b) improving cultural sensitivity training for teachers and guidance counselors; and c) increasing the number of high-quality teachers in hard-to-staff schools where many African American students attended.

According to the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG) (2007), the African American male enrollment in the University System of Georgia's African American Male Initiative (AAMI) increased by 16 % from Fall 2002 to Fall 2006, from 17,068 to 19,780, and the gap between the percentage increase of African American females enrolling annually in the USG was closing. Furthermore, AAMI has attracted external funding, and some USG campuses were institutionalizing their efforts (Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, 2007).

Summary and Concluding Discussion

Overall, this literature review discussed the many aspects of mentoring as one of the enforcements that led to persistence in higher education institutions. It explored the significant models and theories of persistence. Many of these models and theories

expanded from Tinto's (1975, 1993, 1997, 2012) social interaction departure theory and framework of institutional action, which later incorporated studies of social support systems that led to African American students' persistence in higher education institutions (Museus, 2008; Rogers & Summers, 2008, Strayhorn, 2012, 2017, 2019). This current study added to the body of literature by focusing on mentoring or mentoring programs that related to Tinto's models, but connected these themes to African American males' persistence to graduation in higher education institutions.

Additionally, this literature review indicated how it was possible for a non-minority person to successfully mentor a person of color, which helped to encourage faculty-student interaction, student engagement, and student persistence (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Tight, 2020). It was also indicated that African American students, who participated in mentoring or mentoring programs were more likely to be retained and to participate in campus organizations from faculty-student interactions (Furr & Elling, 2002; Kerby, 2015; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1997, 2012).

There were fewer studies on persistence that separated African American students by gender; however, many of the studies concluded that there were little differences in the persistence rates between African American males and females (Davis, 1994; Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Museus, 2008; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). This non-separation of persistence rates may be due to the significantly lower rates of persistence of African Americans in comparison to their White counterparts. (Rodgers and Summers, 2008, as cited by Shafer, 2008) indicated that in 2001, 87% of Black undergraduates attended PWIs, and these institutions accounted for 78.5 % of undergraduate degrees conferred upon Black students, whereas 12.9 % of African

American undergraduates (13.5 % of all African American male students and 12.6 % of all African American female students) attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Graduates of these institutions accounted for 21.5 % of undergraduate degrees conferred upon African American students (Rogers & Summers, 2008). Thus, as Rodgers and Summers concluded, although PWIs have enrolled a larger percentage of African American students, they have a disproportionately low percentage of degrees awarded to African American students.

There were limitations in the persistence studies (Davis, 1994; Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Museus, 2008; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). The major limitations were because of being qualitative, especially with interviews, the studies could not be generalized across other populations or at different higher education institutions (Davis, 1994; Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Museus, 2008; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Other limitations dealt with across and within-group differences in attempting to understand cultural needs, and studies relied on self-report information and did not assess actual behaviors (Davis, 1994; Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Museus, 2008; Rodgers & Summers, 2008).

Lastly, this literature review indicated that even high-achieving African American male students needed mentors to continue to perform at higher academic levels (Freeman, 2000). This social support aspect of mentoring coincided with the theories of Tinto (1993, 1997, 2012), Astin (1984), Sedlacek (1999), Harper (2007, 2012), and others mentioned. This chapter also has indicated that involvement and interaction with others assisted in reinforcing persistence in higher education institutions. Further study is needed to separate the persistence rates of African American males from African

American females in determining how mentoring aspects or mentoring programs affect

retention in higher education institutions.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of mentoring or mentoring programs as contributing factors in persistence and success of African American males at PWIs in Missouri. This qualitative research study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the overarching mentoring persistence factors that contributed to retention for African American males in PWI?

2. What mentoring support systems (e.g., family, peers, colleagues, instructors, etc.) did African American male students perceive as necessary retention elements at PWI?

3. What was the impact of informal mentoring or a mentoring program on their persistence?

This research study was limited to African American males over the age of 22 years old, who persisted through graduate school and acquired master's degrees. This study-imposed race, gender, age, and educational level limitations to narrow the sample size. In qualitative research, it is not unusual for the sample size to be small, because saturation may be reached with a small number of participants. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the data becomes saturated when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation. With this study, a small sample size was used. There was data saturation with the repetition of the responses. As Ilker et al. (2016) posited, it is also important to have appropriate sample sizes to answer the research questions. This research study focused on

African American males, because they have unique experiences based on conceived stereotypes which differ from African American females (Tight, 2020). Additionally, they have a lower persistence rate than African American females and other races at PWIs (NCES, 2021).

A review of the literature revealed a gap in knowledge about the factors that contributed to the success of African American males at PWIs. This study addressed this gap because we know very little about African American males pursuing master's degrees in PWIs (Henderson et al., 2022; Merriam, 2009).

Grounded theory was used because I was interested in discovering the role of mentors and mentoring programs in the success of African American males at PWIs. For this study, African American males' success was defined as the acquisition of master's degrees. Also, from the review of literature, there is little about how mentoring differs between African American males and females, or how the role of race plays in mentoring for graduate African American males who attended PWIs. Mentoring has mostly been referred to African American or other minority undergraduate students instead of for graduate students (Epps et al., 1992; McCabe, 2009).   This study addressed this gap in the literature regarding mentoring for graduate African American males at PWIs.

One of the focuses of grounded theory research is that it emphasizes discovery (Charmaz, 2006; Glasser, & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). Grounded theory also was ideal for this study because it sought to capture the experiences of African American male graduate students who completed master's degrees at PWIs. This study used grounded theory to gain insight and answer the research questions.

Research Design

I used convenience sampling to select the participants for this study. Convenience sampling was appropriate for these reasons: time, availability, and money (Merriam, 2009).   For this study, all participants were virtually interviewed through Zoom video conferencing. Additionally, these participants were chosen because they met the criteria, which was as follows**:** a) African American males that received their master's degrees; b) attended PWIs in Missouri; c) over 22 years old, and d) experienced a mentoring relationship. I wanted to understand and make sense of the participants' experiences in PWIs, and I wanted to explore the mentoring or mentoring programs in which they were engaged.

Grounded Theory Overview

In 1967, grounded theory was founded and developed by Glaser and Strauss and presented in their publication, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory provides researchers with guidelines for data analysis and data collection to support qualitative research. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is the discovery of theory through data enabling researchers to make relevant interpretations, especially when there is little known about a topic.   Grounded theory also enables researchers to develop a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, it enables researchers to take specific slices of data and help to build a theory. For example, grounded theory uses elements such as categories, subcategories, and properties to build theory (Corbin &

Strauss, 1990, 2007). Additionally, grounded theory helps researchers to explain, predict, make applications, and formulate a theory.

Grounded theory uses a constant comparative method beginning with comparing concepts of an incident or a phenomenon, derived from an interview, a memo, or other documents. The constant comparison of incidents within all levels of conceptualization helps researchers to view the internal development and the changing data relationships. For instance, with concepts and categories. This comparative process of grounded theory helps researchers to discover the complexity of data relationships and to generate substantive or formal theories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), substantive theory applies to a specific aspect or practice (Merriam, 2009). This research study generated substantive theory because it was limited to the college life experiences of African American males and how mentoring was a success factor which contributed to their persistence in PWIs. This study did not produce a formal theory because it would require data analysis of several substantive theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This research used the constant comparative method creating substantive theory through open, axial, and selective coding. Data collection began from the first bit of data received from the artifacts of interview transcripts, memos, and other documents (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

In sum, the major purpose of my research was to investigate the meaning of how mentoring was the contributing factor that led to persistence for African American males in PWIs. Examples of how grounded theory was used will be explained further in the chapter.

Participants and Sampling Description

The participants that were used met the following criteria: a) African American males that received their master's degrees; b) attended PWIs in Missouri; c) over 22 years old, and d) experienced a mentoring relationship. The sample for this study consisted of six graduate African American males who were selected based on convenience and snowballing sampling methods.

Convenience Sampling

Convenience sampling is a procedure in which respondents are chosen based on their convenience and availability (Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009). This technique is based solely on the participants being available, based on time, money, and other conveniences (Ilker et al., 2016; Merriam, 2009). According to Ilker et al. (2016), the convenience sampling technique places its emphasis on generalizability; ensuring that knowledge is acquired from the sample and is representative of the population. For this study, the convenience sampling method was used with the six African American male participants because they were representative of the population; their accessibility in Missouri; and their willingness to participate in this research study (Ilker et al., 2016). My convenience sampling began with my family, friends, and friends of friends.

Snowball Sampling

Additionally, as I interviewed participants, I requested that they refer me to other participants for the study; thereby, obtaining additional participants (Merriam, 2009). I used this strategy because I depleted my personal network of eligible participants. I decided to request recommendations from my participants who knew others that would fit

my criteria for this study. From the recommendations, the results were additional

information-rich cases (Merriam, 2009; Ilker et al., 2016).

The rationale for selecting the first criterion in the sampling description was to

identify the mentoring persistence factors for African American males that contributed to

receiving their master's degrees. Additionally, according to Mastin (2019), recalling

experiences depended upon the cues that were presented to the respondents.   For

example, when I asked the respondents, Research Question 3: "How did your institution

support you holistically?" Some of the cues were asking about their relationships with

their families, peers, and instructors. "Did you receive any mentoring support from your

family?" The respondents recalled whether they received mentoring support (Mastin,

2019). Thus, from the cues that I provided in the interviews; the participants were able to

answer the interview questions.

The second criterion was chosen because it distinguished the mentoring

persistence factors for the participants in PWIs. PWIs were defined in the Introductory

Letter and in the ABC Church E-mail Blast.

The third criterion was chosen because there were mostly African American

males over the age of 22 that completed their master's degrees. Eligible study

respondents found in this age range were the researcher's family, friends, or associates.

Finally, the fourth criterion was chosen because only African American males that have

experienced some type of mentoring relationship could assist in answering the research

study questions.

The six African American male participants for this study were chosen because

they met all sampling criteria as stated previously, and they possessed *information-rich*

cases (Coyne, 1997; 2008). As Coyne (2008) indicated, information-rich cases were those from which one could learn a great deal about issues of central importance (p. 624). With this sample, all participants experienced and acknowledged the mentoring contributing factors that helped them to persist in obtaining their master's degrees. All participants were presented with an introductory letter and an informed consent form before participating in the study. They had opportunities to decline any or all the questions. Also, the participants were given their transcripts to confirm the accuracy and to ensure the validity of their statements. Furthermore, there were follow-up co-investigator accuracy checks.

Participant Demographics

As indicated in Table 3.0, the participants were asked for demographic information to ensure they met the criteria for this research study. Pseudonyms were used for participants' names. In classifying the participants for this study, the age range was 28 to 63 (see Table 3.0). Other information requested from the participants was their master's degree discipline, when their master's degree was acquired, their employment industry, their marital status, and the name of their graduate school and location. To protect the participants' identities and privacy, I have not included the graduate school names, the locations of the graduate schools, or the specific employment industries in this study.

Table 3.0

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Master's Degree	Master's Degree Acquired	Employment IND	Marital Status
Melvin	28	Health Education	2021	Educator	Single
Charles	44	Education	2012	Educator	Married
David	50	Education	2020	Entrepreneur	Single
James	55	Health Education	2021	Educator	Married
Eugene	61	Education	2006	Educator	Married
Wally	63	Business	2007 and 2010	Counseling Educator and Entrepreneur	Married

All interviewed participants received master's degrees from PWIs in Missouri. The six research study participants received their master's degrees between one and fifteen years ago. Four out of six of the participants were married, five out of six were exclusively educators, and two out of six were entrepreneurs.

Instrumentation

Before the interviews took place, informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study. The Informed Consent form and the Introductory Letter were sent together electronically by e-mail or by US mail to the participants. Additionally, all participants were given a copy of the interview questions which were enclosed with each introductory letter and presented during the virtual Zoom interview. The IRB guidelines were followed for protecting the privacy of the participants (Roberts, 2010).

Semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were used because of the desire for more flexibility and less structure with open-ended questions (Merriam, 2009). All respondents were asked questions in no predetermined order, and the interviews were guided by a list of questions as in the Introductory Letter (Merriam, 2009). Examples of interview questions were indicated in the interview protocol.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), when selecting sample sizes, the focus should be on consensus building, not saturation. When counter-productivity is encountered during the interviews, and there is nothing new to add to the overall story, model, or framework, Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommended limiting the number of interviews due to no access to additional data. There was no access to additional information causing data saturation (Merriam, 2009; Guest et al., 2006). Since data saturation occurred after six interviews, no additional interviews were coordinated.

Audio taping. Virtual interviews were conducted using Zoom. All interviews were recorded. The audio tape files were saved on two local USB flash drives connected to my laptop and labeled by pseudonyms.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures took place from September 2021 through November 2021. The respondents were sent an introductory letter and an informed consent form. They were given up to one week to sign and return the informed consent form electronically or manually. With the informed consent form, the respondents were requested to virtually interview through a Zoom video conference. All consent forms were returned through the email service or through the US Postal service with the agreement to participate in the interview. Participants were contacted by telephone or by

email to remind them of the Zoom interview. Additionally, I conducted follow-up calls to the respondents, who did not respond to the email virtual interview invitation before the one-week deadline. Lastly, respondents were reassured that their identities would not be released in the dissertation or additional publications (Roberts, 2010).

Observation

At the time of all interviews, field notes and memos were written to recall my reflections, speculations, and hunches as I prepared for data analysis (Merriam, 2009). I have written my thoughts in my memos by participant pseudonym. Immediately, after each interview, I wrote my reflections indicating my observations and reactions. Along with writing my reflections for data collection, I have gathered documents and artifacts to strengthen the results of this study. This is reflected in the email blast document to the ABC Church recruiting church members. All memos, interview transcript protocols, reflection documents, and artifacts were secured in a place that was IRB approved.

Data Analysis Introduction

According to Merriam (2009), the goal of data analysis is to make sense of the data. In other words, it is the process of understanding and interpreting respondents' lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). My goal for this study was to make sense of and interpret the data in the form of interview transcripts, documents, artifacts, and memos. From the impressions of the respondents, I have interpreted the overarching mentoring persistence factors that contributed to the African American male respondents' retention in PWIs.

Procedure

First, the interview transcripts were recorded by using the Zoom software application. The interviews were recorded on the researcher's flash USB drives connected to a personal laptop. After the Zoom software application completed recording the audio and video files, the VTT audio and MP4 files were created and auto-saved onto the researcher's flash drives. The researcher then renamed all files using pseudonyms. For example, one of the respondents was given the name *Melvin*. All MP4 files were then uploaded to the Otter.ai software application for transcription. All transcripts were copied into Microsoft Office Word and Notepad format, checked for transcription accuracy by line number, and saved into protected files with pseudonyms. The respondents were asked to cross-check the Zoom auto-caption transcripts for accuracy during the interviews. The researcher also cross-checked the transcripts by reviewing the Zoom interviews. The respondents were contacted if additional clarification was needed. After the cross-checking process was completed, the process of holistically looking at the data began (Roberts, 2010).

The process of reviewing the data began with the demographics sheet information and transferring the data onto an Excel spreadsheet for my data analysis procedure. Additionally, this involved the initial re-reading of the transcripts (Roberts, 2010). All transcripts were read twice, and I made corrections and took additional notes. Furthermore, the interview questions and the responses were entered into an overall spreadsheet that listed each participant by pseudonym, the interview questions, and the responses. Additionally, I wrote reflective notes capturing patterns, themes, and

categories with each research question that I included in my Memos, Appendix L and in my Codebook, Appendix I (Roberts, 2010).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was utilized with data analysis because it uses comparative analysis with open, axial, and selective coding (Merriam, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding began with each emerging theme with grounded theory data analysis. The theory is a sociological strategy for handling data in research providing modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining a phenomenon or life experience (Glasser, & Strauss, 1967, 2011).

Open Coding

Open coding began with each theme that emerged from notes of each transcript and by summarizing the main concepts of each interview question (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined open coding as the analytic process through which concepts were identified and their properties and/or dimensions were discovered in the data (see Chapter IV, Findings). As discussed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and as conducted in this research study, the steps for open coding were as follows: a) finding a relationship and pattern within the themes and making them into categories, b) separating the categories from the sub-categories, c) developing properties which described the categories and sub-categories, d) developing dimensions which described the range of the category, and e) giving an example which illustrated what was found in the transcript. All transcript matrices were incorporated into this codebook for data analysis.

Axial Coding

The second coding activity was axial coding. Axial coding was defined as the process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed axial because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories with properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). With axial coding, I compared, located, refined, and discussed the presented categories while adding a paradigm of properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For this research study, categories and subcategories were compared to formulate a codebook.

Selective Coding

The final coding technique used was selective coding. Selective coding was defined as the process of selecting a core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that needed further refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For this research study, categories were compared to each other, and new categories or subcategories were developed and refined based on the field notes/memos and interviews.

Limitations

There were limitations over which I did not have control during this study (Roberts, 2010). I could not control whether the participants answered the interview questions, the length of the answers, the brevity, or the thoroughness of their answers (Roberts, 2010). This research study had a relatively small sample size. Six graduate African American males were selected, who attended public and private PWIs. Four of the participants received master's degrees from the same public university, and two of the participants received master's degrees from different private universities. Due to the

source of the information used may not be complete, this may affect the generalizability of the study. Thus, the results from this study may not be replicable (Merriam, 2009; Roberts, 2010).

Another limitation was the possibility of having a bias toward my friends or family because of my familiarity with their mentoring experiences in which they have encountered.   Having bias may have created a slight barrier to asking follow-up questions for the participants to elaborate further because of prior knowledge. Also, in writing field notes and memos regarding research participants, there may have been a possibility of bias in addressing reflections and observations, especially with familiarity with the participants' demeanor and mentoring experiences.

Since some of the participants were family members, friends, or friends of friends, these familiarities may have caused disengagement or disinterest in participation in this research study because they may have felt that the interview may have been a waste of time. Since I had no control over these feelings, this may have affected the thoroughness of some of the responses. However, in the interview sessions, I reiterated if they felt uncomfortable answering questions, we could skip to the next question. Fortunately, all the participants answered all questions and none of the respondents indicated they wanted to skip or leave out information. During the interviews, there were instances when the familiarity with the respondents conjured other conversations not related to the interview questions; however, I was able to redirect the responses back to the interview questions. Also, because of my familiarity with the respondents, there were temptations to adlib answers, instead of allowing the interviewee to freely respond. For

these temptations, I abruptly stopped adlibbing answers and was silent while the respondent answered the questions.

Finally, the unforeseen life calamities of the participants for this research study were another limitation. Due to job obligations or other emergencies, some of the respondents rescheduled their interviews three to four times. With this being the case, I implemented the snowballing referral process strategy. This strategy was used to request the selected participants to recommend others with similar backgrounds to interview (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

Grounded theory was the comparative method used for formulating the concepts for this study. These concepts were discovered from the *raw* data in the responses of the interviewers, which was the first step in this analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The discovery of the concepts embarked on taking apart each interview response by sentence, phrase, or by paragraph. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommended, with each sentence, phrase, or paragraph, I labeled each with a discrete incident, idea, event, name, or something that represented a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).   With this labeling of concepts, I proceeded to group concepts that were similar which led to generating categories within a Microsoft Excel database. Examples of the grouped concepts were identified along with the categories (see Table 3.1). The concepts were grouped based on the common themes, a) *Academic Support Aspects*, b) *Relationships*, and c) *Mentoring Aspects*. Further, the concepts of the phenomenon were named and categorized (see Table 3.1). Additional illustrations of the concepts and categories will be illustrated later in this study.

Central categories were classified from recurring themes and grouped concepts. To classify the categories, the researcher asked questions about the themes and the grouped concepts, such as follows: "What is this, and to what phenomenon does it relate? What class of phenomenon does it seem to pertain? Is this phenomenon similar or different from the one before or after?" (Corbin & Strauss, 1967, pp. 66-68; see Table 3.1). As the recurring themes for this study were as follows: a) *Academic Aspects*, b*) Relationships*, and c) *Mentoring Aspects* which were based on three categories, d):

1) Personal, Academic, or Professional

2) Students, Non-Professional, or Professional; and

3) Personal, Non-Professional, or Professional.

After the categories were created, they were linked to subcategories to further describe each category. Each category was then linked to an exemplary quote to further explain the connection to themes (see Table 3.1). For instance, James, an educator, reported that his professors were his friends and mentors. They gave him space and autonomy with moving his assignment deadlines to fit into his lifestyle which required him to work full-time hours. As represented in Table 3.1, the categories Personal, Academic, or Professional were aligned with James' professors' informal mentoring. James reiterated that his professors looked out for him on a personal level and advised him on the appropriate courses to take for his master's program. On a professional level, James' professors gave him support in his career by providing a work-life balance. The concepts such as *professors know me*, *friendship*, and *professors showed concern* were all connected to the themes of *Academic Support Aspects* and *Relationships*. The *Academic Support Aspects* incorporated concepts such as *employee*

discounts, *work-life balance*, and *assignment deadline adjustments*. The *Relationships*

theme emphasized concepts such as *self-development group mentor* referring to

professors and supervisor mentors (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Theme: Academic Support Aspects and Relationships

Concepts	Category	Illustrative Quotes
Employee discount, professors like mentors, professors showed concern, wanted to be part of life, felt not just a student, friendship, professors personally know me, assignment deadline adjustments, intersectionality, helped work-life balance, make-up assignments	Personal, Academic, or Professional	**James, married, age 55 for Q3**: "I think there was support where I was given opportunities because I was working full-time to actually rewrite or turn in later…so they respected me and gave me space." Lines 5:58 - 6:04; Line 6:24
Career mentors in education, Black males, no formal mentoring program; similar experiences, connections on different levels, had camaraderie, same backgrounds, patterning-self from teachers, integrating knowledge	Students, Non-Professional, or Professional	**Eugene, married, age 61 for Q4**: "No, at no time that I ever participate in a formal mentoring program, although my teachers, at least some of them were Black. So just to see another male figure made me feel more comfortable. But there was no actual formal mentoring, progress, or process." Lines 8:27-9:28

Additionally, the concepts of properties and dimensions were included to

formulate a continuous comparative process. The concepts were compared with the

categories, and the categories and subcategories were compared with the properties and

dimensions. The properties were a characteristic of the category, and the dimensions

were a measurement or range of the properties in the data. For instance, with the theme *Mentoring Aspects*, Wally, a 63-year-old, married, entrepreneur and counselor, shared his informal and formal mentoring experiences (see Table 3.2). Open, axial, and selective coding were administered. First, the concepts were analyzed such as *cohort*, *togetherness*, and *sounding board*. These concepts were then compared to the categories *Personal*, *Academic*, or *Professional*. All concepts interconnected to these categories and the subcategories, *Student/Confidant*, *Student/Cohort Groups*, and *Student/Professors*. Additionally, these categories and subcategories were described by the properties such as *challenged with different perspectives*, *double help*, and *listening ear*. Furthermore, with this analysis, the dimensions were utilized for specificity on how often Wally received double help or a listening ear to spur his persistence (Corbin, & Strauss, 1990). The dimensions also clarified the intensity of how Wally was being challenged by his professors or cohort groups to not being challenged by them (see Table 3.2).

Additionally, for example, from the responses of Charles, a 44-year-old, married, educator, open, axial, and selective coding was administered. First, the concepts were analyzed such as *affirmation*, *encouragement from professors*, and *push*. These concepts were then compared to the core categories *Personal*, *Academic*, or *Professional*. All concepts related to these categories and the subcategories, *Student/Professors*, *Student/Cohort Groups*, and *Student/Advisors*. The selective coding aspect was the comparison of the core categories with the subcategories, which defined the properties and the dimensions. Additionally, these categories and subcategories were described by the properties such as *good advisors*, *responsive advisors*, and *knew how to navigate the system*. Furthermore, with this analysis, the dimensions were utilized for specificity on

how often Charles received advising help or a listening ear to spur his persistence

(Corbin, & Strauss, 1990). The dimensions also clarified the frequency of how often

Charles was being advised by his professors or cohort groups or not being advised or

supported by them (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Theme: Mentoring Aspects

Properties	Dimensions	Illustrative Quotes
Collaboration, double help, bounce things off, different perspectives, a listening ear	No idea exchange to regular collaboration; no help received to regular assistance; not being receptive to different perspectives to having a listening ear	**Wally, married, age 63 for Q5**: "Just being able to have somebody to talk to and bounce things off of and help and you know, when frustrations became overwhelming…" Line 33:53
Good advisor, responsive advisor, knew who to ask, knew how to navigate the system	Bad advisor to a responsive advisor; oblivious to knowing who to ask questions to know who to ask; unknowledgeable to navigating the system to being knowledgeable of the bureaucracy	**Charles, married, age 61 for Q4**: "I was fortunate at the end, that you know, my advisor wanted me to get things done." Line 7:08

Table 3.2 shows the difference between Charles not being challenged to being

challenged, and how being challenged provided *mentoring aspects* which helped him to

persist and obtain an advanced degree. Thus, these constant comparisons of data

instituted the elements of the grounded theory approach (Merriam, 2009).

Analyzing Data Procedure

As previously mentioned, open, axial, and selective coding (Bruscalioni, 2016;

Charmaz, K, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Sabastian, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

were used. The open coding began with tagging data within the memos and interview

transcripts by participant pseudonyms to find recurring themes and categories.   I used

this open coding technique from the start, with word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-

by-incident tagging phrases initiating grounded theory concepts, categories,

subcategories, properties, and dimensions (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990).

 Concepts. Before I created the categories for this research study, I tagged my

memo and interview data with concepts that answered the interview questions.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), concepts were distinct happenings, events, and

other instances that gave the phenomenon a name. The phenomenon or the lived

experience was color-coded with the concepts in my initial interviews and my memos in

Microsoft Word. I also used Microsoft Excel for coding using open, axial, and selective

coding, which was explained further in Chapter IV, Review of Findings. Coding was

used as a process for analyzing the data for this study. As a part of the coding process,

categories were developed by classifying the concepts and comparing each concept

against the other (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

 The classification of the concepts was based on their connection to a similar

phenomenon such as a preponderance of themes and patterns from the data. For

example, the concept of *no formal mentoring program* was compared *to informal

connection* (see Table 3.1). The concepts were grouped due to identifying the same

phenomenon, *informal mentoring*.   Additionally, the common themes and patterns for

these concepts were significant and explained the operative condition, *relationships* (see

Table 3.1).

Development of Categories and Subcategories. As Charmaz (2006) reiterated, "Open coding assisted with completing the grounded theory analysis approach by creating fit and relevance" (p. 54). This study aligned with the empirical process due to the researcher's use of constructed codes and developed them into categories that explained each phenomenon or lived experience. Axial coding involved searching for recurring concepts that related to the categories, subcategories, and properties, which assisted in refining the category process (Merriam, 2009). According to Charmaz (2006), not only does axial coding relate categories to subcategories, but this coding approach also specified the properties and dimensions of a category and reassembled the data to bring coherence to the analysis. This axial coding also involved emphasizing the measurement or the range of the properties' dimensions in the data (see Table 3.2). Additionally, selective coding was used to develop the core categories and to further refine them into other categories (Merriam, 2009; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990).

Merriam's Criteria for Developing Categories. This chapter outlined how the categories were developed, and what the criteria were for establishing the categories. The development of the categories was one of the earlier facets of the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Merriam (2009), categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research; categories should answer the research questions. For this study, the first category was *Personal*, *Academic*, or *Professional* regarding how graduate schools holistically supported students (see Table 3.1). This category, *Personal*, *Academic*, or *Professional* was one answer to this study's research question because it described the sub-categories of *informal mentoring*, *classroom assignments*, *occupational support*, and *friendships*. The second category was *Students*,

Professional, or *Non-professional* which described the type of mentoring relationships the participants were involved in while they pursued their master's degrees. The category, *Students*, *Professional*, or *Non-professional* answered the second research question. The third research question was answered by the third category, *Personal*, *Academic*, or *Professional* concerning what *mentoring aspects* helped African American males to obtain master's degrees.

For this study, there were other category development attributes emphasized. Merriam (2009) reiterated that categories should be exhaustive; you should be able to place all data that you decided were important or relevant to the study in a category or a subcategory (see Table 3.1). Additionally, for this study, the categories were sensitive to what was in the data (Merriam, 2009). All data that was essential for this study was placed in a category or a subcategory, they were: i) *Personal*, *Academic*, or *Professional* ii) *Students, Non-Professional,* or *Professional*, and iii) *Personal, Non-Professional,* or *Professional* (see Table 3.1). For example, the subcategories that emphasized mentoring aspects were a) *formal and informal mentoring programs*, b) *occupational support*, c) help with *work-life balance*, and d) others (see Table 3.1).

Other Researcher's Criteria for Developing Categories. According to some of the main researchers for the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), there was mutual agreement that developing a core category was based on indicating the phenomenon connecting all the other categories (Sebastian, 2019). For this study, my core categories were based on the concepts that formulated the categories of: *Personal, Academic,* or *Professional*; *Students, Non-Professional,* or *Professional*; and *Personal, Non-Professional,* or

Professional. Every concept was a fragmentation of each phenomenon which were events, incidents, or trends. For example, in Table 3.1, the concepts, *employee discount*, *professor-like mentors*, and *professors showed concern* were representative of the participant's experience in receiving an employee discount in a public graduate school. As stated by James, age 55, and inferred by other participants, *professor-like mentors* helped to encourage the participants to complete their master's degrees. These *professor-like mentors* showed concern was another event as well as an experience that most of the participants had in common. These concepts represented the phenomenon or lived experiences created and connected to other categories such as *Mentoring Aspects* and the subcategory *informal mentoring* (see Table 3.1).

Although most researchers were in mutual agreement that developing core categories were essential to research studies, there were different strategies on how to generate them. Sebastian (2019) recommended a constructivist modernistic grounded theory approach. This constructivist grounded theory approach suggested coding everything and grouping all the data around the most prominent codes (Sebastian, 2019). This involved allowance in more than one core category (Sebastian, 2019). I used this strategy in my data analysis in coding all my interviews, memos, and field notes. Additionally, I grouped the most predominant data around the most predominant codes.

As researchers have resonated with grounded theory, there was a constant comparative method of analysis and the asking of questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006; Sebastian, 2019). After conceptualizing this data, meaning after I took apart an interview, a sentence, and a paragraph, and gave each event, idea, or incident a phenomenon name, then I proceeded to ask questions based on each named phenomenon.

This process helped me to group similar concepts and develop categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). According to Strauss and Corbin, (1990), the questions to ask regarding each phenomenon were, "What is this? What does it represent?" (p. 68). The core categories that emerged based on the named phenomena for this research study were as follows: a) *Personal, Academic,* or *Professional*, b) *Students, Non-Professional,* or *Professional*, and c) *Personal, Non-Professional,* or *Professional* (see Table 3.1). The categories centered around the common themes which were themes for this study were a) *Academic Aspects*, b) *Relationships*, and c) *Mentoring Aspects*. Most of the participants' responses were about how mentoring relationships contributed to their retention in PWIs, and how social support systems impacted their persistence. There were 27 responses out of 36 responses from the interviews that referred to *Relationships*. The subcategories and the properties further defined the categories (see Table 3.2). The mentoring relationships entailed formal and informal mentoring that included *students/cohort groups*, *students/supervisors*, *students/professors*, and other subcategories which are explained further in Chapter IV, Review of the Findings.

Validating the Findings

There were multiple forms of triangulation strategies that assisted in confirming the credibility of research studies (Merriam, 2009). This research study was confirmed through the strategies of interrater reliability, member checks, and documents to potentially combat biases (Roberts, 2010).

Interrator Reliability

As defined by Roberts (2010), interrater reliability was established through a process in which two or more people independently analyzed the same qualitative data

and then compared the findings. For this study, the qualifications for the interrater investigator were as follows: master's or doctoral degree in higher education and over 22 years old, a doctoral student in a higher education program; higher education researcher – faculty of a public or private higher education institution or educator from an elementary or secondary institution. With this research study, another investigator read through the same six interviews, and the data collected from the field notes, documents, and artifacts. The investigator utilized the Transcription Rules form for cohesiveness. Additionally, this investigator utilized open, axial, and selective coding to transcribe the data for capturing emerging themes, categories, subcategories, properties, and dimensions.

Multiple Checks

As aforementioned, this notion of multiple checks to confirm the validity of research was noted as investigator triangulation when multiple investigators were collecting and analyzing data (Merriam, 2009). I solicited feedback on my emerging findings from the respondents. The qualifications for the respondents were as follows: African American males over 22 years old, who resided in Missouri with master's or doctoral degrees in higher education or in elementary and secondary education.

Memos were written to validate the interviews and the reliability of the data. The researcher used the comparative method to check the validity of virtual Zoom transcription software against what was stated by each participant. Additionally, the Otter.ai software was used to further check the validity of the MP4 video files. Finally, member checks were done to validate the accuracy of the transcripts. The participants were e-mailed a copy of the transcripts. If they found any validation issues, they were told to inform me of the error that needed to be corrected.

Researcher's Role

In this study, as a researcher, my position is unique because I do not meet all the criteria of the study population. I am an African American adult female, graduate student with my own college experiences in PWIs in Missouri, and I have my personal interpretations of those events. For several years, I worked for an urban school district with a predominantly African American enrollment. For that reason, I have been cautious of my biases.

According to Creswell (2018), the role of the researcher is the primary data collection instrument of analysis; therefore, the researcher's perspective influences how the data is interpreted and the results reported. The investigator's contribution to the research setting is important because it helps to provide insight for the reader to connect to the researcher's perspective to the study. The following epoché presents an expose of my perspective and experiences to avoid bias in the analysis and interpretation of the research.

In 2004, I was employed at a large school district in Missouri as an Information Systems Administrator. I was responsible for reporting the enrollment and retention data to school administrators. African American students were most of the enrollment participating in the free and reduced lunch program. This meant that many enrolled students had low income. Students of low income often did not have access to consistent housing. Homeless or students who had inconsistent housing also were sometimes not attending school. As a result, these students were not retained. Thus, the school district attempted to support programs to address low retention by providing access to housing, food, and other resources. I was also a coordinator helping to address student needs

through the Back-to-School Fairs and partnering with local businesses to help provide resources. From these experiences, I developed an interest on the academic success of African American students despite environmental circumstances. In addition to my career experiences, I have had academic experiences, in PWIs. I have experienced mentoring from my peers and professors. I have not been a participant of a formal mentoring program; I have received mentoring through participation in several study groups. We were all pursuing the same goals in acquiring our master's degrees. These connections provided social and emotional support and served as a network for my career in education and in information technology.

I also experienced professor mentoring with academic and career advisement while pursuing my master's degree. Although I had my perceptions, for this study, my intention was to be alert and aware of any potential bias. Hence, I identified my status as an adult graduate student to each participant and clarified that while I had my own experiences, I was interested in hearing about theirs. There were times when the participants shared about their experiences that were like my own, but I resisted long responses, and I encouraged the participants to tell their stories. I tried to avoid influencing the participants in their answers by being a good listener.

Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the methodology and analysis of semi-structured Zoom video interviews of six participants. Data analysis involved presenting tables constructed from my code book and from my memos, which revealed three major themes and five major categories describing the participants' formal and informal mentoring experiences at PWIs. This study explored the formal and informal mentoring

experiences that helped them to persist and acquire their master's degrees. The three

themes that were identified from this analysis were *Academic Support Aspects*,

Relationships, and *Mentoring Aspects*. Quotations from participants were in support of

the themes and concepts which were used to develop the categories. Chapter IV will

address the review of findings by theme, and Chapter V will follow with the

interpretations, and implications, and conclude with recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER IV: REVIEW OF FINDINGS

This chapter discusses and reports on the findings and the themes that emerged from the data collected. This study focused on African American male graduate students who obtained master's degrees in PWIs. Revelations of the findings of this qualitative analysis process form the basis of this research study and answer the research questions:

What are the overarching mentoring persistence factors that contributed to retention for African American males in PWI?;

What mentoring support systems (e.g., family, peers, colleagues, instructors, etc.) did African American male students perceive as necessary retention elements at PWI?; and

What was the impact of informal mentoring or a mentoring program on their persistence?

All the participants experienced formal and informal mentoring persistence factors that contributed to their retention at PWIs. For this study, these factors resonated and established the major common themes as follows: *Academic Support Aspects*, *Mentoring Aspects*, and *Relationships*. These major themes explained the support systems that the participants perceived as necessary for their retention at PWIs. Additionally, participants uniformly responded to how the informal mentoring aspects and formal mentoring programs led to their persistence in acquiring their master's degrees.

Related Themes and Categories Overview

This section includes an overview of the participants' responses based on the research and the interview questions. The interview questions directly align with the research questions to better understand the lived experiences. Table 4.0 indicates the themes and categories derived from the data. Themes were summarized from the common word and phrase patterns that answered the research questions. These concepts became themes participants shared about their lived experiences. Additionally, Table 4.0 illustrates participants' common experiences in acquiring their master's degrees through the emerging themes as follows: (a) *Academic Support Aspects*, (b) *Relationships*, and (c) *Mentoring Aspects*. Once themes were developed, categories were identified within each theme (see Table 4.0).

Table 4.0

Themes and Categories

Themes	Categories
Academic Support Aspects	Personal
	Academic
	Professional
Relationships	Students
	Non-Professional
	Professional
Mentoring Aspects	Personal
	Non-Professional
	Professional

Academic Support Aspects

The *Academic Support Aspects* theme was formed by the recurring concepts of career and academic advisement, financial support, and friendship mentoring. Three categories emerged from this theme: personal, academic, and professional. Most of the participants reiterated that they trusted their professors and colleagues as advocates who encouraged them to persist to graduation.

Personal. This theme emerged because there were common patterns of friendship mentoring that were classified as *Personal*. Some of the conceptual examples

of friendship mentoring entailed the participants: socializing with their professors and with their cohort groups, depending upon their professors to give them advice on personal matters, and entrusting their professors and cohort associates to keep personal discussions confidential.

Academic. The *Academic* category emerged due to the conceptualization of phrases supporting financial assistance, promotion of coursework success, and course selection advisement. These common *Academic* expressions referred to the support the participants received through their professors or their PWIs.

Professional. This category pertained to how the professors or the PWIs supported or prepared the participants for their careers. This category was developed through repeated conceptual terminology of the professors informally mentoring the participants preparing them for professional careers through practicums, seminars, and assistantships for professional development. The *Professional* category also included peer groups that became career network support groups that informally mentored through study groups.

Relationships

The *Relationships* theme emerged from the recurring concepts of student relationships with peers, supervisors, and professors who provided formal and informal mentoring through study groups, internships, work-study programs, and coursework. Most of the participants indicated that they experienced some type of informal mentoring which was delivered by peers in study groups, by supervisors who guided them in career practicums for job placement, by informally mentoring others, and by professors who guided them with personal and career advice.

Categories that resonated in the *Relationships* theme were *Students*, Non-*Professional*, and *Professional*. As explained further in this chapter, several of the categories overlapped due to the themes being closely related because there were informal and formal mentoring relationships involved in academic support. This is also why some of the same categories were recaptured in the data.

Students. The concepts which emerged in this category were tuition assistance professor-student informal mentoring, and peer group informal mentoring. This role as a graduate student connected with all the relationships as described by the participants. The subcategories are as follows: students/professors, students/supervisors, students/cohorts, and students/friends. The *Students* category also overlapped with the *Personal* category because within each reported relationship, there were social connections that dealt with informal and formal mentoring through friendships, careers, and academic preparations.

Non-Professional. Aligned with this category were concepts such as self-development groups, affinity groups, and general encouragement, which participants received from formal or informal mentoring (see Table 4.1). In this context, *Non-Professional* meant not being restricted to an academic, social, or professional relationship. In this study, *Non-Professional* overlapped with the categories *Personal, Academic, and Students* because most of the respondents considered their supervisors, professors, and cohort groups as part of their social network, who gave them personal advice and respected them as individuals.

Professional. Concepts that emerged and comprised the *Professional* categories were formal and informal mentoring programs. As the participants reported, these

programs were job orientation programs, internship practicums, and career professional development programs. This *Professional* category connected to the concepts that were job-related and interconnected with relationships with supervisors, peers, professors, and friends, who were formally or informally mentored for professional career pursuits.

Mentoring Aspects

The *Mentoring Aspects* theme emerged from the recurring concepts of formal and informal mentoring through supervisors, study groups, spouses, cohorts, and professors. The categories which developed from the concepts were *Personal*, *Non-Professional*, and *Professional*.

Personal. Most of the participants reported concepts such as self-pressure, role models, and social networks providing informal and formal mentoring. Participants expressed that self-pressure involved seeking their own mentoring in graduate school, in the workplace for careers, and with their families and friends. These self-determination concepts developed into the *Personal* category because most of the participants felt that they had to be representative of other African American males. Most of the participants reported that if they could acquire master's degrees others could do the same.

Non-Professional. This category also overlapped with the *Academic, Personal,* and *Student* categories because it aligned with informal and formal mentoring with student study groups, and affinity groups, which focused on personal development and self-determination. These categories also had in common social networking which holistically supported the participants to persist in graduate school.

Professional. The main concepts which developed from the *Professional* were as follows: representation, the position of power, and career advisement. Most of the

participants expressed the importance of representing other African American males in the workplace. It should be noted, many of them were in executive positions, especially in higher education. Having a position of power resonated as essential for African American males to advocate for others. In advocating for others, the participants believed that effective career advisement would help promote advanced degree attainment.

Related Themes and Categories

In this study, the themes *Academic Support Aspects*, *Relationships,* and *Mentoring Aspects* are related in meaning because they all correspond to formal or informal mentoring. All participants responded that they experienced formal or informal mentoring relationships in graduate school or in their careers. This mentoring provided knowledge-building, encouragement, and persistence. Additionally, these related themes overlapped with the categories *Personal and Professional* categories.

Eugene

With the *Academic Support Aspects* theme, Eugene, a 61-year-old, married, educator reported that he received informal mentoring from other educators in his cohort and from his supervisors. Relative to the *Personal* category, he received personal advisement and coursework support from his cohort, professors, supervisors, and friends. This informal mentoring assisted Eugene in gaining confidence in his teaching abilities and acquiring his master's degree. On the other hand, an example of the *Professional* category for Eugene was informal mentoring through educator leadership programming. Eugene was involved in an educator leadership cohort program. This program provided a

scholarship and guidance in educational leadership and recommended him for a leadership position.

Melvin

An example of the *Personal* category of *Mentoring Aspects* comes from Melvin, a 28-year-old, single, educator. He placed pressure on himself to acquire his master's degree. He sought his own informal mentoring within himself. As a first-generation college graduate, he relied on his familial position to motivate himself in acquiring his master's degree. Related to the category of *Professional*, Melvin epitomized this because he was an informal mentor for students. This was one of his job tasks. Through his mentoring other students as a professional, he acquired his informal mentoring experience.

David

Next, with the *Relationships* theme, the *Personal* category emerged in the response from David, a 55-year-old, single, entrepreneur. He expressed receiving informal mentoring from his professors through independent study classes. He felt isolated because he was a community college transfer student, and he sought informal mentoring from his professors. They advised him on personal matters and helped him to network and socialize with other students. For the *Professional* category, David reported informal mentoring from his work-study supervisor, professors, and colleagues. These associations enabled David to persist to graduation because they gave him a sense of belonging. David felt that he was empowered to continue to pursue his master's degree.

Table 4.1

Related Themes and Categories

Themes	Categories	Illustrative Quotes
Academic Support Aspects	Personal, Non-Professional, or Professional	**Eugene, married, Educator, age 61 for Q3:** "First of all, we had about a course to finish. And each of them was a different part of leadership and required was taught by a lot of experienced educators and teachers... it's kind of helped me see the role of the leader in education" (Lines 5:39-6:12).
Mentoring Aspects	Personal, Academic, or Professional	**Melvin, single, Educator, age 28 for Q5:** "I think a lot of pressure on myself (e.g., in the position of power) but just being like a young African American man. I just feel like it means more" (Line 9:19).
Relationships	Personal, Academic, or Professional	**David, single, Entrepreneur, age 55 for Q4:** "My only mentoring was I took a bunch of independent study classes. I just started taking classes from her for independent studies because I knew I could get her one-on-one what I needed so that's how I just did my mentoring" (Line 23:45).

*Note: The categories *Personal* and *Professional* are highlighted in the excerpts to denote the concepts which developed the categories. Concepts highlighted in yellow pertain to *Professional* and the segments relating to *Personal* are highlighted in blue.

The categories correlated with the following interview questions:

1. Where did you attend school? Tell me about your course of study.

2. Why did you choose that particular institution for graduate work?

3. How did your school support you holistically?

4. Did you participate in a mentoring program? Did you participate in any type of mentoring program while you pursued your master's degree?

5. What mentoring aspects helped you to persist and obtain an advanced degree?

6. Describe any mentoring relationships in which you were involved.

7. What would have been the ideal mentoring support system for you as you attended graduate school? (Did you participate in a formal or informal mentoring program?)

8. Is there anything else you would like to share that you feel would be beneficial to younger African American males that are coming up through the ranks that are interested in pursuing higher education?

In discussing and reporting on the findings below, I indicate the research questions followed by emerging themes and categories, properties, and dimensions.

Research Questions and Related Themes

Research Question 1: What were the overarching mentoring persistence factors that contributed to retention for African American males in PWIs?

Academic Support Aspects Theme

In response to Research Question 1, the *Academic Support Aspects* theme emerged. Most participants stated that they received some type of informal mentoring from public and private PWIs although the assistance may have been limited.   As

aforementioned, the participants' responses formed the *Academic* category because they received course/curriculum navigation, financial assistance, and coursework guidance. For example, Melvin, a 28-year-old, single, educator attended a public PWI. He stated, "From the time I got in the program I had, my academic advisor, who helped me register for classes after the first semester. I didn't speak with anybody into this semester until it was time to graduate" (Line 3:19). Melvin also stated that since he worked full-time, he was unavailable to attend any mentoring programs or any academic support events due to work.

Additionally, James, a 55-year old, married, educator attended a public PWI. He is another example of receiving academic informal mentoring. His professors gave flexibility in adjusting his homework deadlines which enabled him to complete his master's degree. James stated, "I think there was support where I was given opportunities because I was working full-time to actually rewrite or turn in later…so they respected me and gave me space" (Line 5:58 - 6:04; Line 6:24). James and Melvin both experienced success with the academic support from their public PWIs.

Furthermore, Charles, a 44-year old, married, educator attended a public PWI. He, like the other participants, acquired his master's degree for a job promotion and to have more career options. Charles received informal mentoring through academic support with scholarship tuition and cohort study group coursework assistance.

Another example of a study participant whose experience included the *Academic* category is Wally, a 63-year-old counselor/educator/entrepreneur. Wally attended a private PWI, which sponsored formal and informal mentoring programming and financially supported him by providing paid fellowships and reimbursement of funds for

dropped courses, and dismissing derogatory grades. Additional examples are provided in

Table 4.2 and in Appendix I - Codebook.

Wally, James, Charles, David, and Eugene reiterated that financial support helped

them to persist to graduation. Melvin was the only participant who did not report any

academic financial support. Most of the academic financial support resources received

by the participants were scholarships, work-study employment, and employee discounts

for tuition reimbursement. A predominance of participants expressed receiving informal

or formal mentoring through academic support; however, Melvin was the exception.

Melvin expressed that he was primarily a giver of informal mentoring by advising

students in his profession.

Additionally, for the *Academic Support Aspects* theme, the category *Personal*

emerged because of the common responses regarding work-life balance support. As

reported by the participants, professors provided autonomy by being student advocates

such as rescheduling academic assignments, by being a part of the participants' social

lives, and by advising on life matters.

The *Personal* category also overlapped with the *Relationships* and *Mentoring*

Aspects themes because the participants reported that their mentors related to them on a

personal level with their study/peer groups, professors, and work peers. Furthermore, the

participants reported that their professors saw them not just as students, but as friends.

This is how the categories *Students, Academic, Non-Professional,* and *Personal*

categories overlapped. Participants also conveyed that they spent time with their

professors, study group members, and cohort groups outside the classroom and gave each

other advice (see Table 4.2). For example, in the Properties column in Table 4.2, James,

a 55-year-old educator indicated that his public PWI supported him through informal

mentoring aspects such as academic advisement and with professors allowing him to

reschedule turning in his assignments, which spurred work-life balance. The properties

column describes the subcategories for the *Mentoring Aspects* theme which are as

follows: informal mentoring, students/instructor-Career support, students/faculty

engagement, and students/professional relationships.

James reported that he received informal mentoring from his professors, who

advised him on the appropriate courses to enroll in for graduation. James also expressed

that he received social-emotional support from his professors. They showed him respect

as a student over 25 years old, with a family, and with a full-time job. James stated, "I

was given opportunities because I was working full-time…they respected me and gave

me space" (Line 5:58-6:04; Line 6:24). When James said that his professors gave him

space, he was referring to them giving him autonomy. Given this autonomy, James was

able to flourish in his academic pursuits and complete his master's degree. Furthermore,

James reiterated that he was able to interact with his professors and work peers on a

social level meaning that he was not just considered a student, but a comrade, a mentee,

and as a confidant.

Dimension examples from the data described the degree of work-life balance

James and the other participants experienced (see Table 4.2). James stressed that because

of his professors' flexibility in rescheduling his assignments, he was able to persist in

graduate school. If James or the other participants did not have this frequent advantage

of rescheduling their assignments, there is a possibility that they may not have been

successful in their academic pursuits or their careers. In Table 4.2, other examples of

data dimensions reflect work-life balance such as holistic support which most of the

participants stated that they received which included day-time registration support,

dropping derogatory grades, and financial support through fellowships.

Table 4.2

Properties and Dimensions Related to Themes

Themes	Properties	Dimensions	Illustrative Quotes
Academic Support Aspects	Helped with work-life balance; gave space (autonomy), gave practical aspects, supported academically and career-wise, emotional support	Received no work-life balance to received work-life balance; No engagement from faculty on a personal level to engagement from faculty on a personal level.	**James, 55, age 55 for Q5:** "I think one of the things that allowed me to persist was not only normalizing some of the experiences that I was having, but also given me encouragement (informal mentoring) yes to complete the program" (Lines 12:04-12:35).
Relationships	By myself, never talked to an advisor, not much support, systems were available for support, didn't know how to reach out for advisement - intimidating, received registration assistance; holistic support not available; but self-determined/sought self-mentoring, in position of power	Never talked to advisor to available day-time advisement systems support; no holistic support available to self-determination support; having a position of power to not having authority or impact	**Melvin, single, age 28 for Q3:** "From the first time I got in the program that I had, like my academic advisor, who helped me to register for classes…I didn't speak with anybody into this semester when it was time to graduate." (Line 3:19)
Mentoring Aspects	Considered himself a mentor; Dropped Failing Grade, Teaching and Counseling Fellowships, Reimbursement of Dropped Class	Not being a mentor to being a mentor; kept failing grade to dropped failing grade; no reimbursement of funds for dropped class to reimbursement of funds for the dropped class.	**Wally, married, age 63 for Q3:** "…the school understood that something was wrong. And they supported me, and they dropped it. And what they ended up doing was giving me a fellowship to where I was able to teach counseling" (Line 11:39).

Note: Academic Support Aspects/Relationships/Mentoring Aspects themes are represented by the categories: Personal (get to know them, holistic support), and Academic/Student (fellowship, dropping failing grade), Professional (teaching and counseling fellowships).

Next, the categories *Students, Academic, Professional,* and *Personal* categories overlapped in the data because of the sub-categories as follows: self-determination, role model, and position of power. For example, in Table 4.2, in the Properties column, Melvin, a 28-year-old, single, educator described his public PWI as not providing holistic support. He defined holistic support as providing social-emotional, financial, and academic support. Melvin also emphasized that he received only course registration support. Due to his self-determination and self-pressure, he was able to persist. He reported that it was essential for him to represent other African American males in acquiring his master's degree and representation in his career. Furthermore, Melvin reported that he did not receive informal or formal mentoring, but rather self-determination informal mentoring. His perseverance in acquiring his master's degree and his career as an educator provided the experience of informally mentoring others and becoming a role model. He also stated that his perception of himself is as a role model due to being the only African American master's degree recipient in his current position as an education administrator.

Most of the participants reported that their mentors were in *positions of power*. The participants surmised that positions of power were defined as roles having the authority or influence to make decisions that impacted the public or private PWIs and with other affiliates. David, a 50-year-old, single, entrepreneur, expressed that positions of power were having the authority to get things done as an informal mentor such as

having access to high-level, confidential information, providing opportunities, and giving honest assessments to the students.

Additionally, in Table 4.2, the dimensions described for Melvin centered around having consistent day-time advisement. This advisement included student activities for student social networking and registration of classes. Melvin reported these informal mentoring services were only available during the day and non-traditional students who worked day jobs such as himself, could not participate in the programming.

Furthermore, other dimensions mentioned were the infrequencies of informal mentoring of formal mentoring programs available at a convenient time. Melvin reiterated that since informal mentoring or formal mentoring programs at his public PWI were after business hours, he had to seek his own mentoring. This was also why self-determination was important as reported by Wally, Eugene, and Charles to seek one's own mentoring. Additionally, knowing mentors in positions of power enabled the participants to persist because of the formal or informal mentoring they were able to provide. Melvin emphasized that because of his role as an educator in a position of power, he was enabled to self-mentor and be an informal mentor for others. Self-determination was a continuous dimension for most of the participants because this concept required them to be assertive to persist.

Lastly, in Table 4.2, in the properties' column, Wally, a 63-year-old, married, entrepreneur/counseling educator described his private PWI. The properties described the informal and formal mentoring subcategories, which were *mentoring duties*, *school board support*, and *financial assistance* (see Appendix I). Wally considered himself a mentor because he was part of an educator cohort. Although some of his professors

organized the study groups, they helped each other with coursework and advised on personal and professional matters. They worked on assignments together and counseled each other.

Wally also received the support of his private PWI school board and his professors. After Wally approached the Board about being falsely accused of plagiarism and he proved his case, his derogatory grade was dropped, and his funds were reimbursed for his dropped class. His professors also gave him social-emotional support by providing insight on how to approach the Board and how to proceed to complete his master's degree. Additionally, the Board gave Wally a teaching fellowship which provided full-time employment and the finances to complete his master's degree (see Table 4.2).

Next, as suggested by the dimensions, Wally experienced consistent formal and informal mentoring. Wally considered himself an informal mentor of his peers through cohort groups. This cohort group met weekly to discuss group projects and were *sounding boards* for each other in discussing personal, academic, professional, and non-professional issues. Wally also received formal mentoring through a counseling teaching position which was a career preparatory position. He received daily mentoring from experienced counselors. He also received feedback on enhancing his counseling skillset. Additionally, Wally received a dropped course reimbursement because he received guidance and support from his professors and the school board. Thus, Wally was empowered to be successful through informal and formal mentoring support.

The *Personal* category also was consistent with the findings of the other participants in the study. For example, self-determination was a conceptual pattern that constantly emerged in the memos. For example, from an excerpt from the memos (Appendix L), Eugene, a 61-year-old, married, educator stated the following:

It is important for students to seek their own mentoring, surround themselves with people that are on their side, and not be afraid to change their educational journey. Eugene added that it is essential that African American males combat stereotypes. That is, Do not get boxed in. Get all the information that you need to be successful and find the best mentor (Line 41:40).

Self-determination concepts, such as *seeking their own mentoring*; *surrounding themselves with people on your side*; *do not be afraid to change your educational journey*; *don't get boxed in*; *get all the information*; and *find the best mentor* were important among the participants (see Appendix L). These concepts helped to develop the personal category within the *Mentoring Aspects* theme.

Research Question 2: What mentoring support systems (e.g., family, peers, colleagues, instructors, etc.) do African American male students perceive as necessary retention elements at PWIs?

Relationships Theme

In response to Research Question 2, the Relationships theme emerged. All the participants indicated that they experienced some type of mentoring support systems such as family, peers, professors, or others. All participants perceived those relationships as necessary retention elements. The retention elements included students/work peers,

students/instructors, and students/supervisors relationships, which enabled all participants

to establish informal mentoring connections. The relationships are discussed below.

Students/Work Peers. Most of the participants expressed that while working on

their master's degrees, they received encouragement and motivation from their student

peers and their work peers. In some cases, most of the participants reported that study

groups assisted them in persisting and acquiring their master's degrees. Having

camaraderie with their student peer groups helped to retain them in graduate school and

helped them to persist. According to Strayhorn (2019), students feeling valued and

having a sense of belonging encouraged them to persist to graduation.   For example,

Eugene, who is a 61-year-old educator who attended a private PWI described his

experience, mentioned having support from his family, but what was significant from his

experience was the support that he received from student/peer groups and work peers.

He reiterated that he was surrounded by supportive colleagues who encouraged him not

to quit his graduate program. He also explained that the student peer groups consisted of

both African American males and females that were all pursuing the same educational

goals. They met and prepared for exams which assisted in passing coursework and

assisted with acquiring a master's degree.

Eugene was supported not only academically, but professionally. He

acknowledged that some of his student peer group members were also co-workers or

work peers. For example, he mentioned that his work peers allowed him opportunities to

observe them teaching. Since he was a new educator, this exposure was advantageous in

building his teaching acumen in observing best instructional practices, but also,

motivated him to continue to pursue his master's degree. Classroom observations were part of his master's program practicum.

Next, another example of peer and work peer support with informal mentoring was reported by Charles, a 44-year-old married educator, who attended a public PWI. Charles reported that his cohort group, which included his student and work peers encouraged him to remain in graduate school. He stated,

The thing was, for people in my office, we were working on a master's program together. So, you have that type of built cohort where you guys were going through it together, that definitely helps provide some support from that experience. We took a lot of the same classes together. So that was helpful (Line 12:00).

Charles reiterated that he experienced informal mentoring through his association with students and work peers. He felt empowered by the sense of affinity because all were working on the same goals and helping each other address challenges and finding resolutions together.

Students/Instructors. Five of the participants responded that the relationships they experienced with their professors assisted them in remaining in graduate school. They reported that professors helped to informally mentor them by providing academic and social guidance. Some of the professors mentored participants on life skills. How to be successful not only academically, but also socially. According to the participants, this informal mentoring relationship with their professors was a necessary retention element for them to persist. For example, David, a 50-year-old, single, entrepreneur, attended a public PWI. He expressed that a couple of his female African American professors were

his friends and his mentors. He depended on them for their counsel, and he trusted them.
He stated,

Okay, the fact that you got somebody that believes in you. I trust you; I'll give

you the benefit of the doubt was a big help in quantifying that degree. When you got

somebody that says, Hey, I'm going to try to do what I can to make your situation better

gives you a little more energy to endure and to have persistence. (Line 27:05)

According to David and most of the research participants, they experienced

positive student/instructor relationships, which helped them to persist to graduation.

These positive relationships were due to professors being available for concerns, and

students considering them friends, advocates, and mentors. Some professors matched

students' efforts in helping them to pursue and acquire their master's degrees with

friendship mentoring. This entailed being a sounding board or being someone students

could talk to when needed. This support from professors assisted in giving the

participants affirmation that they could acquire their master's degrees despite any barriers

they may have encountered at their PWIs. David perceived the professors' assistance as

informal mentoring. He stated,

My only mentoring was I took a bunch of independent study classes. I just started

taking classes from her for independent studies because I knew I could get her one-on-

one what I needed, so that's how I just did my mentoring. (Line 17:29.)

The student/professor relationships that David and most of the research

participants reported were necessary mentoring support system retention elements. As

David and the other participants reported, it was advantageous for them to have

empathetic professors, especially non-traditional students, who were over 25 years old,

who had families and working full-time jobs. James, another educator who was married, explained how his professors allowed him to reschedule assignments to meet his professional work schedule and gave him constant support and encouragement to be successful in his coursework and in life. As James explained, his professors did not perceive him as just another student, but as a human being for which they advocated.

   Students/Supervisors. Four participants responded that they experienced informal mentoring from their supervisors. Participants reported that their bosses opened the doors for them by helping to build their careers. This entailed promoting careers for job advancement and recommending them for academic scholarships and guiding them in selecting the appropriate courses for acquiring their master's degrees.

   The categories for this Students/Supervisors subcategory were as follows: *Students*, *Non-Professional*, or *Professional* (see Table 4.0 and Appendix I). The *Students* category was described as professors being considered friends and informal mentors just as with the *Academic Support Aspects* and the *Mentoring Aspects* theme. All participants spoke of the camaraderie with cohort study groups being that they were all striving for the same goals in acquiring their master's degrees. They also referred to cohort groups on a professional basis being informal mentors at work. For example, Wally, who attended a private PWI, stated that he received formal and informal mentoring from his graduate institution. His formal mentoring consisted of 400 hours in education in which he shadowed a full-time educator, and his informal mentoring consisted of being in an education cohort group. Wally inferred that this mentoring motivated him to complete his master's degree through the encouragement that he

received and the motivation of being a part of a student cohort group that had the same professional goals. Wally stated,

So you could take 400 hours of clinical education which is a mentoring program that teaches you a lot about yourself, but it is geared toward helping you to get in touch with who you are finding out your strengths and weaknesses. (Line 29:30)

Wally stressed that the mentoring relationships that he had with his professors/supervisors and student cohort groups helped his growth as a counselor/educator and entrepreneur. According to Wally, these relationships were necessary retention elements for his acquisition of his master's degree.

Another example of a student/supervisor relationship that provided informal mentoring was through the experience of Charles, a 44-year-old education administrator. Charles stated that his supervisor provided informal mentoring by recommending the appropriate courses for him to enroll in for his career and academic growth. He did not have formal mentors, but informal ones. Charles mentioned that he established amicable relationships with his football coach, advisor, and employer, who all looked out for him. Charles reported about his employer, "You know, made sure that I took the right classes and did things that will be beneficial, experiences that will be beneficial for me to progress in the profession" (Line 10:12). Charles reiterated that his supervisors informally mentored him because they were his role models and advisors. They ensured that he was taken care of professionally, academically, and personally (non-professional). Charles was promoted into executive positions in higher education due to his completion of his master's program. Through his employer, Charles received student tuition discounts which also led to his advanced educational persistence.

Research Question 3: What was the impact of informal mentoring or a mentoring program on their persistence?

Mentoring Aspects Theme

In response to Research Question 3, the *Mentoring Aspects* theme emerged. However, the other themes *Academic Support Aspects* and *Relationships* overlapped with the *Mentoring Aspects* in answering this research question because there were informal mentoring aspects experienced by all participants.   For example, Melvin experienced informal mentoring aspects. In his profession, he was an informal mentor in guiding students in getting acclimated to college life.   He gave tours of the college campuses, helped students network with other students and faculty, and gave advisement on coursework selection. Just as with the other study participants, Melvin was a giver of informal mentoring. He emphasized the importance of perseverance and being a role model for other African American males pursuing master's degrees PWIs. Informal mentoring was also evident in the themes *Academic Support Aspects* and *Relationships*. There was also the intersection of the concepts, categories, properties, and dimensions for the themes (see Table 4.2).   These facets are explained further in this chapter.

The *Mentoring Aspects* theme emerged from the data because of the informal and formal mentoring aspects participants experienced in their PWIs. All participants experienced mentoring aspects; however, some experienced more diverse mentoring experiences than others. For example, Wally, a counseling educator/entrepreneur was the only research participant who experienced informal mentoring from peers and participated in a formal mentoring program while pursuing his master's degree. Wally was involved in an educator/counseling internship program, which was his formal career

mentoring program. Through this formal mentoring program, Wally acquired a full-time,

permanent position as an educator/counselor.   Additionally, Wally received informal

mentoring through his interaction with his professor's student cohort group coursework

sessions. This informal mentoring Wally reported was also like what Eugene and Charles

expressed occurred within their cohort groups. They mentored each other with

coursework assistance and counseled on personal matters.

Furthermore, Wally's experience showed his *Mentoring Aspects* had a

commonality with *Relationships* and with the categories of *Non-Professional* and

Professional. For example, the sub-categories overlap with the *Relationships* and the

Academic Support Aspects themes because Wally's *Non-Professional* relationships

pertained to his interactions with other student cohort groups (Students/Cohort Groups)

and his professors (Students/Professors). Additionally, his *Professional* relationship was

with his work supervisor (Students/Supervisors), who provided informal and formal

mentoring for his counseling educator internship. Wally also reported how his military

peer group provided professional recommendations for his career in counseling. Wally's

experience also was like the other participants because they all experienced the same

informal mentoring relationships at their PWIs. To illustrate, Eugene mentioned his

student cohort group, his professors, and his supervisors provided informal mentoring

through professional recommendations for his career growth in education.   The

Professional category also resonated through Eugene's informal mentoring when he

observed classrooms and different styles of education administration leadership

techniques. In conferring with the teachers and the principals which he observed, they

advised him on how to teach diverse learners, and the principals provided insight and representation on how to lead in a variety of school environments.

Students/Cohort Groups. The informal mentoring impact that Wally experienced was from his student peers within the same educational program. They were all pursuing the same goal of becoming educators nationwide. This student cohort group was impactful due to the *intense collaboration*, *idea exchange*, or *bouncing ideas*. The cohort groups offered informal support by providing information for educational counseling studies, providing a sounding board, offering coursework support, and providing a transparent platform. Wally stated, "Just being able to have somebody to talk to and bounce things off of and help and, you know when the frustrations became overwhelming" (Line 33:53).   Wally felt that he could trust this cohort group because they had developed a rapport, and they had goals such as acquiring their master's degrees in common. This was also evident with the other research study participants, except for Melvin because he saw himself as a mentor for student/cohort groups. He was not a part of an informal or formal mentoring group as a student, but as a professional. As aforementioned, Melvin mentored high school students as part of his profession as an education administrator. However, Melvin having informal mentoring experience helped to provide insight into informal mentoring at PWIs.

Students/Professors. Additionally, Wally experienced being involved in a formal mentoring program. Wally participated in a counseling educator internship program. While he was in this program, he experienced being falsely accused of plagiarism by a professor. Through the support of his other professors and legal representation, he was able to get the charges overturned. Wally stated, "You know, that

incident that took place, having somebody to talk to about that, because I shared with him, and he gave me some ideas and approaches to take on how to deal with it" (Line 33:53). Because of Wally's informal mentoring from his professors, he was given advice on how to get the charges overturned, and he was refunded his money for the course. He was also awarded master's coursework credit hours in the counseling program.

Additionally, David, who is single and an entrepreneur experienced informal mentoring through his professors. He stated that his professors gave him honest assessments of his academic progress and advisement regarding his personal and professional life. David also expressed that his professors told him what he needed to stop doing and how to improve himself. He stated,

I think I had two women that I respected and looked up to. And I think that was perfect. And I think both were fair and honest. And I don't think I could have got no better than what I got. Yeah, I just, it's just me. I always they always had to do over and for me, and I was a mess, too. (Line 38:30)

David took independent study courses so that he would have not only coursework guidance, but informal mentoring to assist him with social and emotional problems. He reported that his professors told him when he was wrong, and they counseled him to get him on track with academic, personal, and professional matters.

Students/Supervisors. Wally was also a counseling educator in training in an internship program. This mentoring program prepared him to become a full-time counselor/educator, and it supported him in acquiring his master's degree. He elected to shadow a full-time counselor to learn the daily responsibilities. The supervisor of his internship program was a well-known, experienced counseling educator, and he became

Wally's mentor. According to Wally, he felt that his supervisor was his confidant.

Through the counselor mentor program, Wally became a full-time counselor/educator

and acquired his master's degree. Thus, the mentoring program holistically impacted him

by giving him financial, social, and academic support.

Summary

Chapter IV is a summary of the review of the findings of the six African

American males who attended public and private PWI institutions in Missouri. The

review of the findings involved illustrative quotations from the participants answering the

three research questions. The review of findings revealed and interpreted the three major

themes and five major categories describing the African American male's formal and

informal mentoring experiences at PWIs. This study explored the formal and informal

mentoring experiences that helped them to persist and acquire their master's degrees.

The three themes interpreted were *Academic Support Aspects*, *Relationships*, and

Mentoring Aspects. Quotations from participants were in support of the themes and

concepts which developed the categories. Chapter V will follow with the implications

and conclude with recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived mentoring experiences of African American males who attended predominately white institutions (PWIs) in Missouri and obtained master's degrees. The six males participated in a one-on-one, Zoom recorded interview. This study aimed to further understand how mentoring contributed to student persistence, and African American males graduating with advanced degrees. In this chapter, an interpretation of the findings is discussed as well as conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

Interpretation of Findings

Three themes emerged from the study: *Academic Support Aspects*, *Relationships*, and *Mentoring Aspects*. The *Academic Support Aspects* theme involved how higher learning institutions academically supported the participants. The academic support included informal mentoring and formal mentoring programs. Most of the participants responded that their PWIs gave them holistic support. Meaning that they received informal support regarding counsel for work-life balance, financial accommodations, and course navigation. Studies have shown that informal and formal mentoring relationships help African Americans persist to graduation (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2019; Tight, 2020). According to the participants, they experienced both informal and formal mentoring from their support network relationships, which emerged as subcategories: *students/professors*, *students/supervisors*, and *students/peers*, who enabled them to persist and complete their advanced degrees. *Relationships* intersected with *Academic Support Aspects* because they were a part of the informal mentoring and formal

mentoring programs. Only one participant received formal mentoring; however, most of

the participants received mentoring aspects such as affirmation from professors or peers.

In the next section, the themes are discussed.

Theme 1: Academic Support Aspects

Academic Support Aspects resounded throughout the six participants. The

Academic Support Aspects theme included professor/student support, student-to-student

support, and financial support. The professors' support entailed advising students on

coursework, but also life advice.   Most of the research participants felt that their

professors were their informal mentors because they supported them not only with

success in their courses, but also advised them on how to resolve impending life

problems.

Professors also supported the participants by giving them assignment deadline

extensions and giving them space and autonomy to enable them to be successful as older

students over the age of 25 years old, with families, and with full-time jobs. Studies have

shown alignment with the findings of Tinto (2012) and Strayhorn (2019). The

participants reiterated that academic support encouraged their class attendance, increased

their knowledge, and helped to reaffirm their career goals. Furthermore, most of the

participants considered their professors not only their informal mentors but their friends.

Student-to-Student support was evident in this study with the student cohort

groups. Peer tutoring was a mentoring persistence factor that resonated with most of the

participants. The participants felt a sense of belonging, which supports findings from

researchers such as Tinto (2012) and Strayhorn (2012, 2017, 2019). According to

Strayhorn (2012, 2017, 2019), a sense of belonging is a basic human need for self-worth

and acceptance by others. Some of the participants felt that the study groups, in which they participated made them feel comfortable, and they did not feel like they were going through their graduate program alone. The participants felt a connection and were integrated into a group where they felt they could be trusted and support one another.

All the participants received some form of financial support. The financial support involved scholarships, tuition assistance, and internships. These academic support aspects coincided with Astin's (1984) and Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2012) theories of student involvement and social interaction. The financial resources enabled the participants to continue their educational programs and provide income for other financial needs such as food and housing. Additionally, the tuition assistance sponsored by the PWIs enabled the participants to be more involved on campus and helped their learning growth because they were engaged in campus activities such as peer study groups, professor-led networking groups, and campus internships. Also, all the participants mentioned setting high standards for themselves and seeking the best forms of mentoring through their engagement with professors, peers, supervisors, or friends.

Theme 2: Relationships

The *Relationships* theme was apparent throughout the participant interviews. It was represented in the roles of students/work peers, students/boss, students/professors, and students/cohort groups. These relationships involved faculty, social, student-to-student, professional, and non-professional.

Most of the participants experienced informal mentoring which included peer tutoring, coursework guidance from peers and professors, and study group cohort support. The findings for the *Relationships* theme correspond with Tinto's (1975, 1993,

2012) Student Departure Theory, his conceptualization of social interaction, and his Framework for Institutional Action: The Conditions for Student Success, because they both addressed engagement and persistence through student, peer, and professor mentoring. The participants reported that the mentoring they experienced encouraged them to persist to graduation even if it was with someone who was of a different race. Although most of the participants preferred mentors of the same race and gender, most agreed that it was also advantageous to have a mentor of a different race and gender.

Additionally, most of the participants expressed positive experiences with different race mentors and different genders and surmised that these relationships encouraged them to persist in their fields of study and broadened their social and academic networks. Studies have shown that African Americans prefer same-race mentors because they found that they received more academic help and alignment with their life experiences, but it does not show that they received better grades (Blake-Beard et al., 2011).

Theme 3: Mentoring Aspects

The *Mentoring Aspects* theme was represented in the relationships of students/professors, students/supervisors, and students/cohort groups. This theme aligned with the *Relationships* and the *Academic Support Aspects* themes because it resulted in three categories: *Personal*, *Academic*, and *Professional*. These categories involved the mentoring aspects such as student cohort mentoring, where knowledge exchange happened in study groups and personal student-to-student relationships grew due to shared goals and lived experiences. For example, Charles, a 44-year-old educator, reiterated that his professors were responsive to his academic needs and helped him to

navigate graduate school, and encouraged him to finish his master's degree. Most of the participants spoke of informal mentoring aspects when referring to emotional support from student cohort groups. Participants uniformly shared that they received career advice, engaged with faculty on a personal level, and learned how to communicate on a professional level. This constant interaction brought about an encouraging and accepting environment, which enabled the participants to feel valued and engaged. According to Strayhorn (2017), "frequent and meaningfully supportive relationships with faculty and staff on campus at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) positively influenced Black males' satisfaction with their college experience" (p. 1109). Strayhorn (2017) found that these positive relationships that African American males had with their professors, peers, and others caused them to be successful in college and helped them to persist (p. 1109). In this study, all the participants experienced a form of informal mentoring through their positive relationships with their professors, peers, and supervisors. Studies (Harper, 2006, 2007, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012, 2017, 2019; Tight, 2020) have also shown that the experiences that Black males have are unique in comparison to other racial groups due to not being part of the predominant race at PWIs and not being accepted as equal citizens of the university communities of the public or private PWIs. This is the reason why there is a higher attrition rate for African American males than for other races. Through their Model of Cohort Recruitment, Eakins and Eakins' (2017) found the following four main barriers that caused student departure from colleges or universities:

1) Sense of Belonging (Campus Climate and Lack of same race faculty and staff)

2) Students were not prepared due to poor K-12 education.

3) Many African American students were non-traditional students with little or no family support.

4) Two-thirds of African American students dropped out of college due to finances. (p. 52)

In this study, the barriers listed that caused African American students to drop out of higher education were addressed by the *Mentoring Aspects* theme. This theme encompassed mentoring programming and informal mentoring that as studies (Tinto, 2012) have shown, help to improve the campus climate. Studies have supported the findings of the importance of mentoring at the graduate level (Patton & Harper, 2003). Having mentoring at the graduate level was especially important because students could make early social network connections in their areas of specialization. The *Mentoring Aspects* theme also addressed the importance of social advocacy for African American students. According to the participants, they felt empowered to be successful through the encouragement of their professors, colleagues, and supervisors. Additionally, the participants were given opportunities to thrive through PWIs' mentoring support with work-life balance through coursework assignment flexibility and with career and personal guidance. Thus, mentoring aspects were indicated as important because they enabled the participants to persist to graduation.

Discussion and Implications

This qualitative research study provided insights into the lived mentoring experiences of African American males at PWIs in Missouri. Although the focus of this research was on African American males, surprisingly, they did not report race as a major factor in obtaining master's degrees. This was somewhat surprising considering the

challenges African American students can experience at PWIs. However, this could be due to the interview questions, as none of participants were specifically asked how race impacted their experience. Nonetheless, the research added to the body of literature, because it enhanced our understanding of how the role of mentoring contributed to persistence among African American male graduate students in PWIs.

The themes of *Academic Support Aspects*, *Relationships*, and *Mentoring Aspects* described the experiences of six African American males while they pursued graduate degrees. The mentoring persistence factors identified were categorized as *Personal*, *Academic*, *Students*, *Professional*, and *Non-Professional*. These categories were descriptions of the type of mentoring received such as counseling, study support, and career support that were provided by peers, professors, supervisors, or cohort groups. Furthermore, previous theoretical models such as Strayhorn's (2019) Sense of Belonging Theory and Cross's (1991) Nigrescence (Racial Identity) Framework were developed from Tinto's conceptional theories, Model of Student Departure and A Framework for Institutional Actions: Conditions for Student Success. Just as Tinto's framework evolved, this was also the case with Cross's model. His initial perspective was the racial conversion process development of racial identity for African Americans from Negro-to-Black (Ritchey, 2014). Furthermore, Cross's Nigrescence (Racial Identity) Framework identified five hierarchical stages of black identity development which are: *preencounter*, *encounter*, *immersion-emersion*, *internalization*, and *commitment*. In this study, none of the participants reported needing to change to fit-in at their PWIs as Cross (1995) described as the *preencounter* stage. Most of the participants expressed having self-determination and seeking their own mentoring to help them to persist. Furthermore,

there was one *encounter* stage event a participant reported was a racist incident when he was wrongfully accused of plagiarism by a white professor. Although the charges were dropped, this event transformed the participant to not trust some white professors. Additionally, most of the participants identified with Cross's (1995) explanation of the immersion-emersion stage. In the *immersion-emersion* stage as Cross (1995) reported, all participants expressed feelings of pride in being African American and solidarity with other African Americans. Most of the participants mentioned wanting to represent other African Americans since they were in education administrative roles of power. The participants also relayed that they wanted to be role models for others in their families since some were first-generation master's level graduates. Additionally, in the *emersion* stage as Cross (1995) emphasized, all participants used their educational attainment to informally mentor others in cohort groups, study groups, and as part of a job function. Next, most of the participants identified characteristics of the *internalization* stage of racial development due to their experiences with diverse race mentors (Cross, 1995). Also, most of the participants responded that it did not matter if they had a white mentor. All the participants reported having success with white or black mentors. Lastly, in the *commitment* stage as Cross (1995) posited, all participants mentioned a devotion to assisting other African American males to persist in acquiring master's degrees. There was a sense of solidarity especially when the participants mentioned being role models and ensuring that they represent other African Americans in authoritative positions. Most of the participants recommended that African American males *seek out their own mentoring*. This meant for them to self-advocate and to self-determine the informal or formal mentoring that is best for them. According to Cross (1991, 1995), if Blacks

understand their *Blackness* in the United States through a non-western perspective and accept themselves, they will be successful in any environment. Thus, as Cross (1991, 1995) has contended, persistence is based on African American males completing the racial identity development process.

According to Tinto's (1975) beginning model, students departed or persisted in higher education due to membership meaning integration and interaction within the higher learning institution. The main themes that resonated with Tinto's original model regarding persistence were interaction and integration, which pertained to mentoring aspects (Tinto, 1975; 1993; 1997). If students were involved and perceived a sense of inclusion, they were more likely to persist in higher education than students who did not (Tinto, 1975; 1993; 1997). Tinto's most recent updated model, A Framework of Institutional Action: Conditions of Student Success placed the obligation on institutions to retain and engage students to persist. To improve retention and graduation, Tinto (2012) implored institutions to implement campus condition expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement to empower students, faculty, staff, and the community (Tinto, 2012).

Persistence is important for future African American males' enablement to acquire master's degrees. The participants' experiences indicate that mentoring is essential for persistence. First, it added to the body of knowledge in education, social inclusion, and mentoring initiatives. Additionally, findings in this study indicated advanced knowledge of social advocacy, and how it empowered the participants to persist with informal and formal mentoring. All participants stressed the importance of informal or formal mentoring in education. The participants engaged in mentoring

aspects either formal or informal activities through the relationships of professors, cohorts, friends, or supervisors. With their encouragement and support, the participants felt accepted. This study also indicated support for accelerated interest in student engagement or student involvement. As Tinto's (2012) conceptual model was the primary framework for this study, the increased acknowledgment of his framework was catapulted by researchers Harper (2006, 2007, 2012), Strayhorn (2012, 2017, 2019), Tight (2020), and others on how student engagement helped to create an environment of acceptance. Studies have shown that the emergence of student engagement promotes student persistence (Kerby, 2020; Tinto, 2012; Tight, 2020).

Recommendations for Future Research

The examination of the lived experiences of African American males disclosed a diversity of topics for further study. The ideas elicit accountability for public or private PWIs to become more intentional in creating informal mentoring aspects and formal mentoring programming for not only African American students but for all students.

Additionally, this study provided benefits of mentoring programs or mentoring practices that compelled African American males to be actively engaged in PWIs on campus and off-campus, which, as Harper (2012) contended, led to persistence and success of degree attainment. Consequently, the following recommendations are proposed for future exploration:

1. A study of a team of cross-functional faculty, students, administrators, and support staff whose function is to oversee institutional planning and student success at PWIs.

2. A duplication of this study with a sample of African American males nationally and globally.

3. An assessment of public and private PWIs in Missouri regarding African American males' perspectives on the best mentoring programs.

4. A study that explores the implementation of mentoring support systems at PWIs and HBCUs.

5. A study that explores best practices in developing mentoring programs for African Americans from orientation to graduation.

6. An assessment of informal mentoring aspects and formal mentoring programming comparing Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU).

Conclusions

This research contributed to the knowledge about mentoring persistence factors for African American males, who obtained master's degrees from PWIs in Missouri. African American males provided insight into their educational journeys; thus, providing a catalyst for future investigations and resolutions for all colleges and universities. The literature is ample with studies on informal mentoring and mentoring programs for retention within undergraduate education; however, there were limited studies that addressed graduate school retention among African American males. Studies were limited on the mentoring persistence factors for African American males in graduate programs. Specifically, there was limited evidence of how universities and colleges developed mentoring persistence strategies for African American males in graduate school. This study addressed the gap with a focus on African American males at PWIs in Missouri. From the participants' experiences and studies regarding persistence (Tinto, 2012; Harper, 2006, 2007, 2012; Strayhorn 2012, 2017, 2019; Tight, 2020) and other

researchers aforementioned in this study, it was determined that more research is needed to improve and enhance the current informal mentoring and formal mentoring programs in higher education for African Americans and for all students to persist.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Interview Protocol

1. Where did you attend school? Tell me about your course of study.

2. Why did you choose that particular institution for graduate work?

3. How did your school support you holistically?

4. Did you participate in a mentoring program? Did you participate in any type of mentoring program while you pursued your master's degree?

5. What mentoring aspects helped you to persist and obtain an advanced degree (e.g., Please refer to introductory letter for definitions.)

6. Describe any mentoring relationships in which you were involved.

7. What would have been the ideal mentoring support system for you as you attended graduate school? (Did you participate in a formal or informal mentoring program?)

8. Is there anything else you would like to share that you feel would be beneficial to younger African American males that are coming up through the ranks that are interested in pursuing higher education?

Appendix B – Demographics Sheet

Please complete the following demographical profile information:

a. Age:

b. Educational degree achieved:

c. Undergrad Degree:

d. Employment (Industry?):

e. Marital Status:

f. Undergraduate School Attended:

g. Graduate School Attended:

Appendix C – Transcription Rules

All transcriptions should include the following information:

Interview Date:

Interview Time:

Interview Location:

Length of Interview:

Transcriber:

Researcher:

Participant:

Anonymity Code: (if necessary)

Initially, each transcribed interview should include the above information. In addition to the aforementioned listed, each transcribed interview should include brief demographic information listed under the Interview Protocol (e.g. (a) name, (b) approximate age, and (c) graduate degree level obtained).

The following symbols were used in the transcribing of interviews:

[ ]   Brackets: Onset and offset of overlapping talk

?   indicates an exclamation

Word Capital letters: Utterance, or part thereof, which is spoken much louder than the surrounding talk

(( ))   Double parentheses: Transcriber's descriptions of events, rather than representations of them

< >   Slower-paced talk than the surrounding talk

Appendix D – Open/Axial Coding (Codebook Example)

Category	Sub-categories	Properties	Dimensions	Examples
Graduate School Experience	A. Choice of Institution	Discusses the graduate institution that he attended	From attending graduate school to post-career goals	"It was a new program… I was interested in the direction that they were going in… It sounded like a program that could be achieved in 3 to 4 years…" (David Line 32:21)

Appendix E – Informed Consent (Example)

UMSL|Education

College of Education

Department of Education Sciences
and Professional Programs
University of Missouri-St. Louis
1 University Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63121-4400
Phone: 314-516-5303

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Participant _____   HSC Approval Number _____

Principal Investigator _____   PI's Phone Number _____

_____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Paula Miller and Dr. E. Paulette Isaac-Savage. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the mentoring experiences of African American males with master's degrees who graduated from a four-year public or private Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in Missouri to further understand how mentoring can contribute to student retention rates and African American males graduating with advanced degrees.

2. Your participation will involve completing a demographical profile sheet and a one-on-one zoom interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview will be conducted at a location and a time that is convenient for you.

3. The loss of confidentiality risk will be minimized because although identifiable names will be recorded, they will be coded, and pseudonyms will be used such that they will only be identifiable to the researcher.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the adult education knowledge base and social advocacy.

5. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. If you want to withdraw from the study, you can contact me at (314) 537-5098. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. By agreeing to participate, you understand and agree that your data may be shared with other researchers and educators in the form of presentations and/or publications. In all cases, your identity will not be revealed. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the

Office for Human Research Protection). That agency would be required to maintain the confidentiality of your data. In addition, all data will be stored on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked office.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call me at (314) 537-5098 or Dr. Paulette Isaac-Savage, Dissertation Chair, at (314) 516-5303. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the Office of Research Administration, at 516-5897. **I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.**

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator or Designee   Investigator/Designee Printed Name
Date

Appendix F – Introductory Letter (Example)

Re: Research Participation Requested

Date:

Dear Research Candidate:

Please receive this letter as an indication of meeting the criteria to participate in my dissertation research project. The name of my project is "Mentoring: The Factors that Contribute to Persistence to Graduation for African American Males in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in Missouri."

The research participant qualifications are as follows:
- African American males that attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in Missouri (e.g., attended universities the student population was predominantly White.)
- African American males that are over 22 years old.
- African American males who have experienced a mentoring relationship.
- African American males who have master's degrees.

Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of this qualitative research project is to gather the impressions of African American male participants on how mentoring relationships or mentoring programs assisted them to persist and attain their master's degrees at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

Upon your agreement to participate in this study, by signing the enclosed consent form, I will contact you either by e-mail, telephone, or US mail to schedule an interview. You do not have to answer all the questions if you feel uncomfortable, and we can stop the interview at any time. If you agree to participate, your name will not be used; instead, an alias will be used to protect your identity. I will brief you on the interview questions before the interview to ensure your comfort level. All data collected will be kept in my home on my file-protected laptop in a locked file cabinet. I am the only person with a key to the lock and with the password to my computer.

Upon receiving the informed consent form, please return it within 7 days, so that we can expedite this process. We can arrange for a location that is most convenient for you once I receive your form. You will be compensated with a gift card for your participation.

Thank you in advance for agreeing to participate in my study. I will be talking to you soon.

Sincerely,

Paula H. Miller

Appendix G – Email Blast to the ABC Church (Example)

Re: Dissertation Research Study Request (Email Blast)

May 28, 2021

Hello, ABC Church Members:

I am conducting a research study seeking African American males that have acquired a master's degree in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). In other words, a college or university where the student population was predominantly White.

The research participant criteria are as follows:
- African American males that attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in Missouri
- African American males that are over 22 years old.
- African American males who experienced a mentoring relationship while in college.
- African American males who have master's degrees.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the mentoring experiences of African American males with master's degrees who graduated from PWI institutions in Missouri to further understand how mentoring can contribute to student retention rates and African American males graduating with advanced degrees.

Participation is voluntary, and the loss of confidentiality risk will be minimized. Identifiable names will be recorded; however, they will be coded, and pseudonyms will be used such that they will only be identifiable by the researcher.

If you are interested in participating and meet the criteria, please e-mail at: pah8t3@umsystem.edu by (date). Also, if you know of others who may meet the research qualifications, please send me their contact information.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paula H. Miller

Appendix H – Recruitment Flyer

Appendix I – Code Book

Participant	Themes	Concepts	Categories	Sub-Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Interview Questions	Direct Quotes (Timestamp)
Charles	Academic Support Aspects	Academic support, course navigation, friends, family and professor support, developed relationships, looked out for me, added value to experiences, ensured success, advisors' encouragement, sense of belonging	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Support network, Financial assistance, Employer support Professor mentors, Scholarships, Tuition Assistance, Employee of Same Institution	Employer promoted career and academics, received scholarships and tuition assistance through employer, employee of the same institution advantages, work/school cohort team, professor mentors supported career	No promotion of career and academics to promotion of career and academics, no receipt of tuition assistance; no receipt of tuition assistance, Having no professor mentors to having professor mentors	3. How did your school support you holistically?	"So, so my graduate experience are very hands off. I mean, other than, you know, talking to my academic advisor about what I should take next semester, there was not a lot of interaction. I mean, they weren't like, mentor me, or, you know, helping me decide, you know, how this would impact my career." Line 4:47
Charles	Relationships	Informal mentoring, tuition assistance and scholarships; coach, academic advisor, cohort, faculty support, developed relationships with informal mentors; received encouragement from informal mentors; boss steered to the right courses, built a cohort; boss good mentor	Students, Non-Professional, or Professional	Student/Supervisors, Student/Cohort; Student/Friends, Student/Athletic network	student athlete/coach- informal mentoring from a position coach, mentoring from university supervisors, received mentoring from office cohort-who mentored each other.	No mentoring from coach to informal mentoring from coach; no mentoring from supervisor to informal mentoring from supervisor	4.Did you participate in a mentoring program? Did you participate in any type of mentoring program while you pursued your master's degree? Describe any mentoring relationships in which you were involved.	"So I had a couple professors who develop relationships with and they sort of served as mentors for me...But once I got to graduate school, I did not participate in a formal Mentor Program." Line 10:12
Charles	Mentoring Aspects	Affirmation, encouragement from professors, push, spousal support, go ahead and finish, go ahead and knock it out, encouragement to finish it	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Student/Professor, Student/ Advisors, Student/Dissertation committee	Professors adding value to experience, Professors Ensuring Success, Assertive Graduate, Good Advisor, Regularly Met with Advisor, Responsive Advisor, Knew Who to Ask, Knew how to Navigate the system; Professor's Encouragement and Affirmation; Encouragement from Advisor. Dissertation Committee Members Encouragement	Professors delineating value to Professors adding value; Professors not confirming success to ensuring success; having a nonresponsive advisor to having a responsive advisor	5. What mentoring aspects helped you to persist and obtain an advanced degree.	"I was fortunate at the end, that you know, my advisor wanted me to get things done." Line 7:08
Charles	Relationships	Formal orientation programs, someone to aspire to, shaping interests, connections, seeking others, information gathering, assigned mentor	Personal, Non-Professional, or Professional	formal mentoring program, mentor, connections, no participation in formal mentoring program	receiving a formal orientation program, students receiving a formal mentor in field of study, to be connected to someone in field, have to seek out connections	Not seeking mentoring connections to seeking mentoring connections	6. What would have been the ideal mentoring support system for you as you attended graduate school? (Did you participate in a formal or informal mentoring program?)	"I think a formal orientation program, students getting a receiving a formal mentor in their field of study would be ideal." Line 7:08

Participant	Themes	Concepts	Categories	Sub-Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Interview Questions	Direct Quotes (Timestamp)
David	Academic Support Aspects	Professors, support, advisors, climate- friendly, work-study, scholarships, seminars, holistic, organization, minority inclusion, GPA, adapting	Personal, Academic, or Professional	AA males, mentor, classes, grad school, college, experience, advisors, work mentorship	Advisor support, instructor support, work-study program, Dept. of Education support, interdepartmental support, finding yourself, scholarship, minority inclusion programming, conversations with instructors, met instructors, work at Surplus, cognizant of positive interactions, woke culture (Line 10:21 - 22:59)	Being lost to finding yourself; not having instructor or advisor support to having instructor or advisor support; not having financial support to having financial	3. How did your school support you holistically?	"I just got lucky because one before I got there, my step Auntie it was terrible myself, my mother, my step father raised me - I was standing down there at her house caught on fire....lost everything and a friend of hers who happened to work in financial aid." Line 17:29
David	Relationships	Classes, informal mentoring, information gathering, professors, support, trusted, 5000 courses	Students, Non-Professional, or Professional	Student/Cohort, Student/Faculty, Student/ Friends, Student/Advisor, Student/Supervisors; Student/Influential Mentor Relationships and undergrad	Independent study classes, One-on-One instruction, mentoring course programming in Adult ED, 2-3-hrs per week informal mentoring, guidance through the process, guidance based on needs, guidance on graduation, trusted advisors; understood what was required, took mentoring classes	Classroom instruction to Independent study, One-on-One instruction classes; general courses in education to curriculum models	4.Did you participate in a mentoring program? Did you participate in any type of mentoring program while you pursued your master's degree? Describe any mentoring relationships in which you were involved.	"My only mentoring was I took a bunch of independent study classes. I just started taking classes form her for independent studies because I knew I could get her 101 what I needed so that's how I just did my mentoring." Line 23:45
David	Relationships	Honesty, power, door, help, matched effort, persistence, energy, make better	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Student/Cohort, Student/Instructors, Student/ Friends, Student/Advisor, Student/Supervisor; Student/Influential Mentor Relationships and undergrad	Contacted instructors, instructors available for concerns, helpful instructors, wanted degree, somebody that believes in you, someone with position of power, committed a change, tangibly resourceful mentors, honest assessment, general guidance, get a door open, matching your effort, strives to make situation better, energizes to endure	Instructors unavailable to instructors available for concerns; not having drive to wanting degree; not having an honest assessment to having an honest assessment; not h	5. What mentoring aspects helped you to persist and obtain an advanced degree.	"Okay, the fact that you got somebody that believes in you, I trust in you, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt was a big help in quantifying that degree. When you got somebody that says, hey, I'm going to try to do what I can to make your situation better gives you a little more energy to endure and to have persistence." Line 27:05
David	Relationships	Mentors, scold, assessment, honesty, informal mentoring, seminars, informal mentoring	Personal, Non-Professional, or Professional	Informal mentoring, reached out, work-study job, met people	Instructors that were informal mentors, work-study job provided informal mentoring, met people to lean on, gave you the benefit of the doubt	No informal mentoring to informal mentoring with instructors; met	6.What would have been the ideal mentoring support system for you as you attended graduate school? (Did you participate in a formal or informal mentoring program?)	"You know, they probably they told me the truth. And they gave me the honest assessment, told me what I needed to do what I need to stop doing. They treated me like an adult. Yet they scolded me when I was wrong. So, I just had to perfect this mess with my mentor..." Line 38:30

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	**Participant**	**Themes**	**Concepts**	**Categories**	**Sub-Categories**	**Properties**	**Dimensions**	**Interview Questions**	**Direct Quotes (Timestamp)**
6	Eugene	Academic Support Aspects	Encouraged class attendance, helped career growth; increased knowledge, helped reaffirm career goals	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Experienced educators, Financial Assistance, Leadership, Principalship, Confirmation, Confidence	Taught by experienced educators, increased leadership knowledge, increased leadership interest, visualization of leadership assistance, visualization of the role of a leader, How to be a leader, How to be a principal, How to be a leader in any part of education, defined leadership, You have to be detail-oriented, confirmed what I knew; made me believe Master's was achievable	Not taught by experienced educators to taught by experienced educators; decrease leadership knowledge to increase in	3. How did your school support you holistically?	"First of all, we had about a course to finish. And each of them was a different part of leadership, and required was taught by a lot of experienced educators and teachers... it kind of helped me see role of the leader in education" Lines 5:39-6:12
7	Eugene	Relationships	Career mentors in education, some of the mentors Black males, no formal mentoring program; had similar experiences, experience connections on different levels, had camaraderie, sharing the same backgrounds, same academic-social experiences	Students, Non-Professional, or Professional	No Formal Mentoring, Informal Mentoring, Cohort mentoring, graduate school experience, leadership opportunities, supervisor mentor, support system, information gathering	Black men and black female cohort, met with black male and females mentors, comfortable with Black male cohort, striving for the same goal, no formal mentoring process, helping each other, discussions, connect on different levels, have camaraderie, share backgrounds, same academic	Not participating in a Black cohort mentoring program to participation in a Black cohort mentoring program; not participating in an informal cohort mentoring program to	4.Did you participate in a mentoring program? Did you participate in any type of mentoring program while you pursued your master's degree? Describe any mentoring relationships in which you were involved.	"No, at no time that I ever participate in a formal mentoring program, although my teachers, at least some of them were black. e they had made me believe that they could do it, I could do it." Lines 8:27-9:28
8	Eugene	Mentoring Aspects	Study groups, supporting one another, camaraderie, trying for the same goal, information gathering, seeking own mentoring, resourcefulness, people you can share with	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Cohort mentoring, Cohort shared experiences, Cohort discussions, Shared experiences, connection with black cohorts, Emulation of AA Male Teachers, AA successful male teachers,	Encouragement, someone able to shadow, show you different perspectives, Black men and black female cohort, met with black male and females mentors, comfortable with Black male cohort, striving for the same goal, no formal mentoring process, helping each other, discussions, connect on different levels, have camaraderie	Unable to shadow to able to shadow; not striving for the same goals to striving for the same goals; No mutual trust to having camaraderie;	5. What mentoring aspects helped you to persist and obtain an advanced degree.	"But it was just me looking at a different examples of African American male teachers and trying to pattern myself after them." Line 12:54
9	Eugene	Relationships	Seeing more AA principals, seeing more AA males, seeing different people in the same role, showing you a different way, more opportunities to observe others, shadowing	Personal, Non-professional, or Professional	Informal mentoring: AA male principals, observing teachers, Advocates, Principals, AA males, Teachers, Experienced Teacher	More AA male principals, having more AA males around me, everyone's different, observing teachers do the same thing, showing you a different way of doing something, mentors showing variety, mentors showing a different environment, presenting more opportunities to observe others, to see mentors in action (teaching)	Having more AA male principals to not having more AA male principals	6.What would have been the ideal mentoring support system for you as you attended graduate school? (Did you participate in a formal or informal mentoring program?)	"One is something with a lot of encouragement, a lot of encouragement because I can say that getting the master's degree was something I never experienced before." Line 32:53

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	**Participant**	**Themes**	**Concepts**	**Categories**	**Sub-Categories**	**Properties**	**Dimensions**	**Interview Questions**	**Direct Quotes (Timestamp)**
2	James	Academic Support Aspects	employee discount, professor-like mentors, professors showed concern, wanted to be part of life, felt not just a student, friendship, professors personally know me, assignment deadline adjustments, intersectionality, helped work/life balance, make-up assignments	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Informal mentoring, assignments, occupational support, grades, work	Rescheduling classroom assignments, gave space, make-up assignments, supportive faculty, GPA support, working full-time support, emotional support, autonomy, respect, wanting to help people, people wanting to make a difference in other's lives, professors that were like mentors and friends, world renowned professor leadership, respect of intersectionality, friendly relationships	No space to autonomy; No supportive faculty to supportive faculty	3. How did your school support you holistically?	"I think there was support where I was given opportunities because I was working full-time to actually rewrite or turn in later…so they respected me and gave me space." Line 5:58 - 6:04; Line 6:24
3	James	Relationships	career mentor, no formal mentor program, informal connection, supervisor informal mentor, normalizing experiences, Self-development group mentor, career mentoring, no formal mentored program, informal connection, supervisor informal mentor	Students, Non-Professional, or Professional	Student/Work Peers, Student/Boss, informal mentoring experiences, Received informal mentoring, Faculty social relationships, mentored AA males, Engaged some faculty members, fostering student relationships	Field supervisor; support from boss, received informal mentoring from work peers	No informal mentoring support from peers to informal mentoring support from peers. No informal mentoring support from job to informal mentoring support from job.	4.Did you participate in a mentoring program? Did you participate in any type of mentoring program while you pursued your master's degree? Describe any mentoring relationships in which you were involved.	"My field supervisor was a mentor. "Line 12:04:""I've met faculty, but they were, you know, I got an opportunity to actually meet and engage with them and get to know them….somewhat on a personal level." Line 15:50
4	James	Mentoring Aspects	career mentoring experience, no formal mentor program, informal connection, supervisor informal mentor, encouragement, learned counseling techniques, learned practical aspects, course navigation, faculty social support, engagement with faculty	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Informal mentoring, Student/Instructor-Career support, Student/Faculty engagement, Student/Professional relationships	Helped with work-life balance; gave space (autonomy), gave practical aspects, autonomy, given real techniques, support academically and career-wise, emotional support, social support within faculty, engaged with faculty on personal-level; understood how to foster professional relationships	Received no work-life balance to received work-life balance; No engagement from faculty on a personal level to engagement from faculty on a personal level	5. What mentoring aspects helped you to persist and obtain an advanced degree.	"I think one of the things that allowed me to persist was not only normalizing some of the experiences that I was having, but also given me encouragement (mentor) yes to complete the program. There are times that you know, grad work can be overwhelming." Lines 12:04-12:35
5	James	Relationships	Affinity group, group for AA males, feel the same pain, sounding board, some vulnerability, not feel excluded, shows empathy; social academic or professional relationships, advocacy	Personal, Non-Professional, or Professional	Informal mentoring groups, informal support programs	Self -development group, group counseling classes, affinity groups, process things together, bouncing things off, group that you know you are not alone, can share your space, vulnerability, allow growth, feeling pain the same	Making network connections only of the same race to making network connections with other races	6.What would have been the ideal mentoring support system for you as you attended graduate school? (Did you participate in a formal or informal mentoring program?)	"When you are processing things by yourself, you feel alone." Line 20:07

Participant	Themes	Concepts	Categories	Sub-Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Interview Questions	Direct Quotes (Timestamp)
Melvin	Academic Support Aspects	Scheduled classes, sent e-mail, academic advisor, no mentoring received, mentoring possibility	Personal, Academic, or Professional	No Holistic support, advising	By myself, never talked to advisor, Not much support, Not the greatest advisor, systems were available for support, didn't know how to reach out for advisement - intimidating, received registration assistance; holistic support not available; not available for assistance due to working full-time; no extension, received e-mail, only day-time meetings (Line 2:34 - 5:30).	Never talked to advisor to available day-time advisement systems support; no holistic support available to holistic support available	3. How did your school support you holistically?	"From the first time I got in the program that I had, like my academic advisor, who helped me to register for classes after the first semester. I didn't really speak with anybody into this semester, when it was time to graduate." Line 3:19
Melvin	Relationships	College advisor, informal mentor, group mentoring, class mentoring, meet up, mentor high school students, keep personable, do lunch	Students, Non-Professional, or Professional	Student/Group Mentor, Student/Undergraduate HS Student Mentor	Group mentoring, group work, informal mentoring high school students, keeping it personable; personable, college advisor, Do Lunch, Undergrad experience discussions, position of power, ensuring comfortability (Line 6:26 - 7:27)	Not participating in a mentoring program to participating in an informal group mentoring program	4.Did you participate in a mentoring program? Did you participate in any type of mentoring program while you pursued your master's degree? Describe any mentoring relationships in which you were involved.	"I am a mentor to like undergraduate students. But like me being a mentee, I don't have time." Line 6:26
Melvin	Mentoring Aspects	Self-pressure, role model, role model for family, representation, position of power, age, ability	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Determination, Role Model, Position of Power	Self pressure, means more being AA male, only family member with Master's Degree, being watched, representation is real, visualization, Someone they can emulate; young man - 28 years old in position of power, people observing me, my representation (Line 9:19)	Being nonassertive to being assertive and having self-pressure; not being a representation to being a role model	5. What mentoring aspects helped you to persist and obtain an advanced degree.	"I think a lot of pressure on myself but just being like a young African American man. I just feel like it means more." Line 9:19
Melvin	Relationships	Informal mentoring, representation, outlier, beck and call, non-helicopter parent, phone calls, available within 48-hours, African American male or female	Personal, Non-Professional, or Professional	Mentor availability, social network; representation; no mentoring	Mentors being at your "beck and call"; mentors being a part of your social network; mentors being AA; not a mentoring person	Mentors being unavailable to mentors being available; mentors not being a part of your social network to mentors being a part of your social network; mentors being diverse races to mentors being AA	6.What would have been the ideal mentoring support system for you as you attended graduate school? (Did you participate in a formal or informal mentoring program?)	"So for me, I'm extremely, I'm an outlier. Like I'm extremely different in regards to the fact that I do want representation so I would want it to be either African American male or female, that part as a just African American person who ...Where they are available for you when you have those questions, and you don't need a seminar every week." Line 12:23

Participant	Themes	Concepts	Categories	Sub-Categories	Properties	Dimensions	Interview Questions	Direct Quotes (Timestamp)
Wally	Academic Support Aspects	Financial assistance, derogatory grade dropping, extra course credits, administrative academic support, complaint acknowledgement, administration delivery	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Financial Assistance, School Board Support, Mentor Duties	Considered himself a mentor; Dropped Failing Grade, Teaching and Counseling Fellowships, Reimbursement of Dropped Class, Financial Assistance, Financial Emotional Help, School Board Agreement	Not being a mentor to being a mentor; Kept failing grade to dropped failing grade; no reimbursement of funds for dropped class dropped class	3. How did your school support you holistically?	"...the school understood that something was wrong. And they supported me and they dropped it. And what they ended up doing was giving me a fellowship to where I was able to teach counseling or biblical counseling." Line 11:39
Wally	Relationships	Cohort, togetherness, counseling education, mentoring program, information gathering, finding strengths and weaknesses, professor's hour group, get help, talk to, perspectives, ideas	Students, Non-Professional, or Professional	Student/Professor; Student/Professor's Peer Group; Student/Counseling Cohort; Student/Military Peer Group	400-hours counseling education, discussion group of 5 students, professor's hour group, informal mentoring, military peer group	No mentoring from professor to informal mentoring from professor; no mentoring from counseling education cohort to informal mentoring from professor's hour group	4.Did you participate in a mentoring program? Did you participate in any type of mentoring program while you pursued your master's degree? Describe any mentoring relationships in which you were involved.	"So you could take a 400 hours of clinical counseling education which is basically a mentoring program." Line 29:30
Wally	Mentoring Aspects	Cohort, togetherness, information gathering, finding strengths and weaknesses, get help, talk to, perspectives, ideas, listening ear, depend on, depend on, sounding board, honesty	Personal, Academic, or Professional	Student/Confidant	Collaboration, bounce things off of, help him, double those who get help, Share with, Idea exchange, listening ear, Double help, Willing to walk the journey, Challenged with Different Perspectives, challenged thinking, Provided honesty, trust-worthiness, objective, critical thinking	No idea exchange to collaboration; not having a listening ear to being receptive to different perspectives	5. What mentoring aspects helped you to persist and obtain an advanced degree	"Just being able to have somebody to talk to and bounce things off of and help and, you know, when the frustrations became overwhelming, and, you know....because I shared with him and he gave me some ideas and approaches to take on how to deal
Wally	Relationships	Give guidance, non-crutch, non-savior, allow mistakes, get help, talk to, perspectives, ideas, listening ear, depend on, sounding board, honesty	Personal, Non-Professional, or Professional	Experienced graduate, not a savior, guider, director	Someone who has experienced graduate school, a mentor to give guidance along the way, a mentor is not a savior; there to give guidance and direction; allows one to make mistakes, let you to be able to win, let you pull away	no mentoring to mentoring with guidance and direction; no mentoring to mentoring an allow you to make your own decisions	6.What would have been the ideal mentoring support system for you as you attended graduate school? (Did you participate in a formal or informal mentoring program?)	"Don't think the mentor is responsible for the outcome. I think they are there to give guidance and directions and allow you to make your own mistakes." Line 45:30

Appendix J – ABC Church Approval Letter

June 9, 2021

Ms Paula H. Miller

Re: Approval Letter for Dissertation Study

Dear Paula Miller

We approve your request to invite members of the congregation, by an email blast to participate in your qualitative research dissertation study, *"Mentoring: The Factors that Contribute to Persistence for African American Males in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) of Higher Learning in Missouri."*

We pray you will have great success with your project.

Sincerely

The ABC Church

Cc: Member File

Appendix K – IRB Training Completion

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 08-May-2021
Expiration Date 07-May-2024
Record ID   42323496

This is to certify that:

Paula Miller

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Under requirements set by:

University of Missouri-St. Louis

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w8b772149-e425-4bd0-b460-04a14d0b953e-42323496

Appendix L - Memos

Memo Codes by Theme		
Theme	**C o d e**	**Concept**
Academic Support Aspects		9
Relationships		13
Mentoring Aspects		125

*Note this Table denotes the color codes for this research study themes by the concept. This is an example of how the categories were developed through the themes and concepts in this memo from the semi-structured interviews. There was a constant comparison of the categories and subcategories for selective coding.

James, a 55-year-old, married, educator

Before this meeting, I was reflecting on how blessed I was and thankful that I was referred to this participant. I was thinking about this verse, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). I felt that this interviewing process was God's plan for me to meet and to interview inspirational individuals. This interview was inspirational because James referred to mentorship as helping to reach one's goals, having to go through pain, but pushing through to meet one's goals. These were my thoughts. I remembered getting very positive vibes from this interviewee. The respondent started by asking, "Are you around this area?" I told him, "Yes." He said that he thought so because that is a St. Louis (lingo). I had not thought about adjusting the question until I asked the respondent about the school that he attended.

From the beginning of the interview, the participant stressed that he had been given support because of working full-time and the professors understood

intersectionality, being a husband, father, and student. They gave him space and support. The respondent seemed very proud of this fact in his assertive disposition. As he spoke, he constantly praised his professors for their support and respect for him as a non-traditional student. He stated that his supervisors gave him space and gave him constant encouragement. He also stressed that he was not part of a mentoring program; however, he received informal mentoring from his supervisors, professors, and peers. He also mentioned that he ran a self-development mentoring group that assisted incoming undergraduate students to acclimate to campus life.

He recommended for those who had an interest in acquiring advanced education: a) be your advocate; b) not be afraid to challenge who they are, and c) not miss out on opportunities. James emphasized having self-determination to take advantage of mentoring opportunities. The person that does not look like you can still be an exceptional mentor. Also, mentoring peer groups can assist students to make sure they are on the right track. "Mentoring relationships help to keep it honest, real, help you to reach goals even though you may have to go through pain…. but push through it – you can do this."

Eugene, a 61-year-old, married, educator

Although I am familiar with this individual, I knew he would be very effective in his responses to the questions for this research study. This person was proud of the fact that he had been taught by exemplary educators. He expressed that he did not have formal mentoring, but informal mentoring while beginning his teaching career. He stressed that during his practicum, he received a lot of encouragement from his peers and his instructors. He felt that this informal mentoring, especially from those of his race,

was advantageous for him in acquiring his master's degree as well as pursuing his doctoral degree. He stated that he tried to pattern himself after African American educators were successful. He was passionate in his responses about how his study group or cohort were also strong informal mentors. He felt that mentoring from men or women would be advantageous. He also reiterated if they could be successful; he could, too.

According to Eugene, it is important for students to seek their own mentoring, surround themselves with people that are on their side, and not be afraid to change their educational journey. Eugene added that it is essential that African American males combat stereotypes. That is, "Do not get boxed in." Get all the information that you need to be successful and find the best mentor for your educational pathway.   Eugene did not feel that a mentor had to be of the same race, but one who had your best interests at heart.

Charles, a 44-year-old, married, educator

In this interview, although I knew Charles as a classmate, I did not know his advanced educational history. As with most of the other research study participants, Charles had no formal mentoring, but instead, informal mentoring experiences. He was the only participant that stated he acquired his master's degree out of convenience to reach his career goal as an educator. His informal mentoring experiences were from his supervisor, peers, and cohort. This support group motivated him to acquire his master's degree.

What was interesting was that Charles stressed that he did not receive much interaction with his advisor for his master's degree except for course selection, and he received no formal orientation for the master's program. He received the most

encouragement from his coach, his supervisor, and his peers. Additionally, he received

financial assistance from his employer.

Charles recommended that students should seek out mentors on their own.

Although he emphasized that institutions should provide mentoring program initiatives

and professorships to create career pathways, especially for African American males that

have limited representation in higher education. He reiterated it is all about higher

education institutions creating exposure and planting seeds.

Wally, 63-year-old, married, counselor, educator, and entrepreneur

In reflecting on this interview, I thought it was profound that Wally was the only

participant who experienced simultaneous formal mentoring and informal mentoring.

His comments were aligned with the other participants that one needs to seek out their

own mentoring. "You have to be assertive, don't take the first, No!"

Just as some of the other participants shared, Wally received financial support that

helped him to persist and acquire his master's degree. His other support systems were his

professors, peer study group, and his boss from his mentoring career program.

Additionally, he shared that mentoring helped him to figure out the answers for himself

and helped him to grow as a person.

Wally advised that African American males need not be afraid to talk and

question others. He recommended reading, researching, and figuring out your

educational and career pathway. Speak up for yourself and challenge your thinking.

Again, as most of the participants have resounded, "Seek out your own mentoring." Be

your advocate.

David, a 50-year-old, single, entrepreneur

I truly appreciated an individual recommending that I interview David. He was "raw", meaning that he was honest and open about his perspectives. David shared that he only had informal mentoring experiences, and he stressed that a couple of his professors were outstanding instructors and mentors that were African American women. He also stressed that his former supervisor was a mentor and often provided encouragement for him to pursue his master's degree. Additionally, David, just like most of the other participants shared that he received financial assistance through work-study and scholarships.

David contended that having mentors of the same race was essential because he felt that someone could not advise if they did not have similar experiences. However, he felt that if someone had the opportunity to be mentored by someone of a different race or a different gender make sure to take advantage of the mentoring opportunity. Additionally, he stressed that to be successful and to acquire an advanced degree, one should learn to agree to disagree. He also recommended being open-minded, asking questions, and getting involved. He also recommended ensuring that you talk to your professors and get to know them.

Melvin, a 28-year-old, single, educator

Again, this person was recommended to me by another participant. I was saddened that Melvin stated that he did not receive much mentoring help during his journey to acquiring his master's degree. Just like the other participants, Melvin was an older student (e.g., over 25 years old), meaning that he was not the traditional age in college; he had a family and works a full-time job.

Melvin admitted that although mentoring programs were available to graduate students at his higher education institution, he was unable to attend them due to his work hours. He felt that he mostly received help to register for classes, but he did not receive any other support. He felt that he had been a mentor in his career as an educator for high school students.

There were several important points that Melvin made about mentoring for African American males: a) representation is real; b) If you are a mentor, be culturally sensitive; and c) adapt mentoring practices designed for each student. Melvin felt that it was extremely important that African American males saw each other in higher education administrative roles of power that warranted master's degrees; this perspective also emulated the shared experiences of most of the other participants. They agreed that by envisioning success for themselves, they would acquire master's degrees and become mentors for others.

Melvin also reiterated that institutions should be culturally sensitive to the needs of their students. He believed that institutions should configure mentoring programs based on the needs of students considering their cultural backgrounds. He stated that institutions should understand that "Not one size, fits all." Melvin expressed those institutions have an obligation to student success.