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WHA UP BRUH, YOU GOOD: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Taran LanDell McZee

University of Kentucky, tmczee@hotmail.com

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Taran LanDell McZee, Student

Dr. Kelly Bradley, Major Professor

Dr. Jane Jensen, Director of Graduate Studies

WHA UP BRUH, YOU GOOD:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN
MALES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
Taran LanDell McZee

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Kelly Bradley, Professor & Chair of Educational Policy & Evaluation
College of Education
Lexington, Kentucky
2023

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

WHA UP BRUH, YOU GOOD: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

This qualitative case study used a phenomenological research approach to explore the lived experiences of African American male community college students who participate in mentoring programs. Mentoring programs for African American males in higher education have been implemented to help improve retention, academic performance in the classroom, sense of self, intention to complete, and graduation rates (LaVant et al., 1997). Critical race theory (CRT) informed the use of qualitative interview methods to represent the lived experiences of the participants and to elevate the knowledge of young African American men in research on higher education mentoring programs. Research participants were 8 African American male mentees from Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC) and Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC) mentoring programs. Findings revealed the perspectives African American male mentees hold of mentoring programs, their experiences within these programs, and the challenges they believe that mentoring programs might help them overcome. The results of this study contribute to efforts to identify and correct the historical inequities African American males face in higher education. Future research should focus on retention and degree completion and their impact on African American males. African American males attending community college warrant further discussion and research regarding mentoring programs.

KEYWORDS: African American, Mentoring, Community College, Cultural Capital, Social Capital

Taran LanDell McZee

(Name of Student)

07/28/2023

Date

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN
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By
Taran LanDell McZee

Dr. Kelly Bradley

Director of Dissertation

Dr. Jane Jansen

Director of Graduate Studies

07/28/2023

Date

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Extensive research has focused on college completion rates as “many students, including Black males, have concerning levels of success, or the lack thereof, in college” (Wood, 2012, p. 30). Black male students’ college outcomes warrant further investigation. National data shows that African American male students have the lowest college completion rate among all-male student groups of color at 38.6%. The completion rate for Asian American male students is 73.7%, and for Latino male students is 48.7% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). In addition to documented college access concerns related to race, gender, and socioeconomic status, African American male students are also disproportionately first-generation students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). First-generation students are “students whose parents did not attend college or attain a bachelor’s degree,” and may not have access to forms of capital that more readily contribute to college success (Jehangir, 2010, p.533). School professionals from many areas and disciplines “have employed numerous antidotes to improve African American men’s pathways to and through postsecondary education” (Harper & Harris, 2012, p. 1). Scholars and practitioners continue efforts to identify ways to increase African American male students’ college retention rates.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Several philanthropic organizations, including the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, The United Negro College Fund, and the College Board, have arranged national caucuses to evaluate the issues facing African American male college students (Harper & Harris, 2012). One result of these meetings was recommendations for

culturally sensitive antidotal mentoring initiatives for African American male students within P-12 schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions. Research over the past thirty years has shown that mentoring programs may help African American male college students navigate access barriers (Martin, 1990; Quigley & Mitchell, 2018). Further, the government allocated hundreds of millions of dollars for mentoring services within the past decade (Tolan et al., 2014).

With these recommendations, research findings, and resources, the promise and power of mentoring programs at community colleges for African American male students is potentially significant. The number of formal mentoring programs in existence at community colleges nationwide saw incredible growth in the early 2000s (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), and the strengths of these established and maturing programs are of particular interest. Small-scale, qualitative studies may help to understand students' experiences in successful mentoring programs, and data may be transferable for serving African American male students across diverse contexts. Exploring African American male students' experiences and the resources and supports they find valuable could provide insight into successful strategies for retention and degree completion within different communities of African American male students (Brooms et al., 2021).

1.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to better understand African American male community college students' experiences within mentoring programs and the challenges they believe these programs help them overcome. This qualitative, phenomenological study examined the perspectives that African American males enrolled at one of two Southern community colleges hold of mentoring programs to add to the research

literature and to highlight the context of community colleges. Participants in this study described the ways the mentoring program impacted their identities, academic progression, and any meaningful relationships with mentors. Research questions that guided the study were:

RQ1. What features of mentoring programs do African American male community college students believe promote their college success?

RQ2. What challenges do African American male community college students believe mentoring programs help them to overcome?

These questions guided insight into how African American males in two community college settings experience mentoring programs.

The use of qualitative research prevented “context stripping and exclusion of meaning and purpose” which separate the findings from their context, thereby limiting their relevance and presence within broader environments (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 106). Critical race theory (CRT) was used to prioritize race as an important variable when thinking through successful relationships, and the need to attend to the lived experiences and counter-stories of African American male students. With this approach, the research produced rich descriptive insight into the experiences and perceptions of mentoring for African American male community college students.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

This research employed critical race theory (CRT) as the conceptual framework, which allowed the study to acknowledge race as a central component of African American male students’ experiences. Critical race theorists include scholars such as Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Kimberl e Crenshaw, and William Tate. Their work builds

on studies by authors considered to be CRT pioneers such as W.E.B. DuBois and Max Weber (Delgado, 1995). “CRT is a framework used to examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly shape social structures, practices and discourses” (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006, p. 4) and makes several fundamental assumptions. A key, underlying belief of CRT is that racism is a normal and common occurrence in American society (Delgado, 1995). Delgado (1995) argued, “because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture” (p xiv). He further contended that Black people speak from an experience framed by racism, that the lived experiences of those who are oppressed by racism are often different than the experiences of members of the dominant culture group, and that all experiences deserve to be heard.

CRT within the field of education gives much-needed attention to the role that race, and equity play in educational research, scholarship, and practice (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate introduced CRT into the field of education with their seminal article “Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education.” Although CRT was initially met with skepticism by educational researchers (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013), it has now become the most visible analytic theory for analyses of race and racism in education (Leonardo, 2013). There are five components to critical race theory that can be applied to the field of education (Bell & Busey, 2021; Serano, 2017):

- (1) understanding of individual experiences, which is centered around the importance of race and racism in the understanding of individual experiences

(2) challenging dominant ideology, which challenges the assumptions of objectivity, naturalness, and equal opportunity within education, (3) commitment to social justice, which involves commitment to social justice by working to eliminate oppression and empower marginalized groups, (4) experiential knowledge and voice, which gives marginalized people voice to certify the effects and consequences of racism by valuing their lived experiences, and (5) interdisciplinary perspectives, which is the utilization of interdisciplinary perspectives by analyzing race and racism in education through historical and current contexts (Bell & Busey p. 33).

This study primarily emphasized theme one (the importance of race and racism in individual experiences) and theme four (the importance of experiential knowledge). The use of experiential knowledge is also known as storytelling or counter-storytelling (Delgado, 1989). Storytelling and counter-storytelling are methods that show the lived experiences of people of color as valid and speak both to and against structural racism (Delgado, 1989).

CRT has been used in educational research to challenge the perception that racial inequities are due to the failures of African American male students versus the failures of higher education institutions. For example, in 2010 a group of researchers conducted a qualitative study on men of color's experiences in community college. The group did not exclusively use a critical race theory framework, but the study contained several important implications of the racial experiences of African American male students. The authors found that men of color “identified low expectations and negative stereotypes based on their race, ethnicity, and gender as salient elements of their experiences”

(Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Martin, & Castro, 2010, p. iii). The result of this and other studies (e.g., Bimper, 2017; Quigley & Mitchell, 2018) suggest CRT can help identify challenges to college retention for African American male community college students. CRT has also been used in prior research to explore how mentoring programs can promote social justice by providing rich interdisciplinary perspectives, services, and support (Serrano, 2017).

The use of CRT when examining access to higher education and college retention entails examining the insights, concerns, and questions students of color have about their prospects for pursuing higher education. A CRT framework was best suited for this work because it allowed me to examine African American male college students' senses of the structures and practices that facilitate academic success, and presumes the validity of their counter-stories.

1.5 Mentoring Programs

Formal mentoring is a process designed to create meaningful and trustworthy relationships that bring young people together with individuals who will offer support, encouragement, and guidance. It is a powerful and popular way for people to learn a variety of personal and professional skills (Chopin, Danish, Seers, & Hook, 2013; Kunich & Lester, 1999). Mentoring programs can vary considerably from institution to institution, and mentoring programs serve different purposes based on the program's mission and vision of (Wesley, Dzoba, Miller, & Rasche, 2016). Despite these differences, literature addressing the value of mentoring within organizational settings is plentiful (Butler, Whiteman, & Crow, 2013). Mentoring programs are "well-conceived and formalized support systems... put into place to promote achievement" (LaVant,

Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997, p. 43). When they are formulated to meet the needs of troubled can provide critical services for many communities (Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014). Mentoring has proven valuable in many organizations and continues to advance as a significant contributor to leadership development (Artis, 2013; Srivastava & Jomon, 2013; Sun, Pan, & Chow, 2014).

Some believe there are benefits and best practices of mentoring when exploring ways to improve Black male students' ability to navigate life's challenges (Brondyk & Searby, 2013; Robinson, 2012). Mentoring programs aimed at African American male community college students are usually tailored to address the specific needs of African American male students, as well as monitor the progression of retention and degree completion (Quigley & Mitchell, 2018). According to Martin (1990), mentoring empowers African American male students attending community colleges and helps them to connect with the institution and build key relationships with faculty, staff, and administration.

In 2009, the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education conducted a study that included 219 Black male undergraduates. The students surveyed identified meaningful mentor relationships with campus administrators and faculty outside the classroom as part of their college success, as well as enriching educational experiences, recognition for college achievement, college preparatory coursework in high school (such as Urban Prep Academy), and participation in college summer bridge programs. The study identified mentoring through the Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center for the African American Male at the Ohio State University as "one of several initiatives that help African American men succeed" academically prior

to college enrollment (Feintuch, 2010, p.18). This program is designed to reduce anxiety and acclimate African American male students to the Ohio State University environment and extend the resources that will better enable them to focus on being a successful college student. The Todd Anthony Bell Center engages Black male students prior to their first semester in college by inviting them to attend an early arrival program. Prior to launching the program, the African American male student retention rate was 80.7%. Four years after the Todd Anthony Bell Center's founding, "the retention rate reached 89.3 %, on par with that of [Ohio State University's] general population at 92.8 %" (Feintuch, 2010, p. 18).

Another exemplary mentoring program for Black male students is the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB). In 1990, Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe founded the SAAB on the campus of Georgia Southwestern State University in response to the numerous academic and social issues faced by Black men on college campuses. Recognizing that this was an issue present across many universities, SAAB has since grown into a nationally recognized organization providing thousands of men of color with the mentorship, resources, and support needed to achieve success. To date, SAAB chapters exist in more than 40 states on university, college, and high school campuses. Core features of the SAAB program include the provision of positive role models and mentors and program revision based on student feedback. Students who participate in SAAB believe that the program contributes to a successful adjustment to college life and the skills needed to positively connect with other male students. The students also connect with faculty and staff mentors to higher grade point averages and receive

personal fulfillment as they grow into a mentor role for others (Kenneth, Carley, & Brown, 2009).

Shaun Harper (2004) conducted qualitative research on the experiences of African American males with high-achieving grades and goals. In the final summary of his study, Harper concluded, “it is important to connect African American male undergraduates to African American male mentors who can expose them to alternate definitions of what it means to be a man” (p.104). The African American male mentoring programs at Oklahoma City Community College and Bluegrass Community & Technical College recognize the lack of mentors for African American males at their institutions. To address the situation they were dealing with, they both decided to create mentoring programs and involve the community where both institutions reside. Both programs have created space where African American men in the community can get involved with mentoring students at the colleges. All of the studies on African American college students cited in this section focused on four-year institutions.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Researchers have noted the importance of African American male college students having mentors. Participation in mentoring programs has the potential to benefit African American male students in several ways, including college retention and completion. Findings from this study are significant because higher education professionals need to know more about these and other benefits of mentoring programs, particularly within the context of community colleges. Further, this study followed conceptual precedent by centering race as a feature of African American male college students’ lived experiences by using CRT. Current programs and theories that

acknowledge the success of mentoring programs for African American males are largely based on research at four-year institutions. Many African American males begin their educational journey at community college, so this study responds to a need in the research literature. The primary audience for this study is higher education practitioners in community college settings who are interested in developing or improving mentoring programs for African American male students and identifying the challenges that African American male college students believe mentoring programs help them to overcome.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Mentoring programs have the potential to influence African American male community college students in several positive ways. As stated, the study aims to better understand African American male community college students' experiences within mentoring programs and the challenges they believe mentoring programs help them overcome. African American male students' perspectives on these mentoring programs tell who they understand themselves to be and the support they need for college success. Several scholarly works over the past three decades have begun to critically interrogate the experiences of Black males and their schooling circumstances (Brown & Davis, 2000; Davis, 2003; Franklin, 1991; Gibbs, 1988; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2008; Madhubuti, 1990; Noguera, 1996; Polite & Davis, 1999; Polite, 1994; Price, 2000). The literature review for this study is divided into two parts. The first part of the literature review is a summary of research on concepts that scholars have used to theorize the challenges that African American male students face in higher education. This includes research on college preparation and completion disparities, stereotype threat, negative faculty interactions, racialized campus environments and racial battle fatigue, and African American male college students' invisibility in higher education. The second part of the literature review is a summary of social and cultural capital, a concept used to theorize the benefits of mentoring initiatives. In order to maintain alignment with the principles of CRT, research that focused on race or the lived experiences and counter-stories of Black students was prioritized.

2.2 Leading Challenges for African American Male Students in Higher Education

2.2.1 College Preparation and Completion Disparities

Among the Black men who do successfully matriculate into college, a disproportionately high number are underprepared for college-level work. As evidenced by Cuyjet's (1997) extensive review of the literature, Black male collegians have been linked to several issues related to college preparation: poor K-12 schooling, lowered expectations among significant adults and peers about academic achievement, limited access to suitable mentors and role models, and assorted barriers related to racism. As evidenced by data from the American Council on Education (Palmer & Young, 2009), college participation rates have gradually risen among all racial/ethnic groups, yet Black men lag significantly behind Black women counterparts in terms of their college enrollment, retention, and degree completion. Harper and Wood (2016) described how young Black men often enter higher education with developmental disadvantages that contribute to poorer academic performance. Despite the popularization of research and programs focused on Black male collegians, Harper (2014) observed that most efforts enacted between 1997 and 2012 did little to improve the status of these students in U.S. higher education. Black male college students remain underrepresented across higher education institutions including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Harper, 2014; Tolliver, Kacirek & Miller, 2020). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that from a CRT perspective, phenomena like college completion disparities should not be attributed primarily to the values or abilities of Black communities, but to structural issues related to race and racism.

2.2.2 Stereotype Threat

Once enrolled in college, Black male students are often faced with stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is a situational predicament in which people are or feel themselves to be at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group (Inzlicht, 2011). Stereotype threat is experienced across genders and in racial groups that would be classified as a minority, such as Black, Hispanic, and Native American (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Pertaining to African Americans in higher education, stereotype threat is the risk of low-test performance outcomes and overall academic underperformance (Howard, 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Research conducted on stereotype threat suggests that racial and gendered achievement gaps, especially those that are attached to high-stakes tests, are partly due to stereotypes that dispute the math and intellectual abilities of White women, African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and people from low-income backgrounds (Coleman, 2011; Steele, 1992; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Several educational researchers believe that acknowledging stereotype threat in academic settings can close gender and racial/ethnicity achievement gaps (Coleman, 2011; Kellow & Jones, 2005; Osborne, 2007). It has been shown that stereotype threat plays a significant role in explaining why African American male students may underachieve academically. Delgado's (1989) critical race theory and concept of counter-stories provide an important way to access African American male students' lived experiences of stereotype threat.

2.2.3 Faculty Interactions

Faculty interactions play a critical role in whether a Black male persists in college. The literature on faculty interactions with Black male students reveals both

tensions and opportunities between students' needs and desires and how they believe they might be viewed by faculty members (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Burt et al., 2019; Dancy, 2010; Dawson-Threat, 1997; Goings, 2017). Additionally, studies also show that faculty members can undermine students' college experiences through disregard for Black male students' capabilities, low (or no) expectations for Black male success and engaging in a realm of racial microaggressions, and harboring various stereotypical views of Black males (Brooms, 2017; Harper, Smith, & Davis, 2018; Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen, 2016). Black male students must carry themselves a certain way to gain respect from faculty in the classroom. Often Black students would have to either must set in the front of the class or answer questions in class for the faculty member to take them seriously in their course. Goings (2017) found that traditional students used a strategy they described as "standing out" to foster faculty relationships. Some of these students used their style of dress to distinguish themselves from other Black males on campus; they expressed an understanding of how their appearance could play a role in developing relationships with faculty. Other students tried to use the quality of their work as a vehicle to help them stand out (Goings, 2017). Delgado's (1989) use of CRT and the importance of lived experiences of the oppressed support qualitative research to better understand African American male students' lived experiences with faculty.

2.2.4 Racialized Campus Environment and Racial Battle Fatigue

Campus climate and environment play a significant role in Black male students having successful academic and social experiences on a college campus. Strayhorn (2015) provides persuasive evidence that "hostility toward Black male students on many

college campuses continues to be an important issue that affects perceptions of a chilly climate and unwelcoming campus environment” (p. 49). In fact, Strayhorn et al. (2013) suggested there are several factors undermining Black male success including culture shock, poor relationship with administration and faculty, and lack of support from peers. Brooks, Jones & Burt (2012) noted that the “research on African Americans who attend PWIs suggested that university administrators, faculty and staff fail to identify problems affecting African Americans on campus” (p. 211). This study added that Black male student success is hindered by not having well-developed study skills. Support structures such as “mentoring programs for Black male students, ongoing faculty and staff professional development, curriculum development, creating and fostering a sense of cultural awareness and community on campus can go a long way in helping Black males adjust and succeed at college life” (Strayhorn, et al., 2013, p. 23).

A positive campus climate has been found to be associated with better outcomes for Black male students (Beckles, 2008; Ihekwaba, 2001; Roberts, 2009). On the other hand, unwelcoming, hostile, and alienating campus climates lead to negative student outcomes for young Black men in college (Harrison, 1999; Wilkins, 2005). For example, Riley (2007) found evidence of a negative campus climate at the institution she studied, noting that campus police repeatedly harassed Black students there. Bush and Bush (2010) found that a positive institutional climate was a strong predictor of Black men’s probability of transferring to a four-year college and academic achievement. Similarly, Wood (2010) found that a positive campus climate served as a driver for student success. Scholars clearly have demonstrated that Black collegians are more likely to have negative assessments of campus climate than their peers of other races (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr,

2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003). Researchers also have demonstrated how universities are working to improve campus racial climates by developing targeted campus-based interventions (Hurtado et al., 2012).

Many African American students are first-generation students which contributes to another set of anxieties and stressful expectations for success. Racial battle fatigue is yet another phenomenon that African American males endure. Racial battle fatigue may be best understood as signs of “stress in the forms of frustration, anger, exhaustion, physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies associated with being an African American male on historically white campuses” (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007, p. 552).

Strayhorn coined the concept, “Racialized Campus Environment: Sense of Belonging.” Due to stereotype threat and racial battle fatigue, racial/ethnic minorities may experience social isolation, alienation, racism, and negative stereotypes about their academic ability in college (Steele, 1997; Strayhorn, 2009c). One’s intelligence and energy may be diverted from scholastic pursuits (e.g., studying, thinking) to concerns about how one is perceived. Indeed, patterns of behavior that either single out or marginalize Black male students because of their race/ ethnicity may leave them feeling less confident than their peers about their abilities (i.e., self-efficacy) and lacking a sense of belonging on campus, which, in turn, can lead to withdrawal or drop out. In response to these concerns, researchers have turned attention to noncognitive determinants of college student success and the role that a sense of belonging plays in their academic

achievement (Strayhorn, 2012a). Strayhorn also advanced a theory for belonging in college that includes four major assumptions and seven core elements. College students' sense of belonging theory assumes that the concept refers to feelings that members matter to one another and the group, a person's perceived indispensability within a system, and an individual's sense of identification in relation to a group (which yields an effective response), and a student's sense of being accepted, valued, and cared about in academic spaces (Strayhorn, 2012a).

2.2.5 Invisibility

Critical race theorist Ladson-Billings (2011) asserted that "perhaps more than any other group in our society, America has a love-hate relationship with Black males" (p. 8). She contended that although much of America embraces, idolizes, and emulates the trends and cultural norms of Black males in sports, entertainment, and popular culture, we then blame them for all that is wrong in inner cities across the country. Young Black males are not given a platform to express who they are, their realities, the daily microaggression they experience, or the opportunity to vent about their frustrations. African American males can be perceived as "invisible" on college campuses. African American college men can be subjected to the "hiding in plain sight" that Ralph Ellison (1952) depicted in his classic novel, Invisible Man. Succumbing to a "cultural myopia," members of the majority culture easily recognize minority individuals who assimilate into the majority culture and exhibit characteristics typical of that dominant culture (p.7).

Even in those instances where the administration of a PWI seems to recognize the validity of a distinct Black male culture within the campus community, there is a danger

of another form of invisibility, which allows the administration not to recognize and accommodate the variety of backgrounds and various community characteristics from which Black men come from (Cuyjet, 1997). Administrators must condition themselves not to make any assumptions about these students based on their appearance or the generalized characteristics of the students around them or in the community (Cuyjet, 2006).

2.3 Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu coined the term cultural capital. Bourdieu, a known and respected sociologist created this theory of cultural capital which has been described as a “signature concept” for explaining inequalities related to social class in an educational setting. In reading several articles on cultural capital, I found that in the 1960s, Bourdieu established that inequalities in children’s educational settings were based on their social setting, race, and origins, but could not be explained simply in terms of individual cognitive ability. One of Bourdieu’s major insights on educational inequality is that students with more valuable social and cultural capital fare better in school than their otherwise-comparable peers with less valuable social and cultural capital. The social reproduction perspective has proved especially useful in attempts to gain a better understanding of how race and class influence the transmission of educational inequality (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 37). There was a wide agreement that what was further required was research that would go beyond simply establishing associations between the social characteristics of students and their educational performance, and that would seek “to specify the processes by which these characteristics are translated into differences in achievement” (Rossi, 1961, p. 269).

Building on the literature on cultural capital, Annette Lareau explored the complex topic of cultural capital, race, and social class in aspects of children's experiences in school. Lareau's thoughts on race and social class stem from the importance of family relationships. Lareau suggested that:

it is more difficult for black parents than white parents to comply with the institutional standards of schools. In particular, educators are relentless in their demands that parents display positive, supportive approaches to education. The historical legacy of racial discrimination, however, makes it far more difficult for black parents than white parents to comply with such demands. Although social class seems to influence how black and white parents negotiate their relationships with schools, for black's race plays an important role, independent of social class, in framing the terms of their relationship" (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 38).

Black parents are often concerned about their children's surroundings and lives outside their homes, particularly the racial problems their children may endure. Black middle-class fathers, especially, were likely to stress the importance of their sons understanding "what it means to be a black man in this society" (J. Hochschild, 1995, p. 24).

2.4 Social Capital

James Coleman (1988) conceptualized social capital as the strength of a relationship between two individuals and explored it in the context of relationships between adults and youths. Social capital is a popular concept that incorporates multiple dimensions in relationships. Alejandro Portes (1998) defined social capital as "the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures (p.6)." Research on social capital determines what contributes to the activation

of relationships with youth and how positive those relationships can become. Coleman (1988) identified five characteristics of adult-child relationships that help to transfer social capital to youth:

1. the amount of time spent together in a relationship,
2. the racial similarity in a mentor-mentee match,
3. youth's reported level of trust in their mentor,
4. the social class similarity in a mentor-mentee match, and
5. closure between parent and mentor.

These findings provide the basis for thinking about social capital in relation to mentoring programs. According to Coleman (1988), adult-youth relationships that take these five factors into account are likely to be stronger, high-quality, and successful in transferring social capital. Social capital may be embedded in a relationship, but an individual's ability to access it depends on the strength of their relationship with another individual (Coleman, 1988).

2.5 Social and Cultural Capital in Research on Race and Mentoring

Coleman (1988) suggested that trust is a form of social capital. If individuals are to form relationships that lead to a variety of benefits, they must be able to trust each other, particularly in the form of obligations and expectations. Several other scholars have explored the idea of trust as social capital and suggest that expectations, confidence, and assurance form the basis of trust (Lewicki and Brinsfield 2009; Lewicki et al. 1998). Gaddis suggested that "certain forms of social homophily are a crucial element in the creation of social capital" (Gaddis 2012, p. 1240). Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) posited that an individual's network consists of more relationships based on similarity

than difference. They found that individuals had more associations based on status homophily (including race) and value homophily (including racial attitudes) than heterophily. Moreover, similarity based on race and ethnicity is present in a wide range of relationships, from strong bonds such as marriages and friendships to weak bonds such as short-term contacts (Blau, Becker & Fitzpatrick 1984; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001). Gaddis (2012) also suggested that “relationships based on racial similarity may be so prevalent throughout society because racial similarity, and similarity in general, inspires trust” (p. 1240). The findings of at least two studies suggest that higher levels of trust stem from racial similarity and result in better use of social resources in networks (Light, 1984; Light and Bonacich, 1988). Additional research finds that minorities and low-SES individuals typically have lower levels of cross-racial trust (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002; Costa and Kahn, 2003; Eckel and Wilson, 2004). If an individual cannot create a positive and trusting bond, it will be unlikely that this relationship will last, and the trust will never be established. This research supports mentoring programs where mentors have cultural, racial, and experiential matches with mentees.

Studies on mentoring over the years have revealed that racial similarity leads to a better and more robust relationship between a mentor and mentee. Thomas (1989) found that both blacks and whites formed a stronger bond in same-race rather than cross-race pairs. When the mentor and mentee are of the same race, the mentee may see the mentor as knowledgeable and sympathetic about their situation. Zirkel (2002) found that students in same-race relationships received better grades, reported more goals and more positive extracurricular activities, and were more likely to consider future plans. Also, with a stronger bond between same-race mentoring, social capital increases when the mentor is

higher in status or social class. Lin et al. (1981) showed that higher-status contacts increase occupational prestige. Data has shown that relationships based on social class differences lead to a better mentoring experience for youth (Lai, Lin & Leung 1998; Marsden & Hurlbert 1988). A college-educated mentor, who is likely to have a network of college-educated friends and acquaintances, may prove very beneficial to a youth with few or no college-educated relatives. A mentor may serve as an example of how exhibiting more productive behavior and succeeding academically leads to upward social mobility, an example that may not be widely available for at-risk youths in their own communities. Research indicates that mentors do provide such benefits, including tutoring, information on continuing education and careers, and valuable connections to other influential people (Dreher and Cox 1996; Fagenson-Eland, Marks & Amendola 1997). Additionally, Erickson, McDonald & Elder (2009) found that in informal mentoring relationships, youths of the lowest SES levels gained the most from mentors in terms of educational attainment. If the implicit mission of some mentor programs is to close the gap between a student's culture (i.e., embodied cultural capital) and the culture of the school (i.e., institutional cultural capital), mentors and mentees must first understand the social capital process.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study is to better understand African American male community college students' experiences within mentoring programs and the challenges they believe that these programs help them overcome. The study uses the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for data collection. The naturalistic paradigm allows students to express student's experiences, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. Through their narratives, experiences, and storytelling, they will provide insight into the benefit of mentorship programs for Black male students who are enrolled in a community college. Research questions that will guide the study are as follows:

RQ1. What features of mentoring programs do African American male community college students believe promote their college success?

RQ2. What challenges do African American male community college students believe mentoring programs help them to overcome?

This chapter outlines my research approach, site and participation, methods of data collection and background and positionality. I addressed strategies to ensure the overall collection of research and trustworthiness of the design.

3.2 Site and Participant Selection

I chose two mentoring programs that focus on African American males in community college. *Students Connecting with Mentors for Success* (SCMS) at Oklahoma City Community College and *A Few Good Men* (FGM) at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. These are the real program names, and data shared about both programs below was taken from their respective websites. Both programs have had

success in recruiting, retaining, and graduating African American males. Both mentoring programs are tied to the institutions and the communities that they serve.

3.2.1 Students Connecting with Mentors for Success (SCMS)

Students Connecting with Mentors for Success (SCMS) at Oklahoma City Community College was created for African American males in 2015. The goals of SCMS are to improve academic achievement and increase retention and graduation rates for African American male students who are enrolled at Oklahoma City Community College. SCMS prepares students for successful entry into the workforce or for enrollment into a four-year academic institution. This is achieved by furnishing mentors who provide supportive relationships that facilitate academic program completion for every student. Mentors for SCMS are members from the Oklahoma City community who must go through a screening procedure before they can be a part of the program. A SCMS student is paired with a mentor in the student's field of interest. For example, you have government officials, bankers, lawyers, doctors, and accountants who are mentors in the program. (Oklahoma City Community College, n.d).

SCMS is a program designed to provide degree-seeking students with mentors and intra-campus resources to facilitate successful academic achievement, higher retention rates, and graduation completion. The SCMS program focuses on connecting students with professionals in their area of interest who will offer support, guidance, and engagement according to each student's need. The program has a 93% graduation rate for African American males. Students in the program meet every week as a group, and they meet with their mentor. They have a peer mentor and a mentor in the community—the standard of the program predicated on the student's participation and the student is paired

with the community mentor by the student's career interest. Students must commit to a weekly meeting, submit grades every four weeks, write papers two weeks in advance of the due date, and study for their test two weeks in advance. Students also must visit the tutoring and writing center on a bi-weekly schedule. The students' papers must be signed off by the writing center and presented to their peer mentor the week before the paper is due. The mentors guide the young men on life decisions, finances, career aspirations, being a better man, father, and husband for their family. SCMS not only improves the lives of the students and their families but increases their positive involvement in the community and their investment in the economic growth of Oklahoma (Oklahoma Community College, n.d).

SCMS mentoring program currently has 65 African American males from the ages of 18 through 35. These students' economic backgrounds range from low income to middle class financially. The average GPA (grade point average) for students' participants in this program is 3.35 compared to campus-wide GPA of 2.6. In five years, SCMS has seen the GPA of the lowest-performing demographic, African American males, rise from an average GPA of 2.03 to an astounding 3.35. (Oklahoma Community College, n.d).

3.2.2 A Few Good Men (FGM)

A Few Good Men (FGM) is a program established by the Diversity Task Force for Recruiting and Retention at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. The retention program is designed to empower African American males, academically, personally, and professionally (Bluegrass Community & Technical College, n.d). The mission of the program is to increase, encourage, and support inclusion and educational

success for this population. This retention program fosters a supportive environment for students to learn and grow as active members of the academic community and as individuals through education. FGM improves their quality of life by enhancing leadership, educational and economic opportunities for personal and professional growth (Bluegrass Community & Technical College, n.d).

Bluegrass Community and Technical College utilizes its infrastructure to serve as a vehicle to motivate and empower FGM to become leaders to fold within the breadth and depth of the communities in which they live. FGM goals are to build strong relationships with faculty, staff, and community leaders, to build relationships with the Lexington community, and create partnerships for workforce opportunities. FGM must meet with the African American Retention specialist and Academic Advisor four times a semester. FGM meets with their mentor on a weekly basis through phone calls, zoom meetings, or in person. FGM men must attend and participate in a monthly “real talk” workshop. FGM has a partnership with Commerce Lexington where Commerce provides internships for FGM in the field of interest (Bluegrass Community & Technical College n.d).

3.2.3 Participant Recruitment and Selection

This phenomenological study focused on uncovering the voices of African American males in the SCMS and FGM mentoring program. This gave me the opportunity to take a deeper look into the lives of the students in the mentoring program while recognizing the diversity of their experiences prior to and during college. I planned to recruit African American Males to interview that are participating in SCMS and FGM mentoring programs. I interviewed participants to better understand their full experience

during their participation in the program. Additional criteria for recruitment included inviting students with a range of backgrounds including first-generation college student status, Pell Grant eligibility, and enrolled full or part-time. I worked with SCMS and A Few Good Men directors to identify students to participate in the interviews. I asked the directors to assist in contacting the students. If the student agreed to the interview, I sent a detailed invitation for the student to participate in the study.

3.3 Data Collection

I used the semi-structured interviewing tactic as a process of questioning. This helped generate data for the perspective of their mentorship experiences. My goal was to take a deeper look at successful mentoring programs for African American males. Another goal was to see how student relationships develop with professionals and how this related to increasing graduation rates and potential employment beyond graduation. The interviews took place virtually (via Zoom), in a one-on-one setting. The interviews were recorded through audio and zoom recordings. Once I received the answers from the questions, I transcribed and coded the student's responses. I conducted the interviews with each student individually. I made sure the student was in a comfortable setting and have appropriate technology to get the best answers without any interruptions. I conducted interviews to better understand their experience and perspectives on the SCMS and A Few Good Men mentoring programs. Each student experience was different. It was important to gather data that reflected their answers.

I built a rapport with the students, visited, and participated in several of their program meetings. I wanted to make sure the students were familiar with me and I built trust to interview them. The interviews were scheduled for a one-hour period, and only

one interview was conducted. The interview questions were all open-ended, allowing the interviewee to answer the questions based on their perceptions and experiences. Students' identity remained confidential, and I am the only person who has access to the full responses. Participation was voluntary, and refusal of participation involved no penalty or loss of benefits to which students are entitled. Students knew they could discontinue participation in this interview at any time. I asked students to give their honest perspectives and thoughts about the mentoring program.

Although I had the opportunity to interview the young men, it did not go according to plan. I had several obstacles present themselves prior to and during the interview process. The first adversity I had to overcome was my process of interviewing the young men from Bluegrass Community and Technical College. I got permission from the President of the college to interview the students. However, while setting up the interviews, I was told I needed to get the questions approved by the Kentucky Community and Technical College System IRB committee. This process set me back two weeks, but I was approved to interview the students from BCTC. After getting the approval, I move forward with setting up the interviews. This process became difficult because the young men did not respond to my email to set up the Zoom interviews. I contacted them on their phones, Facebook, Instagram, Tic Tok, and Twitter. I returned to the email, but I added an incentive this time, which got the young men's attention. I got all the interviews scheduled with the young men, and then more adversity was presented. Half of the young men had spotty Wi-Fi, some of the young men did not have laptops, or they needed a quiet place to conduct the interview. I had to contact the directors of both mentoring programs and ask them to assist the young men with some needed resources. I

expected the interview process to be relatively easy to coordinate, but the directors had to help me. The directors worked closely with me and we got all the young men interviewed. The challenges of working, class schedules, and families played a significant role in the adversity that was presented throughout this process.

3.4 Data Analysis

This phenomenological research study examined the experiences of African American males in community college. The results of Chapter Four come from 8 interviews conducted by 8 students that attend community college and participate in mentoring programs for African American males. Oklahoma City Community College's mentoring program "Students Connecting with Mentors for Success" and Bluegrass Community & Technical College's "A Few Good Men" was selected based on their commitment to African American males and fostering a culture for African American men to be successful.

African American men in the community mentored the 8 participants (4 from OCCC and 4 from BCTC). All 8 participants were seniors and graduated in the spring of 2023. The students were mentored by community members currently in the job field that the students are interested in pursuing upon graduation. The participant's majors included film, music, education, business, and psychology. The students' ages ranged from 18-51 years old. The young men had to overcome several obstacles and adversity throughout their time in the mentoring programs. Seven of the eight young men grew up in single-parent homes with moms. Only five of the eight young men met their father. The young men explained why college was not discussed in their homes. Five men wanted to go to the military but were talked out of it by their mothers. All eight of the young men had a

kid and worked full-time jobs. Six of the young men were dating their children's mothers because they did not want their children to have the experience of growing up without a father. All of the young men spoke highly of completing their degree. Five men had plans to enter the workforce upon completing their degree, and the other three planned to continue their educational journey. All eight men spoke highly about the mentoring program that they were involved in. They spoke about how the programs grounded them, kept them focused, and how each program got them to graduation.

All interviews were conducted over Zoom. The interview time ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour. Participants were eager and excited about the interviews. They were honest, raw, and open to their experiences and storytelling. I believed the young men were very enthusiastic about sharing their stories about the program and how the program helped them. Each interview was recorded on Zoom and audio recorded. Participants shared their truths about being in the mentoring program and their overall experience in the programs.

I chose OCCC & BCTC because of their commitment to serving African American male students. Organizing data in this matter enabled me to locate valid information and easily trace the results back to the interview questions for content and data analysis (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). I reached out to the directors of both mentoring programs, Byron Dickens OCCC and Dr. Carlos Yates at BCTC. I told the directors that the participants in this research were required to be African American males. I gained permission from both directors to interview the students.

I worked with the directors to identify four students from each institution to interview. I gave each young man a pseudonym name to protect their identity. This

study's pseudonyms are James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Kevin Powell, Michael Dyson Jr., Bryan Stevenson, Bayard Rustin, Sterling Brown, and August Wilson. I choose these names and icons because they have all mentored me through their books, writings, activism, and advocacy for justice and equity. Their significance lies in using the power of the written word to inspire, inform, and mobilize people toward positive change. Moreover, these writers and social justice activists act as a beacon of hope, instilling courage and determination into people like myself and fostering a more inclusive and equitable world. Their contributions as African American men remain relevant and impactful, but more importantly, it helps me to understand the past as I move forward into the future.

The interviews were conducted virtually, and a couple of the students did not have laptops for us to be face-to-face. Also, zoom was difficult for the students to navigate because some students did not have great Wi-Fi services and some students did not have a quiet place to perform the interview. I had to adjust the interview terms and allowed some students to conduct phone interviews and others to use Zoom. I recorded phone interviews and Zoom interviews. The students who interviewed over the phone were able to find quiet spots and the students who used Zoom made sure they were in quiet spots as well. I interviewed all eight students within a two-week window (Appendix 4).

I spent three weeks transcribing all the information from the interviews. I listened to interviews six or seven times to capture all the information the students shared. I did experience some difficulty with some of the audio and had to call two of the students back to ask them if they did not mind answering a couple of questions all over. The students did comply, and they were able to give me the information needed to complete

the transcriptions. My goal was to foster a robust understanding of both mentoring programs and the academic experience of the students participating.

Data analysis included reading and re-reading the transcriptions to identify prominent themes for each participant. Since the themes were developed across the interview questions and not necessarily in response to a particular question, I present an excerpt from each participant in response to each of the five interview questions to prevent “context stripping and exclusion of meaning and purpose” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 106). Four themes emerged from the data:

1. *race matters,*
2. *mentor and mentee relationships,*
3. *challenges with family support,* and
4. *institutional investment.*

3.5 Researcher Background and Positionality

Long before the highly publicized murders of Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Tamir Rice, and Michael Brown, the world learned much about young Black men through alarming newspaper headlines and one-sided portrayals of them in televised news programs. Consumers of this media, as well as those who read about Black boys and men in academic publications (books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and research reports), have likely come to know this population as endangered, chronically low-performing, at-risk, deviant, and hopeless. A nation and a world that hears nothing but deficit perspectives about a group understandably come to expect little that is good for its members. This situation has persistently disadvantaged Black males across all age groups. In his 1933 book, “The Miseducation of the Negro,” Carter G. Woodson

famously observed that a young Black boy is repeatedly reminded of his inferiority in every class he takes and every book he reads. The same is certainly true for anyone else who reads much of what is written about Black boys in academic literature and the popular press (Harper & Woods, 2016).

My position on this research project is very personal and important to me. I am an African American male from Flint, Michigan. I grew up in a city that has been in the top 5 for murder per capita. I grew up in a single-parent home in one of the roughest neighborhoods in the city. There were days when we did not know if the lights or water would be turned on. I grew up fatherless, so I did not have that fatherly figure to guide and protect me. In turn, I allowed the streets to raise me. In the interim of the streets raising me, I became a street pharmacist (drug dealer). The OG's (Original Gangsters, a term of endearment for older Black men who pioneered social life in urban neighborhoods) on the block tried their best to steer me clear of the streets because I was good with an eight-pound orange ball. I never thought college was possible because it was not pushed or spoken of in my house.

Growing up in Flint, MI, graduating from high school was my biggest accomplishment. So having the opportunity to go to college to play basketball was never in my future for me. So, I got a scholarship to play basketball at Central Michigan University. I was a first-generation college student who knew nothing about navigating college. My mother could not help me because she had never attended college, and none of my friends at the time did not go to college either. So, I often found myself lost, lonely, and frustrated. I did have my coaches at times to help me, but my pride often would not allow me to continue asking for help. One day I was walking to practice and

was stopped by a man named Damon Brown. Damon Brown was the Coordinator of Student Activities for CMU. He asked me if I would be interested in joining him for lunch or dinner to speak with me about the “Brothers to Brothers” mentoring program he created at CMU. We had dinner, and I joined the program immediately after. The mentoring program changed my life, thought process, existence at the college, and perspective on school. I was introduced to other African American males on campus struggling mentally and emotionally like I was then. I had the opportunity to meet another African American male professional at CMU who also mentored young men. It was almost like this program was in its own utopian world. I had never met successful, smart African American men who genuinely cared about me and my college career. This is one of the biggest reasons I care and advocate for African American male mentoring programs: I know what it did for me and created a path of success.

I have been mentoring African American males for the last 16 years. I have created and implemented African American male mentoring initiatives at four different institutions, which are currently active for young Black males to learn and grow as members of the academic community and become model citizens of society. I have worked in higher education for 20 years, from small private liberal art colleges to large public universities. My title and positions with these institutions range from Coordinator of Multicultural Affairs to Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. One thing remains the same throughout my journey in higher education, African American males struggled and continue to struggle at these institutions.

I made it my responsibility at each institution I worked for to target African American males and ensure they were using all their resources. I developed mentoring

programs, career fairs, campus visits, workshops, internships, and job interviews for students. I have worked with colleges and universities nationwide to create a memorandum of understanding and articulation agreements to help African American males matriculate to 4-year institutions and graduate school. My efforts also included speaking with students about life, fatherhood, being a man, and their place in society. I developed lifetime relationships with some and others for the moment. The research experience mirrored that described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000): “as we worked within our three-dimensional spaces as [qualitative researchers], what become clear to us that as inquirers we meet ourselves in the past, present, and the future (p. 60).

Listening to lived experiences and stories from the past to the present, these experiences shape African American males and their journey in college. Their stories can be combined, and a common theme can be developed from those experiences. Researchers must acknowledge pre-assumptions and bias to establish credibility. I assumed that the mentoring I was providing over the years was effective. I also assumed that each relationship I built with students would last forever. These assumptions were strong because of my experience mentoring and in higher education as an administrator.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents selected, transcribed excerpts from the data to support the major findings outlined in Chapter 5. To protect the identity of the students, each was given a false name. The names of Black men who indirectly mentored me through their writings and activism were chosen (James Baldwin, Kevin Powell, Richard Wright, Bryan Stevenson, Bayard Rustin, August Wilson, Sterling Brown, and Michael Dyson). The quotes selected reveal the authentic voice and experiences that each student has endured in their respective programs.

4.2 Experiences in the Mentoring Program

Students were asked about their experience in the mentoring programs and why they decided to participate. I was looking to gauge student's thoughts and interest in the programs, how did they hear about the programs, and what their experiences have been.

James Baldwin a student at OCCC had an interesting thought process for answering the question. James said:

So initially, I really didn't have any direction. I wasn't sure what I was going to do. After graduating high school, I took a year and a half off because I wasn't even sure that college was going to be for me. I eventually decided to go to Oklahoma City Community College. I attended there because I was tired of working these odd jobs. So, I said let me go ahead and try the college thing. I applied and I got accepted. And that's when I started rolling that same day for the following semester as I was enrolling this guy says "hey, are you interested in mentoring programs for African American males?" I was like, Yeah, you know, that'd be great. So, we went and met Brian, and he was telling me about what the program was going to be like. He was telling me what to expect, what's expected of me, and it just sounded really great. I was motivated. I was inspired by his by his pitch and what he was trying to do with the program. When I was growing up, neither of my parents went to college.

I asked Richard Wright his thoughts on why he joined the mentoring program and why he participated at OCCC. Richard said:

So, my experience in the program was probably a maturity and knowledge. It was different interactions and engagements that you got. There were a lot of different relationships forming from people either in the field that you want to go in or in fields that you couldn't even imagine. Everyone in the program studied together. My overall experience was just learning more because I didn't have the quote on quote studying skills for classes. My main class I wasn't really well prepared for it. I had the confidence, but I just didn't have the skills and tools to study and stay consistent. So, the mentoring program at OCCC taught me how to study, how to prepare for exams, how to get with other guys to study, and how to control my surroundings.

The reason why I wanted to get in the mentoring program, be'ause I was just stressed all the time and I wasn't doing well in the class. I would go to the gym and try to release some stress and one of the guys that was always in the gym at same time, just so happened to be in the that program at the school. One day he pulled me to the side and asked me if I heard about this new mentoring program going on at on campus? He gave me a description of the program, how they helped students with classes, how they help students with their goals, and help students with their professional career. He took me to meet Mr. Brian and I was able to meet with him one on one. I was so motivated after talking with Bryan and I wanted to be in the program so bad. So that's how I learned about the program and why I wanted to be in the program. Getting a degree, is a major accomplishment for me because, nobody in my immediate family completed college.

Kevin Powell attended OCCC and had a different experience than the other two young men. I asked Kevin the same questions and here was his response. Kevin replied:

Just everything about the college campus was new to me because I didn't know really much about college. Most of my family didn't go to college and my friends didn't go to college either. So, my history with college and my experience with college at that point was just all new. I remember, the only person that I really knew at OCCC was Bryan Dickens, who would later become the creator of the program and he was my professor. The students Connecting with Mentors for Success program at OCCC. I remember feeling very comfortable with Brian. Our friendship was very strong together and I knew I needed help. If I was going to get through college, I knew I was going to need help of some kind and I trusted him. So, when he created the mentor program, it was just like an easy transition for me because I trusted Bryan.

So, in the actual program, my experience, I can honestly say that I found a community not just within the college itself, but like a community for myself and my friends. I think for the first time in my life, I was surrounded by other people like me. People who are either career driven or driven to obtaining the degree or get further into their education or their life goals.

Michael Dyson Jr attends BCTC and is a part of A Few Good Men mentoring program. I asked him why he decided to join the mentoring program and why he participated.

Michael's reply:

My experience so far has been awesome. I'm just in my second semester of school here, so my experience so far has been great in this program. It's wonderful opportunity towards the success of African Americans, males within school setting. I've seen the program be all inclusive. When BCTC sent me the information, you know, about joining or whatnot, it was an immediately, yes, I want to be a part of that. I want to be all inclusive with, with the whole school experience. I am real excited to be a part of A Few Good Men.

It's just a positive setting, you know, It gets us all together to talk about our experiences. And then also it's an opportunity to troubleshoot different ways to help us stay on like on track. The program helps us with our academic success, whether that is working for a Fortune 500 company or getting our dream job, the program prepares us for it. I've had the pleasure of building a relationship with each of my brothers in the program.

Bryan Stevenson experience with A Few Good Men shared his interesting perspective about the program and how it shaped his experience at BCTC. Bryan's reply:

My experience in the program has been good. The program has given me a lot of information. Although I'm an unconventional student, I am 51 years old. It has taught me to look deeper inside myself and recognize that I am a Black man. I like the fact that it establishes a brotherhood. With today's environment and everything is going on. We need to, in my opinion, black men need to come together more. Find more resolution to extend that olive branch of a helping each other. A few good men allow us to help each other along the way.

Bayard Rustin is a student at BCTC and he is an active member in A Few Good Men.

Bayard thoughts on the mentoring program opened my eyes to the program and the work the program has created for young men. Bayard thoughts:

My experience in the mentoring program has been phenomenal. It's something that I never imagined that would be available to me growing up as a black male.

It's hard to find good role models that you can really look up to in different areas in life and that you want to be around. So, to find a group of mentors that want to help you, it's something that you just can't find. A few good men is an amazing mentoring program.

I joined the program because it's hard to do it by yourself and to have someone that has already went through what you went through and knows the steps to take, that's going to guide you along your path, that just sounded like the wisest thing for me. And then the fact that they are black, like I am, it gives you the sense of if they can do it, I know I can do it. And they're telling you, you can do it too. So, when they reached out to me to join, I immediately said yes!

Sterling Brown is a former athlete from a major division I school who experienced some hardships and is now a student at OCCC. He spoke to his experience and why he joined the mentoring program at the institution. James's reply:

Why I decided to participate in the program was because of one of the mentors walked up to me before he was heading to the actual meeting. He introduced himself and began telling me information about the mentoring program. He explained that the meeting was for African American males on campus and told me about all the resources available to them.

My experience was surreal. My first day at the meeting, I sat in the room full of strangers. I didn't know anybody on campus but the room just felt very comfortable because we were doing this thing where everybody in the room gets to stand up and introduce themselves and just say something that they're grateful for. The whole experience that afternoon was just very welcoming because I was hearing different stories from different people, different ages and different backgrounds. It was just super, super welcoming to just see a group of black men that were, free to talk to each other about, a lot of things people would not usually open up to. I had the opportunity to know their families and their backgrounds and things like that. It was just mind blowing to see that people would actually find a place like that where they're comfortable enough to share those things and make friends in the process. It was pretty powerful.

August Wilson experience in a few good men mentoring programs at BCTC played a significant role in his success as a student. August's thoughts:

A Few Good Men was the only program from my perspective that provided all resources I would need to be successful. This was important for me and everybody that looks like me. I was able to get to know a lot of people that look like me and just strengthen the relationship between the brothers. This was an

important part of the mentoring program. So, joining the program was a no brainer and I am glad I made the decision to participate.

4.3 Perspectives on African American Male Mentors

I asked the young men do you feel by having an African American male mentor, it plays a role in your success in the mentoring program? Do you feel like it is important to have an African American mentor? I asked this question to see what the best aspect of the program and to understand if race play a part in the young men success in the mentoring program.

James Baldwin's response to this question:

Based on demographics and statistics. The United States, I think it's like 73% Caucasian dominance in the country. So, it's like you see it all over the place. You turn on the T.V, you see Caucasian presidents no matter what. So, it was important for me just to have that sense of representation and to see someone that looks like me. I just thought it was important for me to be able to have someone to look up to and have someone to push me in that direction that gives me that sense of belonging and that can offer that sense of representation.

Yes, I do feel that having an African American mentor was important to me. My mentor was a black attorney and I want to be an attorney so it was a great match for me. I would talk to him about anything I needed to do regarding law school. He took me to networking events with him to meet other attorneys. I talked to him about where my grades needed to be just because I was trying to be proactive. He was able to just give me study techniques and study tactics to keep my grades up. He showed me how to apply for the bar and apply for law school. So, he would help me a lot with that and then just helped me with like just making sure I stayed level headed, just making sure that I was able to stay sharp between the ears to make sure all my assignments are in on time and keep my grades up. So, he was truly a mentor, but he was also like a friend, someone that I could just count on to be there to talk to about anything.

Richard Wright's response:

Yeah, it did. He was a fire marshal for Norman Fire Department. I want to be a EMT and someday a Fire Fighter. That's one of the main reasons why I wanted to join the program. This mentoring program was for African American males to succeed in college. Definitely seeing African American males do well with schoolwork and do well in life was motivating for me, but having an African American mentor doing something that I wanted to do and be made my

commitment to the program so much easier. He invited me to the fire station and I got a chance to see how he worked. He helped me to stay on my path and stay more motivated to accomplishing my goals. It was one of the best experiences in my life.

With my life and the way, I grew up, I didn't have a dad in the household, which, you know, it's kind of a common thing for a black male, unfortunately. That never stopped me from doing anything. I had a strong foundation around me, so I was always motivated and always had the right people in my life at the right time. So, I would definitely say yes it was important for my mentor to be black.

Kevin Powell's response:

Something that can help build a person or a person to become what they want to be. My mentor Jermaine was somebody who's already done it or already has found success in that area that I was trying to go into. I know for me, I wanted to complete college. Jermaine has already completed college, the fact that Jermaine already had a master's degree, meant that he already has found success in this area, and he was going to have plenty of advice and plenty of knowledge that I could use. He was a mean to get me to the places I want to be and learn from his experiences. He added to my pool of knowledge in order to better myself. Then something that was very uplifting, something that was very comforting for me personally was the fact that there was a black male who knows what it's like to be black here in Oklahoma.

Michael Dyson Jr.'s response:

So, it's somebody that's, you know, from the outside. You know, this man's not like a family member to me. I haven't known him my entire life or nothing like that. So, he's literally just like somebody teacher at the school, but he's giving up his time to spend with me. I mean, he's helped me fill out scholarship information and I think that's really important. My mentor is great asset in my life.

It is absolutely important for African American males to have African American male mentors. That is automatically what that starts us off eye to eye. My mentor has supported me more than my family, including my father.

Bryan Stevenson's response:

Having an African American mentor allows him to relate to me and understand my life. With certain issues, certain topics that we present, and certain growth. Black men are often overlooked. When it comes to economic growth and family, he teaches me the value of both. The presence of fatherhood and to be there for your child. We are. I think with this program, it offers various categories. Every time we meet on how to grow.

Well, you know, I was a big brother when I was in Dallas. A few years ago, and I thought about the process of being a big brother. Everyone can relate to you, but there's only certain things that your race or culture can relate to. I tell my son you have three strikes against you. First, you were born black, two, you're a male and you can reproduce, and three you're a black male. No, I'm not saying that that's going to keep my son down because he weighs his outcome. But there is a hindrance against the black male because we can reproduce. You can't relate to Bill our counterpart. It's a different type of mindset. It's a different type of verbiage. It's a different type of understanding. Yes. Sometimes we have to code switch. But it's easier for us to code switch.

Bayard Rustin's response:

100%, yes! I don't want to make it seem like because they're African American, that's why I'm successful. But I truly feel like since they are African American, that they can relate to things that other race have not touched on and can reach with me because I've had white mentors that, you know, mentored and gave me advice. But when it comes from someone that understands your background, understands your culture, may understand how your family feels or understand where your family comes from or what you see on a regular basis is just it's much different and it's much more. I would say, in my success to have someone who understands me already and then it's showing me a path that most African American males don't even know they can do. There's not many other races saying that you can go to school, get back in college, and do this and do that. It's mostly become a rapper or become an athlete or become, you know, just something similar to those. For people to show you another avenue and be from that place where they also were told that they could only be great at these things and they've done more than that. It just gives you a sense of courage and confidence and makes you want to persevere just like they did.

Yes, I do feel like it's important to have an African American mentor. My Mentor can reach places that a mentor from another race probably will not. Relating to speaking to African American mentee, I feel like being the same. The same race, the same background, and knowing the same culture helps me tremendously. I feel like it is very important to have someone that understands where you're coming from, to lead you to where you're trying to go.

Sterling Brown's response:

Um, I definitely feel like having an African American mentor is great because and being around him talking to him about a lot of things and him guiding me through certain things, like how to be present, how to present yourself, carry yourself, how to speak, talk, how make eye contact, how to shake hands, and just how to get your message across. So, I definitely believe my mentor had a very positive impact on everything that that I'm going through right now.

So as a black male or African American male it's beneficial to have an African American mentor, especially somebody that you could always look up to in a professional way or in life. Because if that person is somebody that has navigated through all those steps, then it's kind of like I'm starting out where he has ended, so I don't have to restart the whole process of trying to figure out how to make life work. So as an African American male or as an African-American younger male, I think it is beneficial to have an African American mentor because there are certain things that we would understand just within the culture.

August Wilson's response:

Most definitely. Most definitely. Where I'm from, they always say that to learn you have to see people that look like you do positive things. Sometimes some people are capable of achieving without seeing other people do but to be able to do that, there is still some minor information that is needed for them to proceed. I love my black skin, and my mentor helped me understand that I am a black. My mentor helped me through my struggles because it was something that he had already experienced in his life. I can see that I'm being mentored by somebody who has achieved in life, but also who is there to just listen to me when I am troubled and just give me guidance because they've done it.

Yes, my mentor plays a significant role in my success here at the college and in life. I cannot express it any other way it is definitely important for me to have my amazing mentor. It is most definitely important that.

4.4 Initial Meetings with Mentors

I asked each young man to talk with me about their first initial meeting with their mentor. Where did they meet? I ask these questions to get an understanding of what the student relationship is with the mentor but also to see if the mentor is helping the student.

What attributes or advice is the mentor providing for the student.

James Baldwin's thoughts:

At the first time I met him was actually at OCCC. I want to say it was some event that was hosted for him as well as other. It was some very important people invited to campus and he was one of them. At the time I didn't know he was my mentor until they announced it at the event. I introduced myself to him and gave him some small history of who I was and what I wanted to do in life. Come to find out, he was Brian's brother in-law and Brian knew that I wanted to be an attorney. Since our first meeting we have met at his law office because he wants me to be around lawyer to keep the fire under me for my future.

Richard Wright's thoughts:

We met at OCCC. Brian set it up because turns out my mentor and Brian went to church together. So, Brian told him about me and he wanted to meet me. Brian put together a meeting for us to meet on campus in a small office. We met and I told him what I wanted to do. I told him how I already applied for the fire department and I didn't get in, but I'm in the EMT program and how I'm kind of struggling with it right now. He gave me some ideas and some motivation and some different information that I could use. Then he told me he was a firefighter at Norman Fire Department. He promised me if I finish school, he would get me in the fire department. I have been working my ass off since he promised me that information.

Kevin Powell's thoughts:

So, my mentor is Jermaine Peterson, and he worked at OCCC and our first meeting was at OCCC in his office. I knew of him prior, but our relationship wasn't as close as it is now. I remember Jermaine just saying, Hey, whatever you need man, I got your back. I remember Jermaine just being so encouraging and uplifting and then basically saying, I know you can get through this. Like, you're very smart, intelligent person and no matter what, like you always are going to have me as a resource or as a person of support within your life, not just here at OCCC, but for the rest of your life. And then our relationship has just blossomed beyond past that. Like, he's one of my best friends, honestly. And yeah, it's just to the point where I know if I need anything, I can always call Jermaine.

Michael Dyson Jr.'s thoughts:

Uh, that is a good question. I believe the first meeting was after the first a few good men meeting, but at the Newtown Pike campus. I met with my mentor in one of the classrooms. It was kind of odd at first, but then he asked me about my future plans and what I wanted to do. I gave him my college speech, but spoke in a way that he understood I meant business and I wanted to take my mentorship seriously. He explained to me how valuable his time is and that I had one time to not show up for a meeting and I would be in a lot of trouble. I think our first meeting was productive and we made a connection that still exist today.

Bryan Stevenson's thoughts:

Our first meeting was at the college. We met in a small office in the admission office. I remember it like it was yesterday, I was so nervous to meet my mentor. I was forming all type of opinions about him and why would he want to work with me? When he walked in the office, he had the biggest smile on his face. He spoke with me about his journey, how he started in community college, and how he had to navigate his own road before he was able to figure out life. This helped me because I am currently on that path myself.

Bayard Rustin's thoughts:

We met at OCCC and he called me in because he knew I was trying to get back in the college. I was very doubtful of myself. I didn't even really know why I was even trying because it just felt so far-fetched. The moment I sat down and I talked to him and he just encouraged me and let me know it was possible. He explained to me that you're not the only one who waits this late to go to college and finish. He told me I shouldn't give up on myself. He told me you don't have to just be an athlete or a rapper. There are great things and great possibilities out there for you. So, talking to him was really just life changing in that one event because he opened my eyes to something that I did not think was possible. Where I am from you don't hear many people talking about going to college. This opportunity seemed unreal, but my mentor made me believe. Our first conversation made me feel like I do anything I set my mind to.

Sterling Brown's thoughts:

Okay, so my first meeting with my mentor was actually in his office. I was working on campus again and he was at the end of my shift, so I decided to swing by his office just to because that was right after the Friday meeting that I had first attended. I walked to his office and we were just getting to know each other. He's asking me about my family and where I'm from. You know a little bit about my background, my educational background and things like that. I wasn't very comfortable with him because that's the first mentor I ever had. So, I didn't exactly understand what a mentor was and what a mentor mentee relationship was like. So, I was a little bit timid and uncomfortable at first because, you know, I was literally standing in his doorway for like two hours straight. We were just talking and at the end of the three hours, he asked me, are you sure you don't want to take a seat? I was just uncomfortable because I didn't know what to expect. Our first meeting was pretty much right after my first introduction to our Friday meeting.

August Wilson's thoughts:

I met with him at the office. And is often backing on to the sea. I was introduced by one of the workers there at that time. She's a very sweet white lady and the engineers had told her about me being my first time in the department. She took me to Mr. Bryan Dickens. For about one week, he sat down and we talked for about two hours. That conversation made it easier for me to open up to him. He told me he was here for me and whatever I needed, just let him know. I told him that I had never had an African American mentor before and I was excited to work with him.

4.5 Mentoring Programs and Academic Achievement

Another question I asked the young men is did the mentoring program have an impact on their academics. I also asked them did they think the community college should invest more into their mentoring program. I wanted to gauge and understand what knowledge and skills the young men received, but also did the program help them. Here are their responses.

James Baldwin's reply:

I would slack off a lot in high school because I didn't think I was going to go to college, so it didn't really matter to me. I knew the work wasn't difficult, I just didn't want to do it. So, I was like, okay, let me see what college is about. I will say that being in the program and having other people that had the same common goal, a similar understanding of what life could be like without college and what life could look like with it. So, we all motivate each other. I do think it kept me straight on maintaining my academics and maintaining my GPA. All the young men in the mentoring would also treat it like a competition. We wanted to see who could end with the higher grades every semester. The mentoring program definitely help me keep my grades up.

Yes, I definitely think the community college should invest more in our mentoring program at OCCC. This mentoring program helped me as a first-generation college student. From my understanding it's still not getting the attention and funding that it does need. When our program started, it was like 12 men in it. Now it has grown to 40 African American males, but still operating off the same funds. It almost seems like it was some type of bias against our program. There should be more involvement and more funding, more everything for that mentorship program at OCCC.

Richard Wright replied:

A 100%. It had a huge impact on my academics because there were black males that were in the program that were extremely smart. My mentor actually went to Morehouse. He helped me break down classes and break down lectures like they were nothing and made it simple. I was able to go, sit in class, and actually know what's going on. My mentor taught me how to study and take exams. The best part about the program is we all got to hang out together, study together, and hold each other accountable for grades. This mentoring program definitely helped with my academics.

Yes, the college should invest more money in our mentoring program. More people should know about this program and should participate. I got lucky when I

found out about it. I just happened to be at the right place at the right time. If I never learned about it, there's no telling how my life would have been going now. It is good to have some help from somebody that looks like you and that's doing good things with the program. With this program, you can go get your basics, but then you have connections to your next school. This program definitely works and I recommend it to any new African American man that attends OCCC.

Kevin Powell replied:

Absolutely the program had an impact on my academics. One thing I can say about the mentor program is that my study habits became better because I had a place I could actually sit down, be quiet, and study. If I had friends within the same classes, we had an area where we could pick each other's brains, work together, study for tests, work on worksheets and other assignments together. I think the program helped me become better with collaborative efforts in college because sometimes you get assigned team assignments and you need to be a good communicator in order to indicate with your partner or partners what you're doing. The program definitely taught me how to be more professional, responsible, and better at communicating with people about my ideas to get a task finished. The program also helped me understand how to pick my professors for classes that matched my learning style. I was able to be more focused and more productive when I was in classes and doing my assignments.

Yes, the school should invest more into the mentoring program. I think mentors have a lot of value to a community and in them sharing ideas and building relationships with mentees can only aid them because it just kind of paints a real picture. Mentors can paint a real picture for mentees on how to achieve their goals because they're already professionals in those fields and that can only serve them to become better.

Michael Dyson Jr. replied:

Absolutely, I mean, if somebody reaches out, that's making sure I'm staying on top of my schoolwork and trying to make sure I pass all of my classes, then I will always promote A Few Good Men as the mentoring program for black men. Dr. Yates is always looking for educational and academic opportunities for us to get involved in. He always volunteers me to do things and I may not want to do them but, in the end, when I do it, I actually gain things from it. I'm sitting there like, wow, I'm actually glad I got a chance to do that, even though I didn't want to. But, I really appreciated it and I've appreciated everything up to this point as well.

Oh absolutely, the college should invest more into A Few Good Men. This program is built for African American men to be successful at BCTC. Sometimes you need somebody in your corner pushing you to be great like Dr. Yates. He's always pushing me to be a better version of myself. If that helps me, that would definitely help someone else too.

Bryan Stevenson replied:

Yes and no! As an unconventional student and being prior military, I know the importance of education. I know how to plan my day out and I know my goals. So, I will say yes in a sense and I will say no to the fact that, I'm of age to know better.

Yes, as a fifty-one-year-old man, I wished I had a program like this when I was twenty-one. BCTC must invest more in the black men that attend the college and the school must invest more into this program.

Bayard Rustin replied:

Yes, 100%. They check our academics weekly, although they're not like hounding us, they're very serious about our grades. It's more of a check-up and the mentors do more encouraging. The mentors ask are you doing good or do you need anything? This is just enough to know somebody is looking out for you academically. Even when you're doing good, it still feels good that someone is caring enough to come and check on and make sure you're doing good. When they are checking, it makes you want to make these people proud because they're helping you and they're looking after you and they give you the right path and the right things to do. So, you want to honor those people by doing the things that you're supposed to do because they're doing more than what they're supposed to do.

Yes, I do. But I feel like this program itself is a life changer. The fact that I'm here and then sticking it through, I have to give credit to the mentoring program because they play a huge role in that from the weekly meetings and from the planning to how you should dress, how you should approach someone that's in a higher position than you. It's just so much knowledge that you just don't get out there but the average African American does not get this information. I feel like this is just something that not a lot of people get to experience, which, you know, I'm happy that I am and grateful that I am.

Sterling Brown replied:

Um, I think it does have a huge impact on my academics because being a part of the mentorship program provides opportunities in terms of scholarships that were not available to students of color in the mentorship program. And so being able to access those types of resources, you know, I didn't have to worry about working too much because I know that part of my tuition is taken care of and I could just focus on studying and just putting forth my best effort. Studying and preparing for exams and learning the right way without having to worry about, where am I going to get my tuition from. I think just kind of having that support system helps a lot. And for the fact that the mentors help, they helped me out financially too.

I definitely think they should invest more into it. I think it will be very beneficial if the state could invest in these mentoring programs because this program seems like it's limited to like this old institutional barrier where they can only help students of the community college. I think the mentoring program would benefit a lot more from investments. I think on a state level, too, it would go a long way get across these institutional barriers where the mentors and the programs can be funded.

August Wilson replied:

Yes, it definitely does. Education was something that was emphasized in my family. It doesn't really matter what you learn it, just the idea of having to be able to develop yourself mentally. I would have lost the purpose of that because I probably changed, I wasn't focus on school work. My mentor checked me immediately. The program, has a study area where all the program participates can go and study. I get the chance to bounce ideas off the other brothers in the study area. This is why I think this program is so important to my academics.

Yes, I do. I really, really do. I hope they are investing in our mentoring program. Because that one of my goals is to succeed and get to a point where I'm able to. My mentor has told me to continue to be great and I need to take care of myself mentally and physically. This is the reason I think my community college should invest in more resources for people like me.

4.6 Parting Thoughts

The last question I asked the young men is for them to tell me if there is anything they wanted to share about the mentoring program that I did not ask them.

James Baldwin's thoughts:

We had a fundraising event for us to raise money for scholarships for students in our program. This was an opportunity for us to talk with stakeholder and network with people, talk to them about what we were doing in the program, talk about our experiences. This was a great time for us to speak with folks about our mentoring program and what resources we will need in the future. We got a chance to tell legislator who we are and what type of men we wanted to become. This fundraiser prepared us, for professional events. Brian really did take his time to make sure that that we were prepared for the future and always made us feel and think we belong at the institution.

Richard Wright's thoughts:

This was more than just a mentoring program, it was an actual brotherhood. We would go on to different events together and support each other in and out of the

classroom. Brian made sure our program was involved with the Presidents Office. The program helped us all get jobs if we needed them. We found ourselves spending a lot of time at the school, even if we didn't have class. I would just be up there studying. I'd go up to the school just being around the program. The mentoring program literally helped me become a fire fighter.

Kevin Powell's thoughts:

I don't think I would have graduated without the mentoring program. It would have definitely been more difficult. There's definitely a higher chance that I wouldn't have been able to get through. I just think college is a lot of stress, especially if you don't have support. I didn't have my family's support or I didn't have any friends in college. college and to learn how to be better at college takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of resources. No one I was around initially understood what I was going through. When I got in the mentoring program, I was around guys who were in the same boat I was in. We held each other accountable and made sure we all were doing what we were supposed to do in the classroom.

Michael Dyson Jr.'s thoughts:

I mean, the only thing I would really say is if I could tell a guy that is new to the school is go find Dr. Yates and be a part of the mentoring program. This mentoring program was extremely helpful and beneficial.

Bryan Stevenson's thoughts:

I can say what I've learned is although it might not seem as if the brotherhood is united, but we are united. We are a tight knit family and we pride ourselves on being great at all cost. I would do anything for my brothers in this program and I feel they would do the same for me.

Bayard Rustin's thoughts:

Brian is one of my mentors. He was the first one I talked to about the program and he's the leader of the program. When I first came in he really started an engine in me. It really showed me that he believed in me and he barely knew and I can't let him down. When I think about the program, I think about my future and I think about how it will be impact me years from now. Brian is another family member that's just constantly want to see me succeed. I would love to give that back to somebody else when I get in a position.

Sterling Brown's thoughts:

One other thing I would like to share is I think the mentorship programs is underrated. I've seen firsthand the people that were in the program before me. I've met them whenever they come back for meetings. I have to say they all are doing

well for themselves and they all give credit to our mentor program. We've built bonds with the alumni of the program. I look to be a part of that alumni so I can come back and invest in the mentoring program that invested in me.

August Wilson's thoughts:

I see everybody around me just striving for success and wanting to use that to impact everybody else and that just that drives me. This mentoring program has been impactful on my life. I really don't think I would graduate without the help of my brothers and Dr. Yates.

The review of the interviews revealed three themes that responses to the research questions, and one important additional theme. The first theme disclosed from the young men is that race matters and having an African American male attribute to their success. Secondly, their awareness of not having family support or their family did not attend college. Lastly, the young men spoke highly about the importance of mentor to mentee relationships. Based on these three factors, the mentees understood that receiving a college education could change their life and socioeconomic stature in the future. The final theme described the participants' desire for continued support for their mentoring programs.

This chapter focuses on the mentee stories, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Their voice provided insight into their academic and personal journey. The mentee experiences had an impact on the motivation for each young man participating in the mentoring programs. My analysis also revealed that the young men needed proper communication, respect, trust, and to have someone cheering for them to validate their academic success.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the four themes that were discovered from the interviews with the students. Again, the research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1. What features of mentoring programs do African American male community college students believe promote their college success?

RQ2. What challenges do African American male community college students believe mentoring programs help them to overcome?

The first two themes respond to RQ1:

1. *Race matters* when it comes to mentoring the African American male students who participated in this study. This theme explores the importance of race, racial identity, and racial matching in the participants' mentoring program experiences.
2. The importance of *mentor and mentee relationship*. This theme explores the features of the mentoring relationships that participants believed promoted their college success.

The third theme responds to RQ2:

3. *Challenges with family support*. This theme explores ways that the mentoring programs helped the African American male students who participated in this study overcome the limitations of familial support and first-generation status.

The fourth theme does not directly respond to a research question, but highlights another prominent thread throughout all of the participants' perspectives:

4. *Institutional investment* in mentoring programs. This theme explores the participants' hope that their colleges continue to support the mentoring programs,

and provide additional resources where appropriate to maintain the program's impact.

5.2 Race Matters

The first theme, *race matters*, supports the critical race theory principle that race is a primary variable for making sense of counter-stories (Delgado, 1989). As stated, some research shows that the natural and formal mentoring relationships of late adolescent or college-aged ethnic minorities suggest that cultural differences seem to play a role in the expectation, attainment, and experience of mentoring (Liang, Tracy, Kauh, Taylor, & Williams, 2006). For example, Black mentors connect better with Black mentees, than a Black mentee with a white mentor. Black mentees connect better with black mentors because of the personal and professional development a black mentor can provide. Participant Bayard Rustin said, "The same race, the same background, and knowing the same culture helps me tremendously. I feel like it is very important to have someone that understands where you're coming from, to lead you to where you're trying to go."

Studies of natural mentoring relationships show that when youth choose their own mentors, they tend to seek mentors from the same racial or ethnic background (Cavell, Meehan, Heffer, & Holladay, 2002; Jackson, Kite, & Branscombe, 1996; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Sanchez & Colon, 2005) and mentors of the same gender (Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush, & Dong, 2003; Sanchez & Reyes, 1999). According to this information, same-race mentoring matters to African American males that have a lasting impact on their lives. According to Ensher and Murphy (1997), "this may be due to the fact that perceived similarity has been associated with mentees level of satisfaction with the relationship as well as mentors fondness of mentees." Participant August

Wilson commented, “I told [my mentor] that I had never had an African American mentor before and I was excited to work with him.”

Race and ethnicity play a role in the ways mentees and mentors connect with each other. The mentorship relationship may be shaped by same-race issues and the quality of the mentor and mentee connection. For example, Sanchez and Colon (2005) thinks cross-race matches may be affected by the degree of cultural sensitivity on the part of the mentor, cultural mistrust on the part of the mentee, and feedback provided to the mentee. To further support this finding, remember participant Sterling Brown’s comment that, “as an African American [younger] male...I think it is beneficial to have an African American mentor because there are certain things that we would understand just within the culture.” Cultural norms and values can also impact the connection between the mentor and mentee. Social or cultural norms are important to African American mentees, especially when the mentor can influence the mentees level of communication, academics, and professional diaspora. Mentoring outcomes can reflect more than race and gender between the mentor and mentee. They can reflect the ways mentees respond to mentors, especially if the mentee has multiple characteristics, cultural values, and identities. In another quote, participant Bayard Rustin confirmed this when he said: “Relating to speaking to African American mentee, I feel like being the same. The same race, the same background, and knowing the same culture helps me tremendously.”

5.3 Importance of Mentor/Mentee Relationships

Mentoring is a dyadic psychosocial intervention in which an older individual is brought into a close relationship with a younger person to provide support, guidance, and opportunities for social and academic development (Freedman, 1993; Rhodes, 1994).

During the interviews the young men kept go back to how important their mentors were too them and for them. They spoke about how important it was to them to make sure they continued to work hard in the classroom to make their mentor proud. They spoke passionately to the importance of the relationship and how it affected their everyday life. The students explained how the opportunities that their mentors created for them played a significant role in their future careers. When the characteristics of a mentor is identified, then you can pair them effectively with a mentee. This can be critical to the relationship and the bond that they form. Therefore, the mentor perception of the relationship and quality of the relationship, should mimic the characteristics of sustaining an effective mentoring relationship.

Effective mentorship is often developed in a professional setting. Some of the mentorships for both institutions were from outside of a professional setting. The mentors wanted the young men to feel comfortable, so they established their relationship at a mutual site. Two mentees spoke about their experiences meeting their mentors at their jobs. Participant James Baldwin said, "I wanted to be an attorney, and my mentor was an attorney, so it was a perfect match. My mentor took me to networking events to meet other attorneys in the city." Participant Richard Wright expressed his thoughts on his mentor experience as well: "He was a fire marshal for Norman Fire Department. I want to be an EMT and someday a Fire Fighter. He invited me to the fire station, and I got a chance to see how he worked. It was one of the best experiences in my life." As a researcher, I truly think these are examples of true mentorship and how successful mentoring can be when the connection and bond are solid. y

5.4 Challenges with Family Support

Seven of the participants in this study were ‘first-generation’ college students. As participant Richard Wright noted, “Getting a degree, is a major accomplishment for me because, nobody in my immediate family completed college.” Without college-specific capital from their families, there may be many questions where the participants do not have easy access to answers. Participant Kevin Powell stated, “Most of my family didn’t go to college and my friends didn’t go to college either. So, my history with college and my experience with college at that point was just all new.” Similarly, I can remember as a student my mother not understanding why I could not answer the phone every time she called. At that time my mother did not know the proper way of handling my schedule or academics. It is hard for families to understand when they have no high school diploma, GED, or has not obtain a secondary education.

McCarron & Inkelas (2006) argues that families of first-generation college students will have less knowledge about academics, low self-esteem, and not know how to support their family member in a college setting. The researchers also noted that first generation students may have to get a job to help the family out with bills. This creates another barrier and may affect the student academics negatively, but ultimately it could affect the student attitude towards graduation. Participant Michael Dyson stated, “My mentor has supported me more than my family, including my father.” When he said this, I noted all of the challenges that a Black father might face when trying to provide support for a Black son in college. Participant Michael Dyson was still able to meet the needs he had with help of a mentor, increasing the likelihood of graduation.

5.5 Institutional Investment

Research has shown positive outcomes for retention and graduation rates when institutions invest in African American male mentoring programs. College Presidents have the power to create and invest in African American male initiatives. Presidents have the power to counterattack the myth of African American attaining their college degrees. Community Colleges all over the country have invested in African American male initiatives. Westchester Community College, St. Louis Community College, Mott Community College, Oklahoma Community City College, all have African American male mentoring programs with unique program services. Most of these institutions provide services like early orientation, tutoring services, workshops, and writing seminars. Community Colleges cannot create “off-the-shelf or remedial” programs to solve a retention or graduation problem for African American males. McGarth and Tobia (2008) suggest before community colleges implement change, they need practitioners and institutions to resolve the learning problems they have by committing to qualitative research strategies. As a result, according to McGarth and Tobia (2008), the findings from these studies will increase the amount of research that concerns the most disruptive experiences African American male community college students encounter transitioning to college; they will identify the types of in-and-out of classroom activities and pedagogical practices that promote academic engagement and establish a sense of community.

Finally, community colleges need to invest in seeking improvement through academic success for African American males. Harris and Woods (2013) suggested five domains that influence success primarily for African Americans. These scholars

identified the five factors as: (a) precollege consideration; (b) the academic domain; (c) the environmental domain; (d) the noncognitive domain, and (e) the institutional domain. Pope (2006) recommends institutions who are looking to retain and keep African American male motivated during their quest for their degree completion to follow these retention strategies: (a) academic and social integration; (b) eliminate racism (c) assist students in overcoming triple consciousness; (d) enhance counseling; (e) provide effective orientation programming; (f) evaluate program effectiveness; (g) hire more African American administrators, faculty, staff, and students; (h) create ethnic, cultural, and social support groups; and (i) create programs that connect with African American males' communities. It is beneficial to understand African American males in community college. It is beneficial to keep them motivated and engaged with the institution. Lastly, it is beneficial for African American students to graduate from college.

Institution of higher education should consider mentoring programs that are culturally supported by African American males. The research participants who are a part of my study felt a connection to the institution and embraced their racial identity. These high impact mentoring programs at OCCC and BCTC provided positive environments for the young men and the students acknowledged their college success and progression. Bryon Stevenson said, "Yes, as a fifty-one-year-old man, I wished I had a program like this when I was twenty-one. BCTC must invest more in the black men that attend the college and the school must invest more into this program." Sterling Brown suggested, "I think the mentoring program would benefit a lot more from investments. I think on a state level, too, it would go a long way get across these institutional barriers where the mentors and the programs can be funded." This is clear and the student have spoken, the

institutions need to step up and value the authenticity that these mentoring programs produce.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Studies

Research needs to continue on the topic of African American male students in community college, specifically African American male students participating in mentoring programs. Conducting research through a phenomenological approach gave the young men an opportunity to be heard and gave me an opportunity to lift their voices. There should be research focused on mentors that are outside the institution and how that plays a role in the mentee's success. Also, I think further research should focus on identifying the impact the mentoring program had on young men from academic and social development. There is very little literature on black male retention and graduation at 2-year colleges. Future research should focus on retention, graduation, workforce, and transfers to 4-year institutions. Mentor training was not a focal point in this study but should be evaluated in the future. Lastly, research should examine the mentor's perceptions of the relationship with their mentee.

5.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore mentoring programs for African American male students in community colleges. This phenomenological research approach gave me the opportunity to uplift the voices of African American males and their experiences in mentoring programs in community colleges. The results of this research concluded the analysis of the perceptions of current mentees and mentors in a community college mentoring program centered around the success of African American males. I encourage my colleagues in higher education to take a deeper look at African

American mentoring programs in community colleges. We need more research and data on the persists, progression, and presents of Black males in community college. There is not a lot of research on black male's success at two-year colleges. There is some information out that talks specifically about Black male initiative, but there is very little research conducted on the success of the initiative. I also encourage research to be conducted on mentors who participate in these mentoring programs. My research has proven that mentoring programs work at community colleges.

I learned from the young men that their relationships with mentors was vital in their experience. I learned that the young men developed a deeper relationship with the institution they were attending because of the mentoring program they were associated with. The mentees express the fact that they care deeply about their education, but they were often misunderstood. This was crucial primary because the students participating in the mentoring programs overcame discouraging factors that could have impacted their college success. This study shows that mentoring programs at community colleges is vital and these Black male initiatives should continue to be researched and investigated. Although this was not one of my emerging themes, a couple of the young men express their feelings about their absent father and how this affected their child hood and college experience.

My research has given clear evidence that suggest community college administrators must provide institutional resources for African American male initiatives. Also, the success of the Black male initiative rest on the mentors who take on additional work and responsibility who may not receive proper training. My research proved that mentoring programs at community colleges can be a intervention program for Black

males and that formal mentoring enhances Black male success which lead to retention and graduation. Community college administrators should provide resources for the mentors to be successful in order for the mentoring program to be successful.

My research demonstrates the importance of support to African American males and it proves that when Black males are given guidance in a mentoring program, they have the capacity to be successful in all fields of human endeavor. With the power of story-telling and allowing the young men to control their narrative, I hope this dissertation left an impressive impact on the readers. Through my work, I hope I have amplified the voices of African American men.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. RECRUITMENT LETTER

Invitation and Introduction to Prospective Study Participants

You have been invited to participate in a research study that will examine a successful mentoring program for African American males in community college. The information you provide will be used to complete research for the Educational Policy Studies & Evaluation doctoral program at The University of Kentucky. You will be asked to participate in an interview conversation that will be taped.

I thank you for agreeing to take part in this study voluntarily. By completing the consent form, you agree to take part in this research study. At any point during this research, you will not be forced to answer any question or questions that make you uncomfortable. Additionally, you may choose not to take part in the study at all. There are no expectations of return for your participation. If you chose not to be in this study or stop at any time, you would not lose any benefits.

I am looking forward to having the opportunity to meet with you. Attached is a copy of the Consent Form. Please review, complete, and return via email.

Most sincerely,

Contact Information:
Taran McZee
Doctoral Candidate
taran.mczee@uky.edu

APPENDIX 2. CONSENT SCRIPT

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Why are you being invited to participate in this research?

You are being invited to participate in a research study about successful mentoring programs for African American males at a community college. You are being invited as an African American male who is participating in a mentoring program. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be one of eight (8) people to do so.

The purpose of this research?

By completing this study, I hope to share your perspective on how being a part of a mentoring program helped you be successful in your academics and in your social life. In Addition, the interviews will be more in-depth and will give me insight to what factors took place for you to be successful. Also, to get your perspective on why you choose to be a part of the mentoring program and how you feel this program will help other African American males in the future. This study will help your institution understand how important mentoring programs are for African American males.

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

The research procedures will be conducted in person or virtually in a one-on-one setting on campus. The researcher will meet with you in an agreed upon time and location. The interview will last for about an hour, and you will only have to meet one time.

What will you be asked to do for the research?

You will be asked to show up on time and be ready to answer questions for about an hour. All interviews will be audio and video recorded. The recording will be determined by which interview option is chosen by you.

Who is doing the research?

The person in charge of this study is Taran McZee, principal investigator and doctoral student at The University of Kentucky.

Please feel free to contact me if you have additional questions or concerns. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Contact Information:
Taran McZee
Doctoral Candidate
taran.mczee@uky.edu

APPENDIX 3. CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this research project is to examine successful mentoring programs for African American males in community college. The data gathered will be used to complete a research project for my dissertation. The research is expected to give an insight to successful mentoring program for African American males in community college. The interview will take one hour. Your identity will remain confidential, and the researcher will be the only person who will have access to your response. Participation is voluntary and refusal of participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. You may discontinue participation in this interview at any time. The interview that you will participate in will be audio-taped and video recorded. Records of responses will be deleted in 2 years after completion of the project.

Please indicate your consent to participate below, by signing your name below the statement:

I understand the information above. I consent to participate in an interview for this research project. I allow my interview answers to be used in this research project. I do understand my answers will be secured and remain confidential. My name will not be used in any recording or publication of research data. I also agree to allow my interview to be audio taped and recorded.

Participates Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact Information:
Taran McZee
Doctoral Candidate
Taran.mczee@uky.edu

APPENDIX 4. INTERVIEW SUB-QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. Talk to me about your experience in the mentoring program and why you decided to participate in the program?

Goal: Is to understand why the student decided to participate in the program and what has his experience been like. Was it a good or bad experience? What factors played into his decision to join the program?

2. What has your experience been in the mentoring program? Tell me about your first meeting with your mentor? Where did you meet?

Goal: Understand what the student relationship is with the mentor in the program. Is the mentor helping the student? What attributes or advice is the mentor providing for the student? Will this be a long-term mentorship?

3. Did this mentoring program have an impact on your academics?

Goal: What tools and knowledge has the student learned from the program. Did the program help with study skills and time management?

4. What has been your best experience in this mentoring program and what has been a challenge in the program?

Goal: Looking for information from students about the best aspects of the mentoring program and to see what works best. Looking for information on what areas the mentoring program can improve.

5. Last but not least, is there anything you would like to share about your experience in the mentoring program that has not been asked of you? Do I have permission to contact you again?

Goal: To see if the students have any additional information, they would like to share that they have not already.

Contact Information:

Taran McZee

Doctoral Candidate

taran.mczee@uky.edu

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VITA

TARAN LANDELL MCZEE

EDUCATION

DOCTORAL DEGREE: EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES & EVALUATION

University of Kentucky Lexington, KY

Degree Completion: June 2023

MASTER OF ARTS: EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION & COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Central Michigan University Mt. Pleasant, MI

Degree Completion: May 2004

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE: SOCIOLOGY (Criminal Justice Concentration)

Central Michigan University Mt. Pleasant, MI

Degree Completion: May 2002

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Detailed-oriented and forward-thinking leader with proven success in designing, implementing and facilitating comprehensive DEI and equity-based initiatives that align with unit needs, organizational growth, and inclusive culture building. Recognized for ability to drive and manage social change within large organizations that build relationships with diverse set of shareholders. Grounded in counseling, training, and development with extensive experience creating talent management strategy, transforming teams, and maximizing resources. A skilled communicator and collaborator with demonstrated success operationalizing DEI at all levels.

Vice President for Belonging & Culture

Chief Diversity Officer and Title IX Compliance Officer

Associate Vice President for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion/Title IX Officer

Associate Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion

Special Associate to Vice President Inclusion & Equity

Director of Inclusion & Multicultural Services

Director of Leadership Programs & Multicultural Affairs/International Programs

Director of Multicultural Affairs

PROFESSIONAL HONORS

Black Boys & Men Symposium: Grand Valley State University- 2023

Ottawa Area Intermediate School District Leadership Award: 2022

Golden Apple Award- Fayette County School District-2021

YMCA Black Achiever of the Year Award- YMCA of Central Kentucky-2021

The Innovator Award- Kentucky College Personnel Association 2020

HEED Award- Northern Arizona University: The INSIGHT into Diversity Higher Education- 2018

Distinguished Award for Diversity: Hanover College- 2016

Community Icon Award: Flint, MI- 2013

Distinguished Diversity Enhancement Award: Marietta College- 2007