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Perceptions of Mentoring among High-Achieving, First-Generation College Students

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Perceptions of Mentoring among High-Achieving, First-Generation College Students

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how high-achieving first-generation college students perceived their mentoring experiences at a public research university in the midsouth and examined what role mentoring played in their persistence. Using the narrative inquiry, the study captured mentoring perceptions and experiences of 13 high-achieving first-generation college students. Data collection included one pre-interview activity, one semi-structured interview, and a follow-up meeting with the participants if needed. Participants provided insight on five areas related to mentoring: perceptions of mentoring, development of mentoring relationships, experiences that fostered mentoring relationships, the most influential mentors, and the influence of mentoring on persistence. This study offers recommendations on ways higher education administrators, staff, and faculty can better mentoring relationships for high-achieving first generation college students. Understanding how mentoring influences high achieving first-generation college student persistence can also help institutions better support and retain these students.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family, friends, teachers, mentors, students, and the participants of my study. This is also dedicated to my immediate family (my mom, grandparents, brothers and sisters). Lastly, I would like to dedicate this work to my late Uncle (Uncle Vic), my late grandparents (Grandma Dee and Papa), my late best friend Devon, and my late friend Laura.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The concept of mentorship can be dated all the way back to 800 B.C. (Baker & Maguire, 2005). Mentorship is derived from Homer's tale of *The Odyssey* (Baker & Maguire, 2005). In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus had a trusted friend named "Mentor" who served as a council and friend for his son while he was away in the war (Baker & Maguire, 2005). This image of a helper and of someone older and more mature guiding a younger individual is what would be described as mentoring in today's time (Baker & Macguire, 2005). In more current times, formal mentoring has become a large 20th-century development in America (Baker & Macguire, 2005) and has also been a national priority overall (Girves et al., 2005). Mentorship has been important for a long time.

Mentorship has also been helpful in the educational arena. Mentorship has been positively connected to persistence and GPA (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), and has benefited students from less-privileged families to the highest degree in regard to GPA and persistence (Schwartz et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Less-privileged students who received mentorship were also more likely to pursue graduate school (Walpole, 2003). Mentorship can provide gentle guidance and insight to mentees and help them make their own choices (Sarabipour et al., 2022). According to Sarabipour et al. (2022), "mentors are trusted advisors who draw from their academic, professional and life experiences to challenge, encourage, support and provide feedback to their mentees" (p.2). Mentoring comes in many forms ranging from inspirational figures to personal guides (Sarabipour et al., 2022). When first-generation students are able to succeed at establishing mentoring relationships, this typically leads to academic success (Benmayor, 2002).

Context of the Problem

While mentoring is generally seen as something positive (Baker & Maguire, 2005) and has become a national priority at the national, state, and local levels (Girves et al., 2005), very little research shows how mentoring works (Lunsford, 2011). In Hebert's (2018) study on 10 high achieving first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds, mentorship was seen as helpful. The article highlights the difficult experiences that these individuals face during their academic journey. Although these students faced challenges with family adversity and negative encounters in adolescence, they were still able to graduate from their institutions well prepared for their career fields and graduate school due to the support of family and influential mentors as well as engagement at their institutions (Hebert, 2018). Tillapaugh and McAuliffe's (2019) study on high-achieving first-generation male students from rural Maine also exhibits the benefits of mentorship. The participants from this study share their gratitude for campus staff, advisors, peers, classmates, tutors, and those in leadership positions. These individuals were all deemed as mentors for these students and contributed to their overall success at their perspective universities (Tillapaugh & McAuliffe, 2019). The students felt that their mentors helped them with preparing for future careers, class academics, and social networking (Tillapaugh & McAuliffe, 2019). While both studies show the benefits of mentorship on the persistence of high-achieving first-generation students, neither study explains how those mentor relationships worked to help those students be successful. Therefore, I will explore high-achieving first-generation college students' perception of mentoring and its impact on persistence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how high-achieving first-generation college students perceived their mentoring experiences at a public research university in the midsouth

and examined what role mentoring has played in their persistence. While mentoring is an effective strategy in improving the retention of college students (Girves et al., 2005), it is equally important to acknowledge what aspects of the mentoring have made it an effective strategy. It is also important to explore the role of mentoring for high-achieving first-generation students because the role that mentoring plays for them may not be the same as for another group of students with other identities. Understanding how mentoring influences high achieving first-generation college student persistence can help institutions better support these students.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions:

1. How do high-achieving first-generation college students perceive mentoring?
2. How do high-achieving first-generation college students develop mentoring relationships?
3. What experiences, programs, and resources help foster high-achieving first-generation college students' mentoring relationships with faculty, staff, and peers?
4. Who are the most influential mentors for high-achieving first-generation college students?
5. How does mentoring influence the persistence of high-achieving first-generation college students?

Definition of Key Terms

First-generation student. There are many definitions for the term first-generation college student. The definition can range from including “students whose parents do not have any postsecondary experience” (Redford & Hoyer, 2017, p. 2) to a broader definition that focuses on “students whose parents have not received a bachelor’s degree” (U.S. Department of Education,

2016, p. 1). There are complexities within this population of students that can be overlooked depending on how the term is defined (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020). It is most commonly defined as having parents who do not possess a college degree (Lightweis, 2014). For this study, the term first-generation student was defined as students who were the first in their immediate family to graduate from a four-year university or college. This definition was consistent with how a first-generation student was defined at the research site.

High-Achieving Student. According to the NACADA (n. d.) organization, high achieving college students are defined as individuals “who demonstrate exceptional performance in academic (e.g., high GPA, awards/honors/distinctions) as well as complex experiential pursuits (e.g., Honors program, community-based, leadership, research, internships, creative, political, athletic)” (para. 1). High achieving college students tend to also display characteristics such as having intrinsic motivation, being self-directed, resourceful, intellectually curious, and goal-oriented, and having diversity of interests and a love of learning (NACADA, n. d.). High-achieving students can be used interchangeably with similar terms such as *high ability students*, *high potential students*, or *gifted students*. All terms refer to a student's distinct academic performance or characteristics. For this study, a student was referred to as high-achieving based on their grade point average. A student that had at least a 3.5 cumulative GPA or above was considered high-achieving.

Persistence. The term persistence describes students who progress toward their educational objectives, while having continuous progress and timely graduation (Habley et al., 2012). According to Habley et al. (2012), “a student who persists is one who continues to enroll” (p. 4) until degree completion. The definition of persistence in this study emphasized that a persister is

a student who “continuously pursues a degree with the expectation of graduation in about four (or two) years” (Habley et al., 2012, p. 4).

Mentoring. Mentoring is loosely coined as “a process defined by the types of support provided by the mentor to the protégé” (Allen & Eby, 2007, p. 10). Based on the National Academy of Sciences, “mentoring occurs when a senior person or mentor provides information, advice, and emotional support to a junior or student over a period of time” (Lev, Kolassa, & Bakken, 2010, p. 169). This study was guided by the National Academy of Sciences definition of mentoring.

Full-time College Student. According to Doyle (2009), full-time college student enrollment is defined as being enrolled in 12 credit hours or more. For this study, a student who was enrolled in 12 credit hours or more during a semester was considered a full-time college student.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitation of this study was that it focused on the influence of mentoring for persistence of high-achieving first-generation college students who completed their first-year of college. It excluded first-year college students. While I believe that all students could offer insight on their experiences in terms of persistence, I do not know if first-year students would have spent enough time being mentored to decipher how mentoring would have contributed to their persistence. This study had several limitations. The data for this study stemmed from one institution. While the data allowed me to gain an understanding of how mentoring affected the persistence of high-achieving first-generation students at one university, their experiences may not have been transferrable to students from other institutions. This study was also limited to examining high-achieving first-generation students at a four-year institution. Therefore, I was not able to capture the experiences of students with mentorship relationships at two-year institutions. The final limitation of this study was the potential bias that I may have brought to the

study as a researcher. Not only do I work with high-achieving first-generation students every day, but I also was a high-achieving first-generation college student myself. Therefore, I had certain assumptions and thoughts about who first-generation high-achieving students were and what their mentoring relationships were like.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant for several reasons. Many institutions invest money and resources into designing and maintaining student success programs (Pratt et al., 2019) without always knowing how impactful they are. Mentoring is often embedded in these student success programs. Through this study, I gained an understanding of the level of mentorship that high-achieving first-generation college students were able to develop through some of those success programs or other resources they had access to. From this, campus administration could become more aware of whether they are providing the necessary tools to allow mentor relationships to foster in a way that is helpful for high-achieving first-generation student success.

Often times, interventions and programs only last for a summer, a semester, or one-year. While these programs may be helpful for several reasons, some programs may not allow the time for deep mentoring to occur. Limited literature showed that mentorship has been instrumental in the success of high-achieving first-generation college students (Hebert, 2018; Tillapaugh & McAuliffe, 2019). Therefore, this reiterated the importance of trying to understand how mentoring influences the persistence of high-achieving first-generation college students based on their perspectives. In addition, although institutions have interventions in place (Kezar & Kitchen, 2020), they have to be mindful of whether these resources are serving the demographic of students in a way that is meaningful to them.

On a large scale, this study could help other institutions assess whether they are providing enough of the right resources to high-achieving first-generation students to help them be successful in a way that is useful for them. This may also help institutions acknowledge their preparation for population changes or lack thereof. On a wider spectrum, this knowledge could contribute to a better understanding of how to increase retention and completion rates for high-achieving first-generation college students. Most importantly, it could help institutions be more intentional about how they serve high-achieving first-generation college students.

Staff, faculty, and administrators may be more inclined to reform aspects of the postsecondary educational environment if they have the opportunity to learn about high-achieving first-generation students' experiences in a way that explains what is effective for them and what is not. Sometimes it can be difficult to know where to start when trying to support students but having an idea of what works can give institutions the fuel to give their students more of what is needed. I think having a better understanding of the experiences high-achieving first-generation students have with mentoring can also help higher education administrators and staff to advocate for financial support or resources if they do not have what they already need to support these students. Overall, I think this study would be significant for many reasons. The most important outcome would be having the tools to support the upcoming generation of high-achieving first-generation college students.

Theoretical Perspectives

There were four complementary frameworks that provided insight on first-generation high-achieving students' experiences with mentoring through multiple lenses: Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory, Rendon's validation theory, Yosso's cultural community wealth model, and Tinto's theory of college student retention. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that

human development was shaped by an individual's interactions with complex multilevel socioecological systems. This theory explains "how human development is shaped by the complex systems in which a person grows" (Mulisa, 2019, p. 105), this in turn shapes the socioecological environment in reciprocal. Rendon's validation theory refers to the proactive affirmation of students by in-and-out-of-class agents, such as faculty, student, academic affairs staff, family members, and peers (Linares & Munoz, 2011). When students receive intentional affirmation, they are validated as members of the college learning community. This validation helps them to personally develop and socially adjust (Linares & Munoz, 2011). Yosso's framework is steeped in the critical race theory which helps to analyze the experiences of historically underrepresented students within the k-20 educational pipeline (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Yosso's framework acknowledges the six types of capital that historically underrepresented minority students nurture and bring to a mentor relationship. Nurturing these capitals leads to cultural wealth (Longmire-Avital, 2019). Tinto's theory of college student retention asserts that academic and social integration are crucial to the process of adjusting to college (Yeh, 2010). This framework has been widely used to understand student persistence over the last 50 years (Yeh, 2010). Together these frameworks inform what factors contribute to the persistence of a college student and more intently the persistence of students from marginalized backgrounds. These frameworks also help situate the role of mentoring as critical in the success of first-generation high-achieving students in college.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory

The bioecological systems theory provides a framework that displays "the complex settings in which students' learning takes place" (Mulisa, 2019, p. 104). This system consists of five levels which include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem,

and the chronosystem. The microsystem highlights the element that may have a potential effect on student's learning outcomes such as their interactions with peers, educational and supportive resources, teacher-student relations, leisure time, teaching methods, and family (Mulisa, 2019). Access to these resources and support systems can have a powerful influence on a student's academic habits and career development. It can also contribute to a student's emotional state, cognitive ability, and health behaviors (Mulisa, 2019). The mesosystem involves a "set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person becomes an active participant" (Mulisa, 2019, p. 106). The changes that a student experiences at this level can affect their academic performance (Mulisa, 2019). Students often experience events at home or at work that could affect their progress in school (Mulisa, 2019). The exosystem involves social systems that do not impact an individual's development but could still have an effect on college students' success (Mulisa, 2019). Exosystems can consist of one or more settings "that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by what happens in that setting" (Mulisa, 2019, p. 106). These social systems include social media, mass media, family situations, sibling affairs, parental networks, friends, extended family, companionship, and financial resources. The macrosystem focuses on shared characteristics of a certain generation of students rather than an individual student (Mulisa, 2019). The macrosystem captures the impact that things like curricula, economic status, cultural values, political systems, technological backgrounds, and childcare systems could have on the academic pursuits of a generation of students (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). In the chronosystem level, time perspective variables contribute to developing a person. Ontogenetic change focuses on elements such as developmental maturities, transitions, and family's life courses (Mulisa, 2019). Phylogenetic changes look at how the collective community includes things like the effects of

war, socioeconomic history, increased opportunities for women to pursue a career, sociohistorical circumstances, and environmental factors (Mulisa, 2019). The bioecological systems theory demonstrates how students can be affected by different environments at each level. This theory also shows the different environments in which mentoring can occur.

Rendon's Validation Theory

Rendon's validation theory provides further insight on how an environment can affect a student's development. The theory of validation has six elements and speaks to the backgrounds of low-income, first-generation students as well as adult learners. The first element places the responsibility upon institutional agents such as faculty, advisors, counselors, lab assistants, and coaches to initiate contact with students and offer assistance, encouragement, and support as opposed to having students ask questions first (Linares & Munoz, 2011). The second element reiterates that the presence of validation makes students feel capable of learning and grants them a sense of self-worth (Linares & Munoz, 2011). The third element serves as a prerequisite for student development showing that when students are validated, they gain confidence in themselves and their abilities and get involved in college life (Linares & Munoz, 2011). The fourth element points out the importance of validation being consistent and happening in and outside of the classroom (Linares & Munoz, 2011). The fifth element further explains the necessity of consistent validation and validation as a developmental process. The final element emphasizes the importance of validation during the first few weeks of class and the first year of college (Linares & Munoz, 2011). Validation could be seen as a component to mentoring.

Hallett et al.'s (2020) study explores how the use of the validation theory can create academically validating experiences for first-generation and racially minoritized students through a comprehensive college transition program. A comprehensive college transition

program provides academic and social support for underserved students in their first two years of college. Validating students is one of the most effective processes in fostering student success (Hallett et al., 2020). The validation theory highlights the importance of moving the responsibility for student success off the student and placing the responsibility on institutional agents (i.e., faculty, staff, etc.) (Hallett et al., 2020). Hallett et al. (2020) drew data from a five-year longitudinal mixed methods study of the Thompson Scholar Learning Community (TSLC) comprehensive transition program at three institutions. The study examined how low-income students (some of whom were first-generation and racially minoritized) were affected by a comprehensive transition program. Students wrote digital diaries about their experiences. These programs were composed of shared academic courses, college success seminars, peer mentoring, individualized professional advising, and social, academic, and educational programs. Two key themes emerged from the findings. Hallett et al. (2020) mentioned that staff took the responsibility to create structures that allowed students to have academically validating experiences. This also allowed students to not have to figure out how to access support on their own. In taking a collective approach to help students, participants spoke of the program as a “family” or a “community” that was invested in their academic success and college goals (Hallett et al., 2020). The other theme that arose were the types of academic validation provided to the students. The program incorporated three interlocking aspects of support: providing reassurance, allowing for multiple chances, and creating space for vulnerability and risk taking (Hallett et al., 2020). The program provided multiple ways for students to receive support from different constituents and create a path to graduation (Hallett et al., 2020). This type of support could be viewed as a form of mentorship for the students.

Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model

While Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory and Rendon's validation theory provide insight on how human development is affected by certain environments in the higher education setting, Yosso's cultural wealth model draws on the knowledge students of color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom (Yosso, 2005). Yosso's cultural wealth model "demonstrates that community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). In more recent research, Longmire-Avital (2019) has recognized Yosso's model as a helpful framework for recognizing the capital that historically underrepresented minority students bring to a mentor relationship specifically in the undergraduate research area. Longmire-Avital (2019) mentions that faculty inherit benefits when entering into a collaborative mentored partnership with historically underrepresented minority students that are nurtured by the six capitals. Examples of how the capitals fit into mentorship are exhibited alongside Yosso's general idea of each capital.

This model has six elements. In the first element, students develop aspirational capital as a result of encountering countless barriers (Yosso, 2005). This capital refers to students' continued commitment to pursuing their dreams and persisting. Linguistic capital showcases the social skills students gain through communication experiences (Yosso, 2005). This includes students being exposed to multiple languages, code-switching, and knowing how to communicate across different mediums. Yosso (2005) refers to familial capital as cultural knowledge "nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition" (p. 79). This capital engages a commitment to community well-being (Yosso, 2005). According to Longmire-Avital (2019), in the mentor context, familial capital looks at the

dynamics of community well-being and kinship outside of blood relation. This is reflected in the support that students give each other outside of the classroom, often resulting in lateral mentorship (Longmire-Avital, 2019). Social capital refers to networks of people and community resources where peer and social contacts can provide “instrumental and emotional support” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) to navigate through society’s institutions. Through the aspect of mentorship, social capital refers to membership and engagement in social networks where students connect with researchers, scholars, and community activists on their own (Longmire-Avital, 2019). Navigational capital reflects the ability of historically underrepresented minority students to maneuver around spaces and institutions that were not designed for their existence (Yosso, 2005). Students maintain their high achievement despite the discrimination they face as a minority student (Longmire-Avital, 2019). Students also connect with others outside of their institution that could serve as a potential mentor for them. Resistant capital refers to knowledge and skills “fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Longmire-Avital (2019) connects the resistant capital to students viewing their capacity to do undergraduate research as a vehicle for equity and change (Longmire-Avital, 2019). Overall, the cultural community wealth model shows some mentor experiences historically underrepresented minorities get to have when doing undergraduate research. It also highlights the benefits that faculty mentors get when working with historically underrepresented minority students.

Tinto’s Theory of College Student Retention and the Alternative Perspective

Tinto’s Theory of College Student Retention focuses on the integration of students into academic and social life of college. According to Tinto’s theory, students must be sufficiently involved on campus for an institution to have successful retention (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-

Grice, 2008). Predictors of student persistence include frequent and quality contact that students have with staff, faculty, and other students on campus (Tinto, 1990). Tinto's theory emphasizes that when both faculty and staff combine their efforts, college retention efforts are that much more successful (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). While Tinto believes that students are likely to stay at institutions that make them feel valued as a member regardless of school type, student gender and race, and whether the student attends school full time or part time, Longwell-Grice & Longwell Grice (2008) emphasize that Tinto's theory does not address first-generation or low-income college students. Students from first-generation or low-income backgrounds may not find certain interactions with faculty as beneficial (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Tinto's 1993 model is based on the experiences of traditional-aged, White, middle-class students that attend private residential colleges and does not include students from marginalized student populations (Metz, 2004; Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 2000). While Tinto's theory is limited in terms of its application, it is still one of the dominant models that guides the concept and design of retention in higher education (Hu & Ma, 2010).

Due to the limitations of Tinto's theory, other persistence theories have been highlighted that pertain to the persistence of students of color. Maldonado et al. (2005) provide a critical perspective on the retention theory that focuses on student empowerment and institutional transformation. The authors suggest that three components are crucial for the persistence of students of color: (1) developing knowledge, skills, and social networks; (2) building community ties and commitments, and (3) challenging social and institutional norms. This perspective demonstrates the need to better understand what factors contribute to the persistence of students from varying backgrounds. For this study, the focus was on how mentoring impacts the persistence of high-achieving first-generation students.

Each of these frameworks highlights an important aspect of the study. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory, Rendon's Validation Theory, and Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model provide a lens into student development and growth. The Bioecological theory shows the different environments that can influence student experiences in the higher education setting. Some of the individuals in those environments mentor students and this has an impact on the college student's experience. The Validation Theory shows how certain environments can positively impact first-generation, low-income, and adult learners' college experiences. Those positive impacts stem from positive affirmations given by formal or informal mentors. The community cultural model demonstrates factors that can contribute to the persistence of historically underrepresented minority students as well as how the different aspects of the model allow for mentoring from varying people. The persistence theory gives insight on what allows a student to continue working towards their degree or graduation – reiterating the importance of academic and social integration. Tinto's persistence theory calls attention to the importance of students having quality interactions with other students, staff, and faculty. The individuals that students connect with could be mentors who play a role in the student's persistence during college. All frameworks present an opportunity to understand high-achieving first-generation college students' experiences with mentoring and persistence in ways that are valuable for this study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter highlights the purpose of the study which was to explore high-achieving first-generation college student's perception of mentoring and the role of mentoring in their persistence. While past research has focused on the impact of mentoring, researchers have not investigated how student background characteristics are related to different aspects of mentoring

and how those different aspects of mentoring impact student persistence (Hu & Ma, 2010). The significance of the study reiterated the value that stemmed from understanding how the role of mentoring influences the persistence of high-achieving first-generation college students specifically. Through focusing on research questions that were tailored to the experience of high-achieving first-generation college students, their experience with mentoring was highlighted. The chapter also provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks that guided the study and emphasized the importance of this research topic and the impact the study can make.

CHAPTER II - LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to explore literature on first-generation and high achieving college students at four-year institutions. Throughout this chapter, I examined who first-generation students were, what their college experiences were like in regard to persistence and explored what helped or hindered their persistence throughout their college journeys. I examined who high achieving students were and what their experiences were like in college. I also explored college student experiences with mentoring.

I searched the following databases to locate research on first-generation and high-achieving college students: ProQuest Central, Academic Search Complete, and Google Scholar. For first-generation students, I used a combination of the following key words: “first-generation student”, “low income”, “student success”, “higher education”, “postsecondary education”, “program”, “persistence”, and “retention”. To research content on high achieving college students, I used a combination of the following words: “high achieving”, “high ability”, “honors student”, “college student”, “higher education”, and “postsecondary education”. To find research on college student experiences with mentoring, I used a mixture of the following words: “mentoring”, “college student”, “university”, “college”, “institution”, and “persistence”. I included published scholarship from the last ten years and focused on research articles conducted at four-year colleges and universities. This chapter first reviews first-generation college students’ persistence at four-year institutions, followed by a review on high achieving students at four-year institutions, and concludes with a review on college student experiences with mentoring.

Factors that Hurt First-Generation Students’ Persistence in College

Although first-generation students’ academic potential is comparable to their continuing-generation peers (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2016), first-generation students still face paramount

challenges and disadvantages toward achieving academic success and college completion (Kamer & Ishitani, 2016). Markle and Stelzriede (2020) revealed that common challenges among first-generation students included lower SAT scores, difficulty with transition, lower degree completion rates, higher student loan debt, and lack of support specifically for first-generation students of color. Other challenges also include paying for tuition and living expenses (Azmitia et al., 2018), struggling to fit in (Lowery-Hart & Pachecho, 2011), finding a sense of belonging (Stebbleton & Soria, 2013), having difficulty with finding social support, academic support, and access to resources (Schelbe et al., 2019), and facing obstacles with work-related (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2016) and competing family responsibilities (Stebbleton & Soria, 2013). Therefore, it is important to explore the challenges that first-generation students experience with persisting in more depth.

Financial Stress for First-Generation Students

First-generation students frequently encounter obstacles that compromise their academic success (Stebbleton & Soria, 2013). According to Stebbleton and Soria (2013), some of these barriers include competing job and family responsibilities where first-generation students entering college work more hours, have lower family incomes, and have more financial dependents than continuing generation students (Mehta et al., 2011). Students that lack financial resources and work to finance college are not able to fully integrate into the campus culture which often leads to feeling out of place (Pratt et al., 2019). Working longer hours also results in less time for a student to complete their academic work (Bennett et al., 2015). These factors are likely to negatively impact first-generation students' academic achievement (Stebbleton & Soria, 2013). It may also influence their decision to leave college altogether (Pratt et al., 2019).

Two quantitative studies highlight the effect of financial stress on academic success for first-generation students. Although Stebleton and Soria (2013) surveyed over 58,000 students across six institutions and Bennett et al. (2015) surveyed 231 students from one economics class at a single university, both studies had similar results. Findings showed that financial concerns interfered with academic success for first-generation students (Stebleton & Soria, 2013; Bennett et al., 2015). Stebleton and Soria's (2013) survey displayed statistically higher instances where first-generation students faced academic obstacles with competing job responsibilities. Similarly, 30% of the participants in Bennett et al.'s (2015) survey showed how financial stress led to additional challenges with GPA and grades. Although first-generation students have expected to maintain employment during their college journey in the previous years (Pratt et al., 2019), recent research shows that there is a 40.4% decrease in first-generation students' persistence from working too many hours (Markle & Stelzriede, 2020). Previous research has also shown that financially stressed college students are less likely to obtain their degree (Bennett et al., 2015).

Lack of Sense of Belonging for First-Generation Students

In the United States, 30-50% of all first-generation college students leave after their first year (Azmitia et al., 2018). The students who drop out of college often emphasize not feeling welcomed in the college environment or not fitting with the campus ethos (O'Keefe, 2013). Tinto (2017) states that in order for a student to persist to completion, they "have to become engaged and come to see themselves as a member of a community of other students, academics, and professional staff who value their membership - in other words, that they matter and belong" (p. 3). Studies show that a lack of sense of belonging can lead to low persistence for first-generation college students (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Pratt et al., 2019). Gopalan and Brady

(2020) used a national survey (the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study from 2011 - 2012) to examine a sense of belonging among 23,750 participants at their respective institutions. Findings showed that both underrepresented minority students and first-generation students that attended four-year institutions reported a lower sense of belonging than their White/Asian/multiracial and continuing-generation peers (Gopalan & Brady, 2020). The lack of sense of belonging was associated with low persistence (Gopalan & Brady, 2020).

Pratt et al.'s (2019) quantitative study at a large midwestern university confirmed similar findings. First-year full-time college students were asked to fill out a new student survey which was used to report trends among first-generation college students. A total of 3,118 first-year students participated in the survey. Findings showed that not only was first-generation students' sense of belonging negatively related to their first-year retention ($r = -.06$, $p = .002$), but it was also negatively related to their expectation of fitting in (Pratt et al., 2019). Prior research reveals that it is important for students to feel a sense of belonging as this can lead to both persistence and success (e.g., Gopalan & Brady, 2020).

Lack of Confidence in First-Generation Students

At-risk students tend to be less confident about their academic ability while in college (Pratt et al., 2019). According to Pratt et al. (2019), the students concerned about their financial security, academic competence, and social belonging are the students who tend to leave the university before completing their program of study. An individual's lack of confidence or fear of failure negatively affects their campus experiences (Lowery-Hart & Pachecho, 2011). Students must believe that they can succeed in their studies to do so (Tinto, 2017). They must also have a strong sense of self-efficacy that will promote goal attainment and influence how

they address goals, tasks, and challenges (Tinto, 2017). Self-efficacy (which leads to a student's motivation and persistence) is the foundation to student success (Tinto, 2017).

Multiple studies that revealed the challenges that first-generation students encountered with having confidence are particularly noteworthy (Pratt et al., 2019; Pyne & Means, 2013). Pyne and Means (2013) presented one student's personal experience through a phenomenological study. Not only did this young, first-generation, Hispanic college student at a highly selective private institution face obstacles with confidence, but she also believed that her fear would create a barrier for her to be able to have authentic relationships with her professors which would then limit her access to academic and social resources, and ultimately instill habits in her that would be counterproductive to successful college preparation (Pyne & Means, 2013). Although this study only provides a single perspective on the lack of confidence, the quantitative study by Pratt et al. (2019) that received over 3,000 participant responses echoed these findings. A statistically significant number of first-generation college students felt less confident in their academic abilities ($r = .08$, $p < .001$) in comparison to non-first-generation college students (Pratt et al., 2019). It is important to recognize that while some students begin their college journey with confidence in their abilities to succeed, not all students do, which negatively affects their experiences (Tinto, 2017).

Factors that Help First-Generation Students' Persistence in College

Although first-generation students experience many obstacles that can negatively affect their persistence during their time in college, they also have several avenues of support to help them persist throughout their academic journey. That support comes in the form of familial support, mentorship (faculty, staff, or peer mentorship), academic advising, and student support resources (such as interventions or bridge programs).

Familial Support

Most of the literature in relation to socioeconomically disadvantaged students often describe their families as lacking the ability to support them on their path to success (Roksa & Kinley, 2018). However, that is not necessarily the case for every student. According to Roksa and Kinley (2018), parents do play an important role in supporting students of color in college. Although socioeconomically disadvantaged families may be limited in financially and culturally contributing to their children's educational pursuits, this does not preclude their ability to provide support (Kiyama & Harper, 2018) and serve as a source of motivation for their children (Roksa et al., 2016).

Two studies call attention to the role of family support on college success. Roksa and Kinsley (2018) explored the role of family support in facilitating academic success of low-income students in their quantitative study. The study examined two different forms of family support (emotional and financial) in relation to academic outcomes (grades, credit accumulation, and persistence) among low-income college students (Roksa & Kinsley, 2018). The data for this study came from 728 Wisconsin Financial Aid (WiscAid) study participants who were first-time first-year students enrolled at eight four-year institutions in the fall of 2014 (Roksa & Kinsley, 2018). Findings revealed that while family financial support was not related to any of the three outcomes (grades, credit accumulation, and persistence), emotional family support was. Familial support also emerged as an important factor in Beasley's (2017) study that examined factors that influenced rural college students' college aspirations, participation, and completion through a qualitative study in West Virginia. Participants attending a four-year college talked about having strong parental support and encouragement and high parental expectations that likely led to their college access and success as well (Beasley, 2017).

Academic Advising

Research has consistently alluded to a positive influence of advising on student retention and has also made mention of the number of advisor-advisee meetings possibly positively affecting student persistence (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Advisors can assist first-generation students in their journey to obtain a college degree (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). For example, Kitchen et al. (2021) examined how a specific proactive advising intervention that was implemented as a part of a comprehensive college transition program promoted academic success amongst first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented minoritized students. The study found that proactive advising was directly linked to student retention, reduction in probation and withdrawals, and increased academic achievement and GPA. The findings showed that grade checks caused students to proactively review their grades and assess their academic behavior which assisted in self-appraisal of their academic abilities and beliefs in their ability to recognize and address barriers to their academic success (Kitchen et al., 2021). Pratt et al. (2019) noted that the University of Oklahoma had success using similar tactics. Having a highly responsive advising team and mandatory midterm grade reporting led to a record 90.4% freshman-to-sophomore retention rate at the University of Oklahoma for first-generation college students (McNutt, 2016; Pratt et al., 2019).

Interventions and Programs that Help First-Generation Students Persist

As the disadvantages faced by first-generation college students come into focus, colleges have begun directing resources into programs designed to improve the retention rates for at risk students (Pratt et al., 2019). These programs include summer bridge programs, TRIO programs, and other types of interventions that allow these students to persist through college. Schelbe et al. (2019) found that first-generation students face unique challenges during the transition to college

and can access assistance with the transition through campus support programs. Being engaged with these support programs can increase student success. They can also help to improve the college experience of first-generation students overall (Schelbe et al., 2019).

Bridge Programs for First-Generation Student Persistence

Many colleges and universities have recognized the disparity with student success over time and have created programs to increase academic success and retention for first-generation college students (Schelbe et al., 2019). The Stem Boot Camp Bridge Program at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and the GenOne program have both provided resources and structure to help first-generation students be successful. Lisberg and Wood (2018) evaluated whether the achievement gap between underrepresented minorities and non-underrepresented minorities varied based on program participation in the Stem Boot Camp (SBC) Bridge program.

Enrollment data were analyzed for 52 summer bridge participants who attended and completed the program between 2012 – 2016. Findings showed that retention to year two was significantly higher (96%) for bridge program participants in comparison to the expected retention rate (71.5%) for those who were not SBC participants, but still identified as an underrepresented minority at UWW (Lisberg & Woods, 2018). The program had many components that provided support for students such as peer and faculty mentors, a two-week summer workshop, and a \$1000 stipend. Schelbe et al. (2019) investigated a similar program that served 1,500 African American and Latino first-generation students. The program was called GenOne which is a first-generation academic retention program. Although the 25 students in the sample generally endorsed GenOne for helping them to achieve academic success, many interview findings reiterated that program support, expectations, preparation, and resources were what specifically led to academic success (Schelbe et al., 2019). Programs that encompass services aimed at

preparatory academic skills and academic support networks increase the likelihood of first-generation students graduating (Schelbe et al., 2019).

First-Year Courses/Programs

First-Year interest groups are a part of a movement that started in the late 1980's and are credited with assisting students in earning higher grades, building connections with their peers, and graduating at higher rates than those who do not participate (Cook, 2018). Vaughan (2020) emphasizes that first-year seminar participation increases student persistence and achievement. First-year seminars, groups, or programs can increase a student's practical skills, campus involvement, and peer connections (Vaughan et al., 2019). There are many types of first-year seminars that serve specific groups of students, such as international students, first-generation students, underrepresented minorities, or focus on common themes or topics (Cook, 2018). Sometimes these seminars are optional, or they can be mandatory depending on the institution.

Vaughan (2020) conducted a mixed methods study to better understand how the collaboration of TRIO Student Support Services and First-Year Seminars (FYS) affect first-generation students' success during their first year in college. Participants received intrusive academic advising sessions, workshop sessions, academic, personal, and professional support services as well as participated in the required first-year seminar. Data were compared for students who were in the first-year seminar only, those who were in both the first-year seminar and TRIO, and those who were not in either program. Out of 2,720 participants, findings showed that students who participated in both TRIO and FYS programs persisted at higher rates (84.4%) as compared to the students who were only in the first-year seminar or those who were not a part of either group (Vaughan, 2020). Vaughan (2020) also interviewed students about their experiences and found that being enrolled in both programs provided faculty support, social

opportunities and student connections, time management strategies, help with motivation, opportunities to build close relationships with instructors, and skills relevant to other classes.

Comprehensive Transition Programs

While colleges, universities, and national organizations have experimented with several interventions to improve the success for underrepresented and underserved students, few have tried implementing a comprehensive transition program. A comprehensive transition program incorporates both curricular innovation and out-of-class support for students that are transitioning to college (Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). Multiple existing interventions and programs at a university are integrated to create a comprehensive transition program that can promote student success (Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). Hallett et al. (2020) drew data from a longitudinal mixed methods study on three Thompson Scholar Learning Community (TSLC) comprehensive transition programs placed at three different University of Nebraska campuses. These comprehensive transition programs provided shared academic courses, midsemester grade meetings and staff and instructor support for first-generation and racially minoritized students. Although surveys, interviews, and observations were conducted across two cohorts over a five-year period for this study, Hallett et al. (2020) only chose to examine the interview results. Eighty-three participants participated in semi-structured interviews and digital diary writing over a three-year period. One of the themes that emerged from the findings was the theory of validation. Hallett et al. (2020) defined validation as an “enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that can be focused on academic or interpersonal success” (p. 255). Findings showed that the programs created academically validating experiences for the students which included reassuring them of their potential, reducing stress associated with failure, and allowing the students to fully engage within the academic context

(Hallett et al., 2020). These programs emphasize the influence of support and the importance of instructors engaging with students (Hallett et al., 2020).

High-Achieving College Students

For more than a century, higher education administrators and professors have recognized having academically talented college students in college spaces (Rinn & Plucker, 2019). Given the idea that academically talented students have been a long priority for institutions of higher education (Wechsler, 2014), “higher education administrators and professors have made an effort to provide differentiated instruction and programming to high ability undergraduates” (Rinn & Plucker, 2019, p. 188). While providing academically talented students with environments that can best support their development is important, it is even more important to know who these students are and what their college experiences are like. Considering this, I explore research that was published in the last ten years on high achieving students. I focus on their characteristics, their experience with mentorship in college, and their overall college experiences.

High Achieving College Student Characteristics

Before exploring the research on high-achieving students, it is important to examine the various terminologies used to describe these students in the literature. The following terms have been used to describe academically talented students: “high achieving students,” “high ability students,” “high potential students,” and “gifted students”. While the terms are very similar, it is essential to note that they are not synonymous (Dougherty, 2007). High-achieving student characteristics have been historically known to focus on their academic capabilities (Winston et al., 1984). They also are known to demonstrate exceptional performance in other experiential pursuits they choose to engage in (NACADA, “Advising High Achieving Students Community” section, para. 1). Similarly, high ability students’ academic performance is evaluated. In most

honors colleges at universities/colleges, students are deemed as high ability if they meet a minimum high school or college GPA requirement and/or standardized test criteria for admissions (Miller & Dumford, 2018). High ability students also have intrinsic motivation and independence and tend to be perfectionists (Rinn & Plucker, 2019). Although the perception of high ability students brings awareness to a student's ability, so does the term *gifted*. One of the main distinctions between a high ability student and one that is gifted is that gifted students are traditionally identified as gifted K-12 populations (Miller & Dumford, 2018). In addition, giftedness is considered an aptitude domain and the talents possessed by gifted students are fields in which these aptitudes are expressed (Gagné, 2018). While many of the terms have specific things that distinguish each type of high achieving student, a high potential student is nearly all encompassing of each of these types of students. The term *high potential* is used broadly to describe high achieving students and formally identify them as gifted or having talents in several areas (Renbarger & Long, 2019). Varying literature shows that these terms that are used to describe academically talented students are used interchangeably.

High Achieving Students' Experiences with Faculty and Mentors

High-achieving students have several means of support that they can gain access to during their academic journeys. Over 1,500 institutions have honors colleges and programs that provide their most prepared students with additional support (Diaz et al., 2019). Honors programs have provided students with intellectual and psychosocial growth (Diaz et al., 2019) by giving students individual faculty mentors and including students in small faculty mentor groups (Gee, 2015). Honors programs have also been known to enhance student-faculty interaction (Miller & Dumbford, 2018) via small classroom settings. High achieving students have also

reported finding mentors among the faculty involved in their research (Diaz et al., 2019) and through faculty they have had classes with (Goings, 2017).

Miller and Dumford (2018) investigated findings from the 2015 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which focused on first year and senior students' engagement across 15 universities. This study compared various aspects of student engagement among 1,339 honors students and 7,191 general education students. Honors participation had a statistically significant positive effect on reflective and integrative learning, learning strategies, collaborative learning, discussion with diverse others, student-faculty interaction, and quality of interactions (Miller & Dumford, 2018). Cognard-Black and Spisak (2019) also noted the impact of an honors program in their study. In their study, they also conducted a national survey to develop a profile of honors students in comparison to non-honors students at 19 research universities. Findings from their Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey showed that 15,280 honors students reported greater frequency in working with faculty on activities outside of coursework, increasing their efforts because of high faculty standards, communicating with faculty about classwork outside of the classroom, and doing more work than required because they find coursework to be interesting, in comparison to non-honors students (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019).

Although, the previous studies have focused on honors students in comparison to the general student population, not all students who have successful interactions with faculty are honors students. General high achieving students can also cultivate these types of relationships. Goings (2017) explored the academic and social experiences of nine high-achieving males with 3.0 or higher GPAs attending Success University (an urban public historically Black university). The research questions focused on examining the classroom experiences of high-achieving Black

men interacting with faculty and the strategies they used in classroom settings to ensure these interactions were positive. Each participant did two one-on-one interviews, and from the interviews, three themes emerged. Findings showed that *tough love* was one of the expressed shared experiences amongst the participants. Participants believed professors took a sink-or-swim approach to teaching, where they encouraged students to figure things out on their own (Goings, 2017). One student's remedy to this was to figure out another way to get involved with their professor where they joined faculty in their research (Goings, 2017). The second theme that emerged was *standing out* where students had to be strategic in their interactions to develop positive relationships with professors (Goings, 2017). The third theme that emerged was *never outshine the master* referring to the political strategy to avoid being offensive or seen as a know it all in classroom spaces (Goings, 2017). Although participants understood the intentions of their professors, they felt that their professors needed to diversify motivations for showing them compassion (Goings, 2017). Despite the different interactions that these students had with their professors, they believed that their professors' actions were grounded in preparing their students for success in a world that may not offer them much assistance (Goings, 2017).

Student Support for High Achieving Students

Different forms of support exist to help high achieving students be successful throughout their college careers. Honors colleges and programs are one of varying student support programs that can provide additional support for their most prepared students and create an environment that fosters their abilities and talent (National Collegiate Honors Council, 2018). Honors programs are defined as an “academic unit on a collegiate campus responsible for devising and delivering in-class and extracurricular academic experiences that provide a distinctive learning environment for selected students” (Rinn & Plucker, 2019, p. 188). Honors colleges and

programs are designed to provide academically rigorous experiences for high-ability students previously identified as gifted (Miller & Dumford, 2018). Part of the academic experience that many honors programs provide are first-year seminars, learning communities, collaborative assignments and projects, problem-based learning, undergraduate research, service learning, and capstone courses or projects (Diaz et al., 2019). Some honors programs also offer students the opportunity to live in an educationally enriching environment which helps with peer academic interactions (Wawrzynski et al., 2012). Outside of honors programs, there are also different scholarship programs that offer additional support to the high achieving students they select for funding. Different forms of support include financial support (where tuition and supplies are covered) and career services support (Wolniak & Rekoutis, 2016). For high achieving students who are not involved with any sort of support program, research has shown that those students take advantage of general college campus resources (Tillapaugh & McAuliffe, 2019).

Diaz et al. (2019) researched the impact of an honors college on the successes of a diverse urban student sample from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Data showed statistically significant differences ($p \leq .01$) between honors and non-honors college students on gender, age, race/ethnicity, first-generation college student status, parent income, high school GPA, AP credits earned, ACT composite, first-term GPA in college, first-to-second-year retention, four-year graduation (notably 69% versus 24%), and six-year graduation (85% versus 53%) for a sample of 21,723 full-time first year students entering the university between 2006 and 2012 (Diaz et al., 2019). Findings revealed that honors college students had far greater academic success than non-honors students due to their participation in the honors college and their access to a host of resources through honors (Diaz et al., 2019).

On the other hand, Wolniak and Rekoutis (2016) and Tillapaugh and McAuliffe (2019) conducted studies on high-achieving students who were not in an honors college. Both studies showed that high-achieving college students can succeed with other means of support. Wolniak and Rekoutis (2016) conducted a quantitative study to discover other ways that high achieving students were able to succeed academically despite several risk factors. They surveyed 2011-2012 Horatio Alger Association award recipients with at least a 3.0 GPA. Results from 1,496 participants showed that having a mentor during college significantly increased coping through utilizing institutional resources (Wolniak & Rekoutis, 2016). Findings also showed that more frequent usage of college services enhanced a student's ability to cope with the college atmosphere through drawing on institutional resources such as talking with professors, academic advisors, or peer groups (Wolniak & Rekoutis, 2016). Similar findings were discovered via Tillapaugh and McAuliffe's (2019) qualitative study. Their study examined the critical influences that helped four high achieving first-generation students from a rural area be successful. Students who identified as a first-generation college student, a man, a junior or senior in college, came from a rural area, had a cumulative GPA of a 3.0 or higher, and were involved on campus with at least one leadership role were selected to participate. Interview findings show that the themes that led these participants to be successful in their college endeavors were accessing student support programs, connection with campus mentors, family support, and financial support (Tillapaugh & McAuliffe, 2019). Participants were better equipped to be successful in college through utilizing campus resources (Tillapaugh & McAuliffe, 2019).

Academic and Social Engagement for High Achieving Students

High achieving students get engaged in different campus activities to enhance their undergraduate experience (Wawrzynski et al., 2012). One of the more traditional paths for

engagement is through classroom experiences (Miller & Dumbford, 2018). Academic engagement included the use of learning strategies, quantitative reasoning, higher order learning, and reflective and integrative learning (Miller & Dumbford, 2018). Outside of the classroom, high achieving students also get engaged in social networking and extracurricular activities (Young et al., 2016) which can lead to leadership development (Hu, 2011).

Hu's (2011) and Hebert's (2018) studies show that high achieving students are highly engaged. Hu (2011) examined the relationship between scholarship awards in college and the leadership capacity of college graduates for Gates Millennium Scholarship (GMS) recipients and students with similar academic backgrounds. GMS recipients are high achieving students who have attained a GPA of a 3.3 or higher on a 4.0 scale to receive the funding (Hu, 2011). Data for this study were collected by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago and included three waves of longitudinal surveys of the freshman of GMS cohorts/recipients and non-GMS recipients in 2000 and 2001. Findings from 3,319 participants showed that GMS recipients had higher levels of academic engagement, social engagement, and leadership efficacy than their non-GMS counterparts (Hu, 2011). Hebert (2018) conducted a smaller scale qualitative study to highlight the experiences of 10 high-achieving first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds who overcame adversity at a large urban public university in the Southeast. To qualify for the study, students had to have an average GPA of a 3.5 or higher, identify as a first-generation student, have evidence (documentation) of coming from a low-income family, and be a full-time student at the university. Interview findings similarly showed that these 10 students were engaged in research projects with faculty and graduate students, service learning, internships, and study abroad opportunities through financial help and social connections in the Honors College (Hebert, 2018).

Financial Support for High Achieving Students

High achieving students have varying financial need when going to college. Some students come from a higher socioeconomic status where they may not need as much financial assistance (Diaz et al., 2019). Other high achieving students that come from low-income backgrounds may depend on financial support more heavily. Some high achieving students that take part in honors programs may receive financial support for undergraduate research projects, conference travel, and other scholarly activities (Clark et al., 2018). Financial support not only funds low-income students' college experience but can also play a huge role in their success (Renbarger & Long, 2019).

Two studies examined the outcome of financial support on low-income gifted students' college success. Renbarger and Long (2019) conducted a systematic review of literature that highlighted specific financial programs that support low-income gifted students. The researchers reviewed the findings from 16 articles that included quantitative ($n = 2$), qualitative ($n = 10$), and mixed methods ($n = 4$) studies and identified themes from them. All articles refer to an intervention at an institution. The intervention types (identified themes) were as follows: GMS, financial aid, advanced coursework, and early college and dual credit. Financial aid and scholarship programs such as the Gates Millennium Scholars Foundation, various Promise scholarship foundations, and the Lottery scholarship were helpful for students. Renbarger and Long (2019) found that college success outcomes depended on the type of aid received and the race of the student. For the Gates Millennium Scholars program, results showed that students who received GMS funding were able to be involved with more social engagements and community service, were able to attend a college that fit their academic intellectual interests, accrued less college debt, and had higher GPA's than nonrecipients of the GMS scholarship

(Renbarger & Long, 2019). DesJardins and McCall (2014) did further research on the Gates Millennium Scholars program and examined data from the National Opinion Research Center. They analyzed the impact of the receipt of a Gates Scholarship on several outcome variables for 3,570 participants and had similar findings. Results revealed that the receipt of a Gates scholarship increased a student's grade point average and aspirations to obtain a Ph.D. degree and led to statistically significant reduction in hours worked (DesJardins & McCall, 2014).

Mentorship for Undergraduate College Students at Four-Year Institutions

Mentoring programs and mentoring practices have become a national priority (Girves et al., 2005). Most college mentoring programs are designed to increase student persistence and serve targeted populations such as minorities and first-generation students (Hu & Ma, 2010). Although mentorship programs can be designed for specific groups of people, the mentorship experience is one that all students can benefit from. Research shows that faculty mentorship (Hernandez et al., 2017) and peer mentorship (Broom & Davis, 2017) were important to undergraduate college students and their continued efforts to persist through college.

Faculty Mentorship

Faculty mentorship is helpful for college student persistence. Two studies highlight the benefits of faculty mentorship for undergraduate college students. Hernandez et al.'s, (2017) quantitative study examined the unique benefits of an informal mentoring program aimed at supporting first- and second-year female STEM majors' scientific identity development at a four-year institution. The sample consisted of 116 first- and second-year college female STEM majors recruited from seven universities in the Colorado/Wyoming area. Students completed an online matching survey that measured academic interest and achievements, demographic characteristics, family support and resources, interest in having a mentor, and a variety of psychological and

motivational factors associated with persistence in STEM. Findings showed that mentoring support from a faculty mentor strengthened a student's motivation, persistence, achievement outcomes, and their scientific identity (Hernandez et al., 2017). Brooms and Davis (2017) also emphasized similar findings. Brooms and Davis's (2017) study investigated the college experience of 59 Black males at three different historically White institutions. Through interviews the researchers were able to learn how the participants made meaning from their college experiences. Results showed that receiving mentorship from Black faculty members was a critical component of their college experience that positively shaped their persistence efforts (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

Peer Mentorship

Peer mentorship also contributed to the persistence of undergraduate college students. Brooms and Davis's (2017) qualitative study emphasizes the importance of peer mentorship alongside faculty mentorship. Peer mentorship positively shaped African American males' persistence efforts in Brooms and Davis's study (2017). The benefits of peer mentorship were multifaceted in the sense that peer mentorship could influence "one's academic, social, emotional, and psychosocial perspective" (Brooms & Davis, 2017, p. 308). Lancaster and Xu's (2017) qualitative study also examined the experiences of African American students and found similar results. Twenty-five students from STEM majors were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. Findings showed that despite the many obstacles they faced with challenging classes, large classes, frustration with advising, and weak relationships with faculty, that peer support and mentoring were helpful in their efforts to persist (Lancaster & Xu, 2017). In Lancaster and Xu's (2017) study, mentors were family friends, older siblings, and upper division classmates (peer mentors). Mentors provided psychological and pragmatic support which helped with overcoming

obstacles and managing stress (Lancaster & Xu, 2017). In both studies, peer mentors provided students with the tools to persist.

Mentorship for First-Generation Students

Low income, first-generation students report that mentorship is key to their undergraduate success (Lisberg & Woods, 2018). Faculty and peer mentorship not only alleviate social pressures associated with college, but also soften the transition into the academic community, provide an environment to address challenges associated with being an underrepresented minority, and promote coping skills and resiliency (Mondisa & McComb, 2015). Mentor relationships can consist of student-to-student, student-to-faculty, or student-to-staff member connections and could involve guidance or mentorship around components like research, academic support, career support, and personal consideration (Lightweis, 2014). Many institutions have committed to improving retention by frequently connecting and engaging key faculty with first-year students (Pratt et al., 2019).

Mentorship: Helping First-Generation College Students Navigate College

Two qualitative studies emphasize the importance of mentorship in navigating the college experience. Longwell-Grice et al.'s (2016) qualitative study examined the experiences of first-generation undergraduates in private institutions and offered evidence for how students find their own way in dealing with the complexities of a transition. Fourteen first-generation college students from three different private institutions in the Northeast participated in semi-structured interviews to provide insight into their experiences. Findings revealed that having mentors and peers to work through issues with was critical to the successful navigation of college for these first-generation students (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Schreiner et al.'s (2011) qualitative study on successful high-risk college students further emphasizes the importance of mentors. Schreiner

et al.'s (2011) study focused on 62 successful high-risk students from nine different colleges and examined their responses on who they deemed to be the most influential in their ability to persist through college. Like the previous study, 54 participants in this study acknowledged that faculty or staff played a positive role in their persistence (Schreiner, 2011).

Peer Mentorship for First-Generation College Students

Recent research shows that peer mentorship has been a helpful form of support for first-generation college students. Peer mentors have similar backgrounds that give them insight on the social and emotional challenges their mentees face (Plaskett et al., 2018). In addition, peer mentors “possess the knowledge, skills, and experience to guide and support their mentees effectively” (Plaskett et al., 2018, p. 48). Two studies focused on the impact of peer mentoring for undergraduate college students at four-year institutions. Plaskett et al.'s (2018) qualitative study focused on examining a program that connects incoming first-generation low-income college students with peer mentors from an area or city similar to where the mentee matriculated from. The study had six participants (five mentees and one mentor). Findings showed that peer mentoring relationships produced a variety of benefits for the incoming students. Mentees received help with applying for scholarships and financial aid, selecting classes, strengthening study skills, building friendships, and connecting with people and organizations on campus (Plaskett et al., 2018). The most important aspect of the peer mentorship was when mentees were able to not only receive help from their mentors but also bond with them (Plaskett et al., 2018). Moschetti et al.'s (2018) mixed methods study on a peer mentoring program for Latina/o first-generation college students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution had similar findings. Data were collected over three years from 458 Latina/o students with mentors and 86 Latina/o students without mentors. Findings showed that peer mentors had an impact on their mentee's campus

integration and connection. Like Plaskett et al.'s (2018) study, mentees in this study benefitted from having a meaningful mentee/mentor relationship as well as emotional and academic support (Moschetti et al., 2018).

Faculty Mentorship for First-Generation College Students

Faculty mentorship was another component of mentoring that first-generation college students found to be important. Two qualitative studies provide insight on the effects faculty mentorship can have on first-generation students during their college experience. Hebert's (2018) study focused on the experiences of 10 high-achieving first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds. Students selected for the study were full-time first-generation high-achieving college students with a 3.5 grade point average (GPA) or higher and evidence of financial need in their financial aid application. While the study does not directly focus on mentoring, students highlight how their relationships with their faculty mentors led to other beneficial experiences throughout their college careers. Students shared that being mentored by faculty led to their engagement in undergraduate research, regional research conference attendance, engagement in study abroad opportunities, and preparation for graduate school (Hebert, 2018). Similarly, Demetriou et al. (2017) conducted a study that described the experiences of 16 successful first-generation college students through student reflections. Students had to be a first-generation student and a successful student (a student who has been retained and is within one semester of 4-year undergraduate degree completion) (Demetriou et al., 2017). Students from this study also emphasized the importance of their faculty mentor relationship. Findings showed that faculty mentorship helped first-generation students to generate original ideas, contribute to the academic enterprise, and feel connected and accepted in the college community overall (Demetriou et al., 2017).

Mentorship for High-Achieving College Students

Although the research on mentorship for high-achieving college students was limited, there were a couple of qualitative studies that highlighted the value of mentorship for high-achieving college students. Hebert (2018) and Tillapaugh and McAuliffe's (2019) studies emphasized the importance of mentorship for students who identified as high-achieving along with other identities. Tillapaugh and McAuliffe (2019) conducted a study on four high-achieving first-generation men from rural Maine. Students selected for this study had to be a first-generation college student, a junior or a senior, come from a rural area, be a male student, and have a 3.0 cumulative grade point average or higher. Findings from the study showed that staff and peer mentors were key participants in a high-achieving student's overall success (Tillapaugh & McAuliffe, 2019). High-achieving students received assistance with preparing for graduate school, getting engaged on campus, doing leadership roles, and building important relationships for different opportunities (Tillapaugh & McAuliffe, 2019). Hebert's (2018) study on 10 high-achieving first-generation low-income college students found similar findings. Hebert's (2018) findings reiterated the importance of mentorship specifically from faculty mentors. Faculty mentors helped high-achieving students get engaged with undergraduate research, study abroad opportunities, and preparing for graduate school (Hebert, 2018). Overall, mentorship has been beneficial to high-achieving college students in multiple ways.

Chapter Summary

The chapter highlights the experiences of first-generation and high-achieving college students and reviews the literature to show different factors that help and hinder first-generation, high-achieving college students' persistence. Although first-generation and high-achieving students are two distinct groups of individuals that have varying needs, there is one overlapping

resource that is influential in both students' college careers. That resource is mentorship. While there are studies that highlight the importance of different types of mentorship (e.g., staff, faculty, or peers) separately for high-achieving and first-generation college students, research is limited in terms of understanding the impacts of mentoring for students with both overlapping identities. Tillapaugh and McAuliffe's (2019) study sheds an important light in this regard, but more studies are needed to fill the gaps in the literature by exploring the impacts of mentoring on high-achieving first-generation college students' persistence and success.

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how high-achieving first-generation college students perceived their mentoring experiences at a public research university in the midsouth, and examined what role mentoring played in their persistence. This chapter will start with an explanation for selecting a qualitative narrative research design. Following that, more information will be included on this research design, the process for selecting the research site, the research participant criteria, and the interview protocol. From there, some insight will be given on the reasoning for using open-ended semi-structured interviews. The chapter will conclude with insight on the data collection process, strategies that were employed to ensure the consistency, credibility, and trustworthiness of the study, and steps on how the data will be analyzed.

Research Design

A narrative research design was used in this study to explore the influence of mentoring on high-achieving first-generation college student persistence. According to Maxwell (2012), “much qualitative research provides valuable and trustworthy accounts of educational settings and activities, the contexts in which these are situated, and the meanings they have for participants” (p. 655). Qualitative methods are useful when trying to gain an in-depth understanding of a complex problem or a poorly researched area (Rust et al., 2017). Qualitative research also provides a more inductive approach when using samples that tend to be smaller, often nonrandom, and focus on the subset of a population (Rust et al., 2017). The overall goal of a qualitative study is to “explore complex phenomena from the participants’ point of view while minimizing researcher assumptions and biases to potentially discover unconsidered topics” (Rust

et al., 2017, p. 1305). The methodology for this study was narrative inquiry which focuses on human stories (Mertova & Webster, 2019). According to Mertova and Webster (2019), narrative “is a rendition of how life is perceived” (p. 11). Through narrative inquiry, human beings are able to make sense of their experiences through story structures (Mertova & Webster, 2019). The narrative methodology may be the primary way that humans understand their lived experiences (Birks & Mills, 2014). Narrative inquiry looks for a deeper understanding of specific aspects of life experiences (Yang, 2011).

Sample

I used purposeful sampling to identify and select the participants for this study. According to Creswell (2012), the idea behind purposefully selected individuals for a proposed study is to “best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 189). I used criterion sampling because it requires “explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria which includes specifications for methodological rigor” (Suri, 2011, p. 69). In criterion sampling “individuals are selected based on the assumption that they possess knowledge and experience with the phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 539). The participants that were selected for this study were high-achieving first-generation college students at a public research university in the midsouth. The students had to meet the following criteria to take part in the study: be a high-achieving college student, a first-generation college student, and a student who is currently enrolled full-time at the university (enrolled in at least 12 credit hours that semester), and had completed their first-year of college. College students with a cumulative grade point average of a 3.5 or higher were considered high-achieving students. Students who are the first in their immediate family to graduate from a four-year university or college were considered a first-generation student for this study. Students who have completed their first year of college were

identified because they had been enrolled at the university for some time and could provide better insight on their mentoring experiences than first-year students. Thirteen participants were selected for this study. While Creswell (2012) notes that narrative research tends to include one or two individuals, he also emphasizes the importance of reaching saturation when selecting a sample size (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), saturation occurs “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (p. 189). Therefore, I stopped collecting data once the categories or themes were saturated (Creswell, 2012).

Data Collection

I recruited participants for this study through an Honors Student Support Program at a research university in the midsouth. The Honors Student Support Program is a mentorship and scholarship program for high-achieving underrepresented college students. The Honors Student Support Program provides mentoring and academic support to high-achieving students with varying underrepresented backgrounds. Varying underrepresented backgrounds include students who are first-generation, low-income, from a rural town, from a town that is underrepresented at the institution, or who are in a major that is dominated by the opposite gender. Some students in the program are enrolled in the honors program but there are others who are on the pathway to becoming honors students. Students in the Honors Student Support Program are provided with assigned peer mentors, faculty mentors, and professional mentors who work at the institution. These mentors help the students to be successful with whatever they are trying to accomplish during their college careers. I recruited students from the Honors Student Support Program who had a 3.5 cumulative GPA or higher and who were first-generation because they met the criteria for my study. In addition, I recruited these students because they were in a mentorship program and had exposure to mentorship experiences. They had a deeper understanding of mentorship

and were able to better reflect on the role that mentoring played in their success. Before contacting any potential participants, I asked the Director of the Honors Student Support Program and the Dean of the Program for permission to conduct this study with the selected participants. From there, I contacted potential participants for the study. All students in the Honors Student Support Program were sent an initial email about the proposed study along with the research criteria and a short demographic survey to fill out. Students were asked to submit the demographic survey if they met the criteria for the study. Students were also able to create their own pseudonym when filling out the demographic survey. This was done to protect their anonymity in case they were selected for the study. I selected participants based on if they met the criteria and based on the number of participants needed for the study. Once selected for the study, I sent each participant a follow-up email with a Doodle Poll that allowed them to select a date and time for the interview. I also sent each participant a confirmation email with the date, time, and location for the interview, the interview questions, and information on the pre-interview activity. Participants were able to reflect on the interview questions before the actual interview. Participants also received a reminder about their scheduled time for the interview. I conducted interviews in-person based on the participant's availability. The interviews were conducted at the university campus and were audio recorded for transcription purposes. It was important to use the university campus as a location for interviews given that “qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study” (Creswell, 2012, p. 185). After participants were interviewed, they received one follow-up email with a request for them to review the transcript and provide feedback on if the information was accurate or if things needed to be fixed. The participant was able to request a follow-up meeting if they wished to discuss anything related to the transcript or

have a follow-up conversation. The data was collected from research participants over an eight-week period.

IRB Approval

In order to conduct a study with human subjects, an approval is required by the University of Arkansas. The appropriate request form was submitted to the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review. The purpose of the IRB protocol form was to inform the participants that their identity would be kept confidential and that there would be no anticipated harm from engaging in this study. The IRB form also outlined what the participant could expect from the study. Before participating in the interview, I asked participants to sign a participant consent form (Appendix A).

Pre-Interview Activity

For a pre-interview activity, participants were asked to select and bring in an artifact to the interview to show what mentoring looked like for them. An artifact could have included a drawing, photo, or other items. Artifacts are typically used to help gain an understanding of the abstract topic from the participant (Douglas et al., 2015). Artifacts can include items such as photographs, drawings, art, relational maps, writings, scrapbooks, etc. (Douglas et al., 2015). If the researcher is using an artifact, they must "link the physical evidence being observed to the phenomenon of interest" (Wildemuth, 2017, p. 168). Photographs are commonly used as artifacts. According to Bardhoshi et al. (2018), using photos is designed to empower the voices of individuals who are not typically heard. Participants were able to document salient experiences through bringing in a photo that they took (Bardhoshi et al., 2018). Participants were also able to reflect on and share more insight about the photos that they brought. While some participants brought in a photo of what mentoring looked like for them, some preferred to draw a

picture of what mentoring looks like for them. According to Thomson (2008), “the creation of visual images such as drawings, collages and posters by children and young people, can lead to rich individual and collective narratives that enhance differing approaches to research” (p. 37). While Thomson (2008) explains that drawings are regularly used with children, I used this method with participants who are young adults. Thomson (2008) mentions that drawings help children “to narrate aspects of their consciously lived experience as well as uncovering the unrecognized, unacknowledged or ‘unsayable’ stories that they hold” (p. 37). While a narrative is a “story-based account of happenings” (Thomson, 2008, p.37), it contains so many other forms of communication such as moral and emotional reactions, commentary, and illustrations. According to (Wildemuth, 2017), “the use of evidence gathered directly from preexisting documents or artifacts can greatly strengthen a study” (p. 171). Providing participants with more than one outlet to tell their story helped them to discover things about their experience that they might not have noticed before. These methods allowed me to engage in critical dialogue with the participants about the artifacts they selected and brought to the interview.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Participants took part in semi-structured open-ended interviews. According to McIntosh and Morse (2015), semi-structured interviews are “designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced” (p. 1). Overall, the open-ended interview questions in the study allowed participants to share their personal experiences on how mentoring has influenced their success throughout their college careers.

In qualitative research, “the researchers are the ones who actually gather information” (Creswell, 2012, p. 185). Qualitative research includes semi-structured interviews to gain views

on a focused topic or in-depth interviews to understand an experience, a condition, or an event from a personal perspective (Hammarberg et al., 2016). The researcher serves as the instrument in collecting the data and is able check in with the participant to verify the accuracy and interpretation of the participants' response (Merriam, 2009). I followed the same research procedures with each participant using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The open-ended research questions were designed to allow each participant to share their unique experiences with mentorship and how it affected their persistence in college. Semi-structured interviews are usually characterized by open-ended questions that include an interview guide in which broad areas of interest sometimes include a set of sub-questions (Busetto et al., 2020). I used an interview protocol (Appendix C) to record answers during interviews. Creswell (2012) recommended that researchers also take notes during an interview "in the event that recording equipment fails" (p. 194). The interview protocol provides a brief overview of the study, the open-ended interview questions with spaces in between to include notes on each response, and instructions for the interviewer to follow. I asked all participants the same set of open-ended interview questions in the same order. Although participants were free to respond to the open-ended questions how they chose, I probed their responses as needed (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The interview protocol form included the following questions:

1. Please tell me about your life growing up – where you are from and what your life was like growing up. (Who influenced you growing up?)
2. Tell me about the artifact that you brought that represents what mentoring looks like for you.
3. How would you define mentoring?
4. Describe the first mentor you remember having?

5. Describe any mentors you have had prior to your collegiate experience?
6. Describe any mentors you have had during your collegiate experience? (When in your collegiate experience did they serve as your mentors? Are they a student, staff, or faculty member? Are they on or off campus?)
7. Describe your most influential mentor during college? (How were they helpful?)
8. What mentor programs were you involved in before college or during college that provided you with mentors? (Which mentor relationships have formed outside of any mentor programs?)
9. How did you meet your mentor(s)? (Describe how your relationship with them formed and developed over time).
10. How often do you meet with your mentor(s)? (Who initiates these mentor/mentee meetings?)
11. Describe the types of things you and your mentor(s) discuss when meeting. (What types of things does your mentor assist you with and how do they assist you with those things? Who guides the discussion that occurs between you and your mentor(s)? Who initiates the conversations?)
12. Describe your experience being a first-generation high-achieving college student.
13. How has the mentorship you received influenced your academic and social success as you continue to persist in college? (How has mentorship been helpful when dealing with any goals you wanted to accomplish or any challenges you might have faced?)
14. What other things do you wish you had a mentor to help you with outside of all the things you have identified having assistance with so far?

15. What suggestions would you have for someone that is mentoring a high-achieving first-generation college student in college?
16. Is there anything else that you wished I would have asked you about during the interview?
17. Is there anything else you would like to share that is important considering everything that we have discussed?

Field Testing

According to Tashakkori and Teddie (2003), pilot studies are both helpful and useful in qualitative and quantitative studies. Pilot studies “are a mini version of a research or a trial run conducted in preparation of a full-scale study and may be conducted specifically to pre-test a research instrument (Dikko, 2016, p. 521). I did field testing with two students prior to the actual interviews for the study. The students had the same characteristics as the participants of the study. I also met with a couple of experts on the research method for this study and had them review my interview protocol and provide feedback. This was done to detect any possible flaws in the interview questions (Dikko, 2016; van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001) before conducting the study. According to Dikko (2016), “a pilot test of questions helps to identify unclear or ambiguous statement in the research protocol” (p. 522). van Wijk and Harrison (2013) emphasize that pilot studies can add credibility and value to an entire research project. Overall, field testing can highlight ambiguities or difficulties in research questions, record the time taken to complete an interview, determine if a question solicits an adequate response, establish whether replies can be properly interpreted, determine whether the researcher has included all the necessary questions to measure all the concepts, and allow the researcher to practice interviewing techniques (Dikko, 2016).

Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2012), multiple strategies are needed to check the accuracy of the findings in a study. In this study, I used trustworthiness to address the validity of the study. Making the study trustworthy included using the same robust procedural description as other studies (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Hammarberg et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of the purpose of the study, procedural decisions, and data management being transparent and explicit. Through using trustworthiness, a reviewer should be able to follow the progression of events, decisions, and logic of a study through the adequate descriptions, explanations, and the justifications of the researcher's selected methodology and methods.

Credibility

Credibility is another strategy used to check the accuracy of the findings in a study (Creswell, 2012). Credibility is used to evaluate the truth or internal validity in qualitative research (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Qualitative studies are deemed credible when adequate descriptions of context are included, and "are recognizable to people who share the experience" (Hammarberg et al., 2016, p. 5). For this study, I defended the credibility by reflecting on the influence the research personally had on me and making sure that the data demonstrated the experiences of the participants instead of myself.

Triangulation

For this study, I used triangulation "to build a coherent justification for themes" (Creswell, 2012, p. 201). Triangulation included answering the research question in several ways by using different data sources such as interviews, observation, and documentary analysis (Hammarberg et al., 2016). I used interviews and an analysis of drawings, photos, and artifacts for this study. Triangulation also included having a substantial description of the interpretation

process and verbatim quotations from the data (Hammarberg et al., 2016). For this study, I used verbatim quotations and a description of the participants interpretation process to illustrate and support their interpretations.

Consistency

Consistency was used to assess the criterion of the study for reliability and dependability (Hammarberg et al., 2016). While this does not mean that the same results would be found in other contexts, this does show that other researchers would be able to find similar patterns in the study (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Through this strategy, researchers “often seek maximum variation in the experience of a phenomenon” (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This is done to discourage the fulfilment of limited researcher expectations where there would be cases or instances that do not fit the emerging interpretations (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This helps with the verification of findings. According to Holloway and Todres, (2005), “each approach has to demonstrate consistency with its foundations and reflect them in the data collection, analysis, and knowledge claim” (p. 93). Each type of approach has distinctive features that demonstrate the types of research questions that this approach is suited to answer, or the kind of data collection or data analysis that would be consistent with this method (Holloway & Todres, 2005). To ensure that there was consistency in this study, I made sure that the research questions, data collection, data analysis, and research site were consistent with what was needed for a qualitative research design that is framed by narrative inquiry.

Member Checking

Creswell (2012) emphasized several strategies that are used to convince the readers of accuracy of a study. One of those strategies includes member checking. Member checking is used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings (Creswell, 2012). Through this

process, the final report or specific descriptions or themes are reviewed with the participants to determine “whether these participants feel that they are accurate” (Creswell, 2012, p. 201). For this study, I provided the participants with a finished product of the transcripts. The transcript was sent to the participants via email. After they reviewed the transcript, they had the opportunity to respond to the email with feedback on whether or not the transcription was accurate. Follow-up meetings were held for any participant who wanted to discuss any discrepancies in the transcription.

Position of the Researcher

According to Birks and Mills (2014), the researcher must ask themselves “how am I positioned in this narrative?” (p. 164) when doing narrative research. For this study, I acknowledged the multitude of ways that I am positioned in the narrative. As an undergraduate college student, I came from a single parent household where postsecondary education at a four-year institution was valued but never pursued. I was a high-achieving first-generation college student. While I was a high-achieving student, I often struggled with varying aspects of college. My college mentors were the catalyst in my academic and social success on campus. I was mentored by many including the Dean of Students, the Associate Director of Student Affairs, the Director of a TRIO research program, staff from my scholarship program, people who I met at professional conferences, faculty from the graduate school at my undergraduate institution, and designated peer mentors and unofficial peer mentors. There were many people who were a part of my college journey and my overall success. While I did not realize it at the time, every person that mentored me played an integral role in the way that I developed as a student during my undergraduate career and impacted my experiences and choices after my journey as an undergraduate student. My personal experiences have influenced my interest in the topic of

mentoring and my views about mentoring overall. I feel as though mentoring is something that helps every college student be successful and persist no matter what type of mentoring they receive. I also believe that mentoring is both necessary and instrumental for high-achieving first-generation college students to be successful. Given the background of first-generation students, the guidance that mentors can provide is extremely important. I now get to view mentoring from the other side of the spectrum as an Associate Director for a mentorship and scholarship program that serves high-achieving underrepresented college students. While in this role, I have gotten to work with some of the participants in the study. I have also gotten to experience how serving as a mentor to the student's (in this role) has affected their college careers first-hand. I have also heard the students I work with casually talk about the impact that mentoring has had on their college experiences. While I have my own beliefs of the impacts of mentoring, I am aware that the qualitative research process “keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researcher brings to the research or that writers express in the literature” (Creswell, 2012, p. 186). Although Creswell (2012) noted that all research is interpretive, I was consistent with reflecting on the role that I played in gathering and interpreting the data. To ensure and enhance the validity of the study, I was very intentional about taking field notes and keeping a reflective journal to record follow-up questions for clarification. While my biases might have created some challenges, I was adamant about capturing the participants’ stories.

Data Analysis

For this study, the data analysis included a multistep process that consisted of seven phases (Lewis, 2018). The first phase included the transcription of each interview. I listened to each interview repeatedly and transcribed them (Bird, 2005). According to Lewis (2018), during

this phase, the author should write memos as “questions, reactions, remembrances and explanations occurred” (p.16). The second phase required member checking. During this phase, I allowed participants to review the transcripts from their interview and provide any additional comments about their interview or the drawings, photos, or items (artifacts) they brought in for their interview. In the third phase, I began coding data. Coding was inspired by a procedure from Whiffin et al. (2014) that included preserving the sequence of the participant’s narratives and longitudinal matrices. During this phase, the sequence, contextual issues, and consequences of a discrete story were analyzed (Whiffin et al., 2014). According to Lewis (2018), this coding would result in the participants’ profiles. Phase four included doing more coding. I did open coding which entailed four lenses through which I considered the data. The following lenses were used: “identifying narrative processes, paying attention to the language used, recognizing the context in which the text was created, identifying moments when something unexpected happens” (Lewis, 2018, p. 17). This resulted in a high-quality level of analysis of the data (Saldana, 2013). During this phase, data was also considered from the perspective of field notes which included descriptions of context, nonverbal communication, thoughts, and noted reactions to the interview. According to Lewis (2018), this will finalize the identification of codes and themes and will complement “the restorying of the data” (p. 17). The fifth phase showcases the similarities of storylines amongst participants. In this phase, I compared longitudinal matrices of each participant’s stories and identified typical stories that were commonly recognized in each participant’s stories (Lewis, 2018). In the sixth phase, it is noted that researchers can analyze data based on previous research or theory using pre-existing codes (Sandelowski, 2000). While this is identified as one of the seven phases, Lewis (2018) mentions that “it might be better to follow the lead of most narrative inquiry researchers and avoid comparing data to an existing

theory” (p. 17) Therefore, I left this step out of my data analysis. The final phase entailed doing triangulation. I triangulated interviews with the pre-interview activity. Lewis (2018) mentions that the consideration of these varied data sources provides “additional reliability to the study’s findings” (p. 17). Overall, this analysis resulted in several products: profiles of the participants from the study, constructed narratives of the common experiences of participants, and quotes from the interviews which will enrich the data (Lewis, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This chapter explains the methodology for this study. The chapter begins with the explanation for selecting a qualitative narrative research design. The chapter continues with rationales for the research participants, the sampling selected, the data collection, the interview type, and the strategies to employ accuracy of the data collection. The chapter concludes with my position as the researcher in this study and the steps for the data analysis.

CHAPTER IV - RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how high-achieving first-generation college students perceived their mentoring experiences at a public research university in the midsouth and examined what role mentoring played in their persistence. According to the literature, first-generation college students felt that mentorship was crucial to their success as an undergraduate student (Lisberg & Wood, 2018). Mentorship was also known to soften the transition into the college environment (Mondisa & McComb, 2015). Several studies have shown that mentorship is key to student success. Therefore, the focus of this study was to investigate the role of mentoring in high-achieving first-generation college student persistence.

Design of the Study

A qualitative narrative research design was used to conduct this study. Through narrative research, I was able to explore the impact of mentoring on high-achieving first-generation college students through each participant's perception (Mertova & Webster, 2019). Participants were given the opportunity to tell their story through narrative inquiry and make sense of their personal experiences (Mertova & Webster, 2019) The qualitative method created the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the perception of mentoring and its influence on high-achieving first-generation college student persistence. Overall, the qualitative narrative research design was helpful in examining the role of mentorship for high-achieving first-generation college students.

Data Collection

Data were collected for this study through a multistep process. Participants were asked to complete a pre-survey to see if they met the criteria for the study. Criteria for this study consisted

of the following: being a first-generation college student based on the definition of first-generation for the study, having at least a 3.5 cumulative college GPA, and having completed the first-year of year college. Fourteen participants signed up for the study, and all 14 participants were selected for the study. However, only 13 participants completed the study. Selected participants completed a pre-interview activity, an interview, and a follow-up meeting by their request. For the pre-interview activity, participants were asked to identify an artifact that showed what mentoring looked like for them and bring it to the interview. Participants also completed a one-to-one interview that focused on their experiences with mentoring. The shortest interview was 65-minutes long and the longest interview was 90-minutes long. After the interview, participants were sent the transcription of their interview for review. If needed, participants were able to request a follow-up meeting if they wanted to add additional information to their interview. Three participants requested a follow-up meeting to add additional information to their interviews.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data for this study through a multi-step process. After collecting data, I listened to each interview, transcribed the interviews and shared the transcription with the participant for member checking. I coded the data by preserving the sequence of each participant's narratives. I did open coding where learning about the participants background, paying attention to the context of the stories, surprising moments, and nonverbal communication were completed. I examined the participant's common experiences and used this to understand and restory the data. I triangulated the interview portion of the data with the pre-interview activity to provide more reliability for the study. Throughout this chapter, I will present the descriptive profiles of each participant followed by a thematic analysis of the data.

Participant Profiles

Paige

Paige is a third-year student studying agricultural business at a four-year institution. She is from a town. In her community, it was very unlikely that students would move far from home let alone attend a large university. As a first-generation student, Paige's family felt hopeless about the process of her applying to college and encouraged her to attend college in the towns nearby. However, Paige had dreams that would supersede her parents' expectations of her. While Paige's first mentor (her second-grade teacher) gave her confidence and prepared her academically very early on, it was her seventh-grade advisor who gave her the tools to apply for a big research university. Paige has been mentored by many from elementary school all the way through college. Her success has stemmed from many individuals along the way. As a junior, Paige continues seeking out mentorship and encouragement through her friends, peer mentors, staff, faculty, and her community at home.

Emma

Emma is a second-year student studying political science at a four-year institution. Her parents are from El Salvador but they moved to the United States where she was later born and raised. Despite having a rough childhood and many rocky patches with her parents, she grew up being a very social person. In her formative years, she was influenced by her second-grade teacher and her oldest sister. Her teacher taught her how to be a good person and served as her role model considering that she wanted to someday be a teacher. Her oldest sister influenced her by teaching her how to control her emotions which was very important given her life at home. Among those who influenced her, Emma also had several peer mentors during her educational journey. Some of those peer mentors were helpful while others did not provide her with support.

While Emma has had a few mentors during her college career, her second oldest sister remains her most influential mentor. Her sister made it easier for her to navigate college overall.

Odalis

Odalis is a fourth-year student studying business marketing at a four-year institution. Her parents immigrated from Mexico to the United States, where she grew up as an only child.

Odalis grew up speaking Spanish and did not learn English until after the first grade. She had a normal school experience throughout grade school being involved with sports and other school engagements. She has been positively influenced by many and finds it difficult to acknowledge one individual as the most influential in her lifetime. While she acknowledges that it is difficult to deem one person as the most influential, she believes that she has received impactful mentoring overall.

Mya

Mya is a second-year student studying business accounting at a four-year institution. She was born and raised in a small town where she grew up with three siblings. She grew up in a two-parent household where education was highly valued. She attended small schools for her k-12 education and was always encouraged by her parents to be at the top of her class. Her first mentor was her older sister who is a few years older than her and set a great example for her.

Mya's sister was the only mentor she had before attending college.

Kat

Kat is a fourth-year student studying communication sciences and disorders and Spanish at a four-year institution. Her parents immigrated from El Salvador to the United States before she was born. She grew up with a younger and older sister. Kat's parents heavily influenced her while growing up and were the ones who encouraged her to go to college. While Kat's parents

did not receive a college education, they made sure that she always had their support when it came down to her educational endeavors. Even though Kat received a lot of encouragement, she had to figure out all educational opportunities on her own. Kat has built a network of mentors since starting college. However, her first mentor was one of her high school teachers who came from El Salvador just like her parents.

Tin

Tin is a second-year student studying computer science at a four-year institution. He was born in Vietnam and moved to the United States when he was three years old. His family left Vietnam to make a better living. Tin grew up with his parents having high expectations of him and having mentors who helped him explore his potential. While Tin distinctly remembers his first mentor being his middle school football coach, he attributes his successes to many including his parents, high school friends, and middle school and high school coaches.

Johnny Bravo

Johnny Bravo is a third-year student studying mechanical engineering at a four-year institution. He grew up in a rural community and had a normal life overall. As a child, he was always academically talented and continued to get good grades throughout his k-12 education. Both of his parents have always supported his educational endeavors. But his dad is the one who influenced him while growing up. His dad worked during the early morning so that he could care for him and his younger siblings during the day while his mom worked at nights. At the age of 12, Johnny Bravo's dad got deported to Mexico. This mishap caused him to have to step up and help raise his younger siblings while still feeling the pressure of such a major life change. While Johnny Bravo has had several mentors during his secondary and postsecondary education, his most influential mentor is his dad.

Reggie

Reggie is a fourth-year student studying electrical engineering at a four-year institution. He was born in California and was the first family member (in his immediate family) to be born in the United States. As a child, he moved back and forth between California and Mexico for his dad's job. Eventually, Reggie's parents decided to make a more permanent transition and relocated to Arkansas in 2008 due to a growing family and needing better affordability. Upon moving to Arkansas, Reggie remembers many life milestones. He remembers having to learn English, delving into his curiosity (which meant disassembling and reassembling computers), reading a lot because he loved it, and being the first in his family to go to boarding school for high school. His entire immediate family has always been invested in his education and their investment in his future has shaped who he is today. Reggie stems from a lineage of family of engineers – having three siblings who went to a four-year institution and received electrical engineering degrees. While Reggie has had many mentors throughout his life, his teacher from middle school and his brother provided guidance that changed his entire life.

Coco

Coco is a fourth-year student studying apparel and merchandising at a four-year institution. She was born in Mexico and moved to the United States when she was three-years old. She grew up in a large family with six siblings. She was heavily influenced by her older sister and brother growing up and often looked for their approval. Her older siblings have attended college and have provided her with much guidance. Despite having older siblings who have served as her mentors, Coco has also relied on faculty mentors, teachers, and professional mentors to help her navigate different aspects of school and life.

Rebecca

Rebecca is a third-year student studying interior design at a four-year institution. She grew up in the United States but her parents are from Mexico and El Salvador. She is an only child and was heavily influenced by her dad while growing up. Her dad became an orphan at the age of seven and later moved to the United States at the age of 18. Despite his life circumstances, he eventually started his own business. Rebecca works really hard and wants to be successful because of everything that her dad sacrificed for her to go to college. She has had many mentors throughout her lifetime who have supported her journey thus far.

Lynn

Lynn is a fifth-year student studying nursing at a four-year institution. She grew up in the United States. Her parents are from Mexico. She has three siblings and is the first one in her family to pursue higher education. Her mom only has a middle school education, and her dad only made it halfway through primary school. Lynn's parents are very encouraging when it comes down to her college education and have sacrificed a lot for her to go to college. Lynn often thinks of the day when she will be able to repay her parents. Lynn feels like having mentors prior to college and during college has helped her to get to where she is today.

Marin

Marin is a fourth-year student studying business at a four-year institution. He is from Michoacan, Mexico and lived there for 12 years before moving to the United States. Marin grew up with five siblings. Marin's parents are also from Mexico and had a challenging life growing up because of their lack of financial wealth. Neither of his parents finished high school, but his parents value education and have supported his academic journey. Marin has valued the mentor relationships he has had during his lifetime because he felt that he would have been lost, alone, and unmotivated without the support.

Jazmyn

Jazmyn is a third-year student studying psychology at a four-year institution. She is from a rural community. She grew up with two older sisters. From the time she was a little girl, she was smart and performed well in her classes. She was enrolled in the gifted and talented program. She continues to perform well academically in college. While she did not really use the support of mentors for her academic endeavors, her mentors have helped her with the social aspects of her life while in college. Through mentorship, she was able to build a steady community that has supported her overall growth as a person. She appreciates mentorship for that.

Experiences Being a High-Achieving First-Generation College Student

Participants were asked to describe their experience being a high-achieving first-generation college student. While most participants talked about the hurdles they experienced throughout this journey, a few also talked about the positive aspects of their experience. Being a high-achieving first-generation college student was challenging due to the experience of being lonely, having a lack of support, having to be independent, having a lack of financial wealth, and having to deal with the pressure of high expectations. The positive aspect of being a high-achieving first-generation college student stemmed from some participants feeling a sense of accomplishment despite the many obstacles that were faced during their college careers. Overall, high-achieving first-generation college students have a mixture of experiences while being in college.

Lack of Support and Loneliness

One thing that high-achieving first-generation students often struggled with during their college careers is a lack of support and a sense of loneliness. The lack of support stemmed from

participants' parents not having the tools or education to support them. The sense of loneliness came from feeling like they could only rely on themselves through this experience. Participants had varying situations that caused them to describe their experience as such. Paige highlighted the sadness that came with not having parents to help her figure out the academic components of college. Paige said,

Some of my friends here have parents that are doctors, so they can help them with their college homework. And I'm like, what is that like? Like, I don't have anyone to call to be like, oh, my gosh, I'm struggling with this.

Paige emphasized the loneliness with not having anyone to turn to during her college journey.

Like Paige, Johnny Bravo also expressed the difficulties that came with not having the support of family throughout his college journey.

So especially being first generation, it's very tough because I mean, you are the first one in your family to come up here and go to college. Being a first gen also is like you don't really have any other type of person who's already within your family who has already experienced that college experience. And also, me coming from a minority group, most of my family or relatives don't really attend college or even finish high school.

Johnny Bravo emphasized the obstacles that made his experience as a high-achieving first-generation college student lonely. Alongside Johnny Bravo, Kat also experienced not having a family who could understand how to support her during her college career. While talking about her parents, Kat said,

Like I don't know like you feel like you're a different person with them like you're not like I'm this academic version of Kat, and I do these like all these things and they're so proud of me for all the things that I do but they don't really know what I do so like in that way um it's interesting to me being first generation they don't really understand and they try to. But they'll never really be in like that academic world of mine and be able to like relate to me and I feel like that's sometimes super hard because if I have to do a lot of things on campus or if like during COVID I have to be studying and doing these things but they wait for me to do like chores and like be doing other things that like maybe if like they understood what I'm like going through they wouldn't be asking me to do those things.

Kat experienced the challenges that not only came with a lack of support from her family but also a lack of understanding in terms of her academic responsibilities. While previous participants explained their experiences with the lack of support they received from their families (because their families did not know how to support them), Coco experience the lack of support from her family by choice. Coco had parents who did not provide her with support because they did not like the major she was pursuing. Coco said, “My family looks down on my major because they don’t understand my major. They don’t make an effort to try and understand my degree and what I can do with it in the future.” Coco was originally a business major but then switched to apparel and merchandising. Coco’s parents did not talk to her for four months because she chose to switch to this major. The lack of support made Coco experience further isolation in the college environment as a high-achieving first-generation college student.

Outside of the lack of parental support, some participants also experienced a lack of support from their mentors. As mentioned earlier, Emma experienced this with a peer mentor. When referring to her mentor relationship, she mentioned, “She was overly cautious about how a mentor relationship should be. She thought it should only be professional.” Since Emma’s mentor was overly cautious about what should be discussed in a mentorship relationship, Emma did not get what she needed from this mentorship. Overall, the lack of support seemed to stem from a lack of understanding or empathy for the participant.

Independence

The lack of support that many participants experience in college initially resulted in a very independent college journey. Several participants talked about their independence and its effect on their college experience. Tin talked about the obstacles that came with being the oldest

in his family and what that looked like as a first-generation college student. Tin explained the following,

I'm kind of like on my own. And I can't really ask my parents for advice because they've never really experienced, you know, college like I have, right. I think it's a lot of trial and error. Just also, you know, trying to get off on the right foot rather than you know, being in a slump and having low grades and because of low grades I might have to you know, be more conscious of scholarships and other things like that.

Tin not only was responsible for figuring out how to navigate college on his own, but also for ensuring that he had the financial pieces of college expenses covered. Marin and Johnny Bravo experienced similar concerns about their finances.. Like Tin, Marin had to worry about having scholarship money for college. Marin talked about the struggles of only having one employed parent and the barriers that came with that. While referring to his dad, Marin said,

It's just, it's impossible for me to go up to him and ask him for like, for money to pay for my, for my tuition or just books. So, I always had to rely on myself. Stay focused on applying for scholarships because I knew I needed those. It's something that I cannot take for granted.

Marin had to learn to be financially independent upon starting college. While Johnny Bravo did not talk about having to be financially independent, he did talk about also having to rely on himself like Marin. As he explained his family background and his first-generation experience, he said,

And also, me coming from a minority group, most of my family or relatives don't really attend college or even finish high school. So, they don't really get that experience in like high degrees or like experiencing the college life. So, it was very tough because like you're going to a big place all on your own. So, it's like you got to take initiators by yourself. You got to learn things on your own and you got to succeed on your own technically. And then you can't really have anybody to fall back on because the same, the lack of study they had or the lack of resources they had to attend college and stuff like that.

Lack of Financial Wealth

The experience of being independent as a high-achieving first-generation college student was also connected with a lack of financial resources for some participants. Several participants expressed their concerns with the financial component of college. While previously talking about the general experience of being independent as a college student, Tin and Marin also mentioned the challenges that came with not having their families to rely on when it came down to college cost. Tin talked about the heightened pressure that came with maintaining his grades since he could not rely on his parents for financial support. Like Tin, Marin also felt the pressure of needing to be able to provide for himself. His family also could not help him pay for college. Two other participants also did not have the financial support from their families for college. They expressed the frustrations that came with these experiences. When thinking of the financial aspect of being a first-generation student, Paige said,

Sometimes it makes me angry because, I'm like, you don't have to worry about like, where you are getting that scholarship. You don't have to worry about your financial situation like it just kind of makes me mad because, you know, those are the cards I'm dealt with.

Paige was frustrated with the extra stress that the financial piece caused. Like Paige, Jazmyn also got frustrated when she compared her situation to other students who did not have to think about how to finance their college careers. According to Jazmyn, "All that's here is daddy's money people." Jazmyn felt that being around so many people with money made it hard to not fall into comparing herself to others. While many of her peers were worried about being invited to certain parties, she was worried about paying for food, her bills, and her textbooks. The lack of financial wealth made participants' experiences as a first-generation college student more difficult overall.

Expectations

In addition to the lack of support, lack of financial support, and independence that first-generation college students in this study faced during their journeys, participants also experienced the pressure that came with high expectations. Since some participants did not always have someone to rely on, they put a lot of pressure on themselves. Some participants' families also had high expectations of them on top of the expectations they had already put on themselves. Johnny Bravo talked about the pressure that came with being the first one in his family to go to college. He said, "I don't have anyone in my family who has experienced college. As a minority, most people in my family did not finish high school. I don't have anyone to fall back on and it's a lot of pressure. It's an unwritten law for you to succeed." Johnny Bravo also mentioned that there was pressure for him to be successful because he would be expected to be a mentor to everyone in the family to help with going to college. Johnny Bravo felt the pressure of high expectations not only from himself, but also his family. Like Johnny Bravo, Lynn also placed high expectations on herself to be successful as a college student. Lynn explained why being successful was her only option.

Being here was just the first step, and then I kind of had to be, because I wanted to show to myself, I guess to myself and my parents that their sacrifices were worth it to get me to this point. And it was kind of a way of repaying them, I wanna say. So yeah, I felt like not being high achieving wasn't even an option or it wasn't even like a thought that I had. It was like, you're here and now you have to do good because you're the first one to come and all that it took for you to be here.

Lynn felt the need to fulfill high expectations for reasons beyond just herself. Similar to Johnny Bravo and Lynn, Rebecca also had high expectations for herself. Her expectations of herself were more focused on academic performance. Rebecca talked about her work ethic with her classroom projects.

So it's just like little things like that, that I have such expectations. I think that validation. Yeah, I got to. I have three projects and one. I was like, like, I could not stop replaying it

over and over and over. And so, but again like I turned around and used the entire weekend to further develop my project.

Rebecca wanted to be successful in the classroom and often reworked her projects to get the best possible outcomes within the academic environment.

Like Rebecca, Reggie also felt a lot of pressure from academic expectations. However, these were expectations that his family had of him. Reggie came from a lineage of engineers where several of his older siblings all attended college before he started his degree. Not only did Reggie's older siblings get engineering degrees, but they also got their degrees from the same institution that Reggie was attending. This has caused Reggie to feel an overwhelming amount of pressure. Reggie was constantly reminded that his siblings got their degrees and that they had things harder than he did. As Reggie reflected on this, he also thought of additional expectations his oldest brother had of him. He said "My brother has higher expectations of me. He wants me to get a doctorate degree." Reggie was expected to accomplish more than his siblings did, especially because he had an easier path than they did. Kat also talked about the expectations her family had of her.

My parents don't understand the academic version of me, and they can't relate to me as a college student. My parents don't know how to help me. My parents have unrealistic expectations of me, and I have to set boundaries for my parents and set realistic expectations for myself.

Boundaries also meant that she created a more realistic set of expectations for herself rather than trying to accomplish things based on the standards of her parents. High expectations added on to the list of obstacles high-achieving first-generation college students experienced.

Emotional Challenges

Being a high-achieving first-generation college student solicited a lot of different emotions from the participants. Words like "sad," "frustrated," "angry," "lost," "anxious,"

“desperate,” “overwhelmed,” “tough,” “complicated,” “accomplished,” and “interesting” came up when being asked to describe their experiences as a high-achieving first-generation college student. Paige and Marin talked about how difficult college had been for them throughout their educational journeys. When I asked Paige to describe her experience, the first thing she expressed was feeling like an outsider. She thought about what statistics said about first-generation students’ parents and how they did not make as much money because they did not pursue a college degree. This made her think of the challenges that came with being first-generation and how tough things could be at times. She then became frustrated and said,

It sometimes like makes me angry because, I'm like, you don't have to worry about like, where you are getting that scholarship. You don't have to worry about your financial situation like it just kind of makes me mad because, you know, those are the cards I'm dealt with. But then it like makes me glad because I'm typically like way harder of a worker and my work ethic is like way higher than some of those people I'm around because they never had to work for anything, they were given it.

Regardless of how frustrating this college experience had been for Paige, she also expressed feeling really accomplished because of all her hard work. Marin also reflected on the tough times that came with being a first-generation student. Like Paige, he started his college experience alone because no one in his family had a college degree. One of the hardest things for him was feeling isolated and coming into college without any connections or friends. As Marin shared more about feeling alienated, he said, “I always felt like I had to figure out things by myself. People think you know everything and it’s frustrating without mentors.” Marin was reminded about how much of his college journey had been experienced alone. Overall, being a high-achieving first-generation college student put participants in a vulnerable space but also allowed them to be appreciative of what they had accomplished.

Feeling Accomplished

Although being a first-generation college student presented many obstacles, overcoming barriers led to some participants feeling highly accomplished. Paige and Johnny Bravo expanded on their reasons for feeling a strong sense of accomplishment. After discussing her frustration with not having the same support and connections that other college students had, Paige then realized the value in her hard work despite the hardships she faced. She said,

And so, at times, it makes me angry in the moment. And then whenever I sit back after, I'm like, oh my gosh, I wouldn't have accomplished all this, because I look at my resume and I take every opportunity necessary to make me as high achieving as possible, to create the best opportunities for myself.

Paige recognized how her hard work allowed her to accomplish so much. Similar to Paige, Johnny Bravo talked about the stress of not having the support system that other students may have had while going through college. Johnny Bravo mentioned the following,

Just like, there's a lot of pressure to know that you don't have anybody to fall back on or you don't have anybody to share these experiences with because you're the only one in your family that's going through it. But it's a huge accomplishment.

Johnny Bravo still felt accomplished despite not having the support he would have liked to have throughout his journey.

Discussion on High-Achieving First-Generation College Student Experiences

Being a high-achieving first-generation college student came with more challenges than it did positive experiences for the participants in this study. This section highlighted the most important aspects of their experiences. Participants struggled with loneliness, independence, a lack of financial wealth, family expectations, personal expectations, emotional challenges, and a lack of support. Given this, it is important to understand the lived experiences of each participant to understand their journey with mentorship and their need for mentorship. Their need for mentorship and their need for a specific type of mentorship is based off what they did not have and what could be useful for them. The perceptions and influence of mentorship and the

experiences of high-achieving first-generation college students are further explored in this chapter to create an understanding of the perceptions of mentoring on high-achieving first-generation college student persistence.

Perceptions of Mentoring

Participants were asked several interview questions that would allow them to explain how they perceived mentoring. They were able to reflect on their life growing up, people who influenced them while growing up, and their understanding of the concept of mentoring. Participants were able to convey their perception of mentoring through the representation of an artifact that they selected. Participants were also able to elaborate on their experiences based on different interactions they had with different mentors throughout their lifespan. The type of mentorship that participants received varied based on their needs during specific stages of their lives.

Representation of Mentorship through Artifacts

The concept of mentoring was represented by a variety of artifacts in this study. Participants brought in the following artifacts to show what mentoring looked like for them: a Future Farmers of America (FFA) pin, a journal, instructions to a phone tag game, a drawing, a blog that was written on a past study abroad trip, a deck of cards, a high school graduation picture with friends dressed in their caps and gowns, a picture of two audio amplifiers for a car, a candle, a pack of coloring pencils, a picture of themselves and seven of their peers hanging out in their professional mentor's office, and a high school diploma. Most of the artifacts carried a personal meaning for each participant rather than an obvious message.

Explanations that the participants provided for selecting their artifacts helped them understand the meaning of mentorship for them. Paige brought in her FFA pin because she

looked up to the officers in the FFA organization and eventually wanted to take on a leadership role in the organization. Paige said, “People from the FFA competitions would help me and tell me things I should work on to prepare for leadership roles. My mentors were agriculture teachers from across the state.” Many mentors helped prepare Paige to get a leadership role in FFA.

Emma also brought in an artifact (a journal) that represented something she was hoping to get out of mentorship which was emotional support. As Emma reflected on the reason for bringing her journal as her artifact, she said, “I learned through reflecting on my feelings. I needed help with processing my feelings because my family sweeps things under the rug.” She wanted a mentor who was open to talking about feelings and emotions rather than just surface level topics.

Several participants used their artifacts to explain mentorship as a cycle. Odalis brought in instructions for a phone tag game that she specifically plays with a previous mentee of hers and her mentee’s mentee. Odalis mentioned that mentorship came “full circle” and emphasized building a lineage of mentorship among her mentees. According to Odalis, “mentorship can be passed down” and that is what she loved most about it. It was the idea that individuals she mentored became mentors and continued passing valuable information down. Mya drew a picture of mentorship (Artifact 1 - refer to Appendix F) being continuous through different stages of accomplishments. The first part of the picture shows several blocks with only one person standing on the highest block with a trophy in their hand. This person has reached success but had to accomplish their goal alone because they have not received any assistance to get to where they are. They also do not have anyone to share their success with. The other picture shows several square blocks that are of different heights with a person standing on each of them. Each block has a different person on it. The first person does not have a block to stand on but has learned something valuable from their experience and shared it with the person standing on the

first block which allowed this person to accomplish something. The person on the first block learned something important from the person that was not standing on the block and passed it to the second person on the block. The process continues until it gets to the last person on the block. She felt that mentorship should not stop just because the mentee has accomplished a goal. Like Odalis, Mya also felt that mentorship “should be a cycle.” Mya defined mentorship as “guiding someone down a path you’ve been down.” She genuinely felt that the advice received through mentorship should be passed on.

Some of the participants tied their artifact directly to the experiences that they have had with mentoring. Kat’s study abroad blog reminded her of the mentorship that she received that made it possible for her to go abroad. Johnny Bravo’s picture with his high school friends reminds him of three high school teachers who mentored him and helped him be successful. Reggie’s pictures of the two audio amplifiers (Artifact 2 – refer to Appendix F) reminds him of a time where his brother mentored him on how to install audio amplifiers into cars. As Reggie reflected on this experience with installing the amplifiers, he also described the concept of mentorship. According to Reggie, “mentorship is knowing when to let someone go on their own and giving them autonomy.” While his brother taught him how to install the amplifiers step by step, he also gave Reggie the freedom to take the lead on installing them the next time they did it. This memory served as representation of what mentoring looked like to Reggie. Rebecca’s magenta color pencil (Artifact 3 – refer to Appendix F) reminded her of the encouragement she received from one of her elementary school teachers. When reflecting on her childhood, Rebecca gloats over the importance of encouragement.

Since middle school, I kept a 24 pack of Crayola colored pencils with me because I knew I’d want to go into interior design. I was always drawing as a kid. Teachers always stayed consistent with allowing art to be a part of my school journey.

She was always encouraged to pursue her passions. Lynn's picture of her being in her professional mentor's office with her peers gave her a space to go to and study and a place of comfort since she was not familiar with the college campus yet. Marin's picture of his high school diploma (Artifact 4 – refer to Appendix F) reminded him of all the mentorship he had received to accomplish such a goal.

Two participants' artifacts represented how they mentored others. Tin brought in a deck of cards (Artifact 5 – refer to Appendix F). The cards reminded him of the first role he received as a mentor for engineering students. His first task was to meet up with all his mentees at once. He tried to play a card game with them called Mafia, but the students did not enjoy it because they did not know each other. He realized being a mentor created some learning curves.

Jazmyn's artifact (which was a journal) represented the way she mentored others through her church. She kept a journal of questions that she felt were valuable to ask to each of her mentees when she was in the process of getting to know them. These were questions her church mentors asked her when they first met her. While Jazmyn does not mention the cycle of mentoring as something that represents mentoring to her, she displays how she passed some of the things she learned from her mentors on to her mentees.

Defining Mentorship for High-Achieving First-Generation College Students

While the literature has many definitions for the word mentorship, the participants in the study shared what this word meant for them given their background as a high-achieving first-generation college student. Mentorship was broadly defined among the participants based on their understanding of mentorship and their personal experiences. Words that repeatedly came up in the different descriptions of mentoring were “guidance,” “understanding,” “leading,” “motivation,” “advice,” “full circle,” “support,” and “resource.” Emma defined mentorship as

“supporting someone even if you do not understand how that thing will impact the person.”

Paige defined mentorship as “guiding and leading with understanding.” Marin’s description of mentoring also highlighted the guidance aspect of mentoring.

Mentoring is the ability to help guide someone by molding a relationship the mentee can look up to, a resource that can guide you, someone that cares about you, someone you can look up to. Mentoring is when someone empathizes with you, helps you grow personally, someone who wants to see you succeed, willing to shape you, teach you, listens to you.

Johnny Bravo also wanted to share a lot about mentoring. He said, “mentoring felt like having a really close friend, someone that supports you, motivates you, believes in you. It’s like a brotherhood; it provides guidance and emotional support.” Like Johnny Bravo, Lynn also felt that support was an important aspect of mentoring. She defined mentoring as,

People that are there to support you, that they can provide you with a variety of resources. By just knowing that you have those people there. And you can go to them if you have questions about anything like literally anything [chuckle] is what mentoring means to me.

Each participant shared their description of mentoring and the parts of it that were important to them.

The Connection Between Mentorship Definitions and Artifacts

The way that participants defined mentorship did coincide with some of the descriptions of artifacts that participants brought in to help explain how it represented mentorship for them.

Paige, Marin, and Johnny Bravo all mentioned the word “guidance” in their definition of mentorship and several of the descriptions for the artifacts were all about guidance. Marin’s definition of mentorship was very long but included several aspects of mentoring that are represented through the artifacts. According to Marin,

Mentoring is the ability to help guide someone by molding a relationship the mentee can look up to, a resource that can guide you, someone that cares about you, someone you can look up to. Mentoring is when someone empathizes with you, helps you grow

personally, someone who wants to see you succeed, willing to shape you, teach you, listens to you.

The artifacts emphasize guidance, resources, support, growth, and listening in mentorship. The Future Farmers of America (FFA) pin was representative of mentorship because it reminded Paige of all the people that helped her prepare for a leadership role in the organization. The instructions from a phone tag game also included aspects of guidance in its meaning. The instructions reminded Odalis about the cycle of mentorship and also the idea that guidance is and can be passed along from person to person. The picture that was drawn about mentorship was also about guidance. The picture emphasized the importance of receiving guidance and also guiding others when one has helpful information to share. The picture of the high school diploma/plaque was representative of all the guidance received for Marin to be able to accomplish graduating from high school. The picture of Johnny Bravo and his high school friends on the day of his high school graduation reminded him of the guidance he received from three high school teachers to become successful. The picture of the two audio amplifiers represented a demonstration of guidance. Reggie's brother showed him how to install an audio amplifier step-by-step and then allowed him to try to install it while only being around to provide guidance but not do the entire task for him. The concept of guidance served as a huge aspect of how mentorship was defined by the participants. The artifacts and the stories behind each of them allow for a deeper understanding and depiction of how guidance happens. In all of the mentions of artifacts that display the concept of guidance, they all also included an emphasis on support. Guiding someone was a part of how mentors showed their support.

Mentorship was also described as resources. One artifact was representative of mentorship being defined as a resource. Kat shared a picture of her study abroad blog that she wrote. The blog was emphasized because it reminded Kat of the funding she received to go

abroad and the connections she was given to learn more about this resource. The concept of growth is also represented in some of the artifacts. Growth can be seen in some of the artifacts mentioned earlier. Rebecca's magenta color pencil also represents growth because her teacher always encouraged her passions which allowed her the opportunity for continued growth within her interests. Artifacts were really helpful in terms of reinforcing the definition of mentorship. It also provided visual ways to understand different aspects of mentorship.

The Impact of First Mentors

A participant's first mentor relationship was a key part of each participant's experience with mentoring experiences, mentor expectations, and their perceptions of mentoring overall. First mentorship relationships set the tone for what a mentor relationship should look like. First mentor relationship also appeared to affect the general expectations that participants had for mentor relationships following that one. Understanding the participants' first mentor experiences was integral in gaining an understanding of the perceptions of mentoring for high-achieving first-generation college students altogether.

Characteristics of First Mentors

Supportive First Mentors

Participants' first mentors were supportive, provided encouragement, dedicated time to their mentee, and served as a resource for them. Reggie, Paige, and Rebecca had their first mentor relationships with mentors who provided them with support. When asked to describe his first mentor, Reggie decided to talk about his fifth grade teacher who was supportive of his passion for reading. Reggie mentioned, "she saw that I wanted to read more and that I wanted different books. So she was able to get the school to purchase more books. I think we ended up with almost a new shelf of books." Like Reggie, Paige also had a teacher who was supportive of

her progress with reading. Her first mentor (her second grade teacher) helped her overcome this challenge. Paige valued this mentorship and mentioned,

The one-on-one mentorship and like, giving us hope to, that we could do it. It helped us because at the time we weren't like, when we started in her class we couldn't read very well, and then, once we started in her class, our reading level, was better than most kids.

This support gave Paige the opportunity to continue with her primary education at the level that was needed. Rebecca also experienced a similar form of support from her kindergarten teacher. Rebecca mentioned, “Yeah, she would take me out of class and just like, help me and like make sure I was you know understanding.” Her teacher provided exceptional support to ensure that she was learning everything properly as she worked to learn the English language. Support was one aspect of mentorship that was appreciated in the first mentor relationship.

Encouraging First Mentors

Alongside support, participants also valued encouragement in their first mentor relationships. Johnny Bravo, Tin, and Kat experienced this in their first mentor relationship. Johnny Bravo’s first mentor was his dad. Johnny Bravo said, “My dad was around for the first 12 years of my life before he got deported. He took us to sports, school events, and he was proud of us and made us aware of our potential.” Johnny Bravo really appreciated the support and encouragement that his dad provided while he was around. Like Johnny Bravo, Tin also experienced encouragement from his first mentor which was his football coach. Tin said, “so with that mentor, he tried to, like I said, push me beyond what my potential was, rather than just focusing, you know, on ‘he's just a speedster.’” Although Tin was an “underdog” according to himself, that encouragement was pivotal in terms of him joining the football team. Similar to Johnny Bravo and Tin, Kat also had an encouraging first mentor. Kat recalled what encouragement looked like for her first mentor relationship. Kat said,

He was definitely like my first mentor where I was able to like talk to him. And he like always encouraged me and he's been like about my personal life and even now like I'll still when I see him like it's still like that type of relationship.

Kat's mentor not only seemed to encourage her in the classroom but also beyond that.

Encouragement made a difference in the first mentor relationships of the participants.

The Impact of Time on First Mentor Relationships

Participants also felt that time was really important in getting to develop meaningful first mentor relationships. The longer the participant knew their mentor, the more valued the mentor relationship became. Lynn, Mya, and Marin provide insight on their first mentor experiences with mentors that dedicated a lot of time to the mentoring relationship. Lynn had an opportunity to have the same mentor (for her first mentor relationship) over a long period of time. She recounts how long her mentor relationship was with her. Lynn mentioned,

She was my counselor since kindergarten, so I knew her since kindergarten. Yeah. She was there since I started kindergarten and at the same school fifth grade. And so, yeah, just going into the office where she was at, she was always super happy. She had this laugh, you just knew it's her. [chuckle] So yeah, and then joining Girls on the Run and her being one of the coaches that really helped build even a more stronger relationship with her.

Being able to interact with her first mentor over a long period of time allowed Lynn to really get to know her mentor and develop a true relationship. According to Lynn, "it was like a mom type of relationship." Similar to Lynn, Mya's first mentor relationship showed the importance that time can make on the development of the mentor relationship as well. Mya talked about two of her first peer mentors and mentioned, "It was easy to get comfortable with them, easy to like open up to them. After so long, it stopped feeling like structured conversations. And it's like, well, it's not like structured meetings, it's like regular conversations." As Mya spent more time with her first mentors, it became easier and more comfortable to build a relationship with them. Like Mya, Marin also experienced the magnitude that time had on the development of a mentor

relationship. Marin's band teacher was his first mentor. Marin did not have any English speaking friends upon the start of his educational journey in the United States. Marin reflected on the importance of time with his first mentor. According to Marin,

Having that teacher in the band, and just having the ability to go there and spend some time during lunch, playing my trumpet, and just spending time with her kind of gave me a sense of like, belonging even though like, maybe in the cafeteria, I thought I wasn't.

The time that Marin's band teacher dedicated to spending time with him everyday is what allowed him to eventually find a sense of belonging at school. Although participants talk about the concept of time in different ways, they all emphasize how time can impact the development of the mentor relationship.

First Mentors as Resources

Participants also valued having first mentors who served as a resource in addition to serving as someone who provided support, encouragement, and time to the mentor relationship. Odalis and Mya share their experiences with having a first mentor who could serve as a resource. Odalis had a mentor from the Upward Bound Program who acted as a huge resource to her. As Odalis reflected on the ways that her mentor helped her, she mentioned, "she really helped me with like finding scholarships, talked to me about the mentorship program, reached out to me, had any questions, checked up on me, seeing if I had already filled it in." Like Odalis, Mya also had a mentor who had a lot of resources. Mya was not connected with her ethnic community in the university setting, so her mentor was able to help out with that. As Mya shared about how her mentor was resourceful, she mentioned,

I guess she helps with anything else, I guess like social stuff, just like learn about organizations like the, like the black organization on campus. She took me to a meeting. That's the only way I'd feel comfortable going somewhere I didn't know like a lot of people.

Mya's mentor knew about resources that would be helpful and meaningful for her during her college experience.

The Impact of First Mentor Relationships on the Perceptions of Mentoring

While understanding first mentor relationships is valuable, gaining an understanding of how this is connected to the participants' perception of mentoring is also important. Something worth noting is that participants' description of their first mentor relationships seemed to heavily align with the way they defined mentorship. As mentioned earlier, some of the key words that came up when participants described mentorship were, "guidance," "support," "resource," "understanding," "leading," and "motivation." Some of these concepts are demonstrated in the examples of first mentor relationship characteristics. More specifically, this can be shown through examples of how several participants defined the word mentorship. Johnny Bravo defined mentorship as "having a really close friend, someone that supports you, motivates you, believes in you. It's like a brotherhood; it provides guidance and emotional support." His first mentor (which was his dad) provided him with a lot of support and also believed in him. Like Johnny Bravo's definition, Mya's definition of mentorship also included an aspect about guidance. She defined mentorship as "just guiding somebody to look out for you." One of her first mentors (which was her sister) guided her and looked out for her when it came down to her applying for college. Marin also focused on the guidance aspect of mentoring and defined it as

The ability to help guide someone by molding a relationship the mentee can look up to, a resource that can guide you, someone that cares about you, someone you can look up to. Mentoring is when someone empathizes with you, helps you grow personally, someone who wants to see you succeed, willing to shape you, teach you, listens to you.

Marin's first mentor (his band teacher) was someone who cared about him, took time to build a relationship with him and was willing to listen to him especially during this time in his life where

he did not have any English speaking friends. Reggie's definition of mentorship also included the guidance concept. Reggie defined mentorship as

Providing guidance to the person in a way that you can see them grow and develop, but also giving them some freedom to explore what they want to do without restricting them to a path. So instead of I guess, paving the path for them, then you let them pick the path and they each kind of helped to make sure that the they can get where they want to get.

Reggie's first mentor gave him an opportunity to grow and develop through his passion by providing him with an environment to read as many books as he wanted. Tin defined mentorship differently compared to some of the other participants. He coined the term mentorship as "being more aligned with trying to get people like above their expected potential and above their comfort zone." His first mentor (which was his football coach) observed and noticed his potential. As demonstrated the participant's perception of mentoring can sometimes be defined by the first mentor relationship they have.

The Evolution of Mentorship

While the perceptions of mentoring differed among each participant, the types of mentorship needed during varying stages of each participant's lives were similar. The type of mentorship that participants looked for evolved over time. Between elementary school and middle school, participants wanted a mentor who provided them with a sense of safety, comfort, and belonging. During middle school, participants also looked for mentors who could provide them with encouragement. In high school and college, participants looked for mentors who could provide them with general guidance for the next steps in life. Overall, the various types of mentorship were instrumental throughout each participant's life. Throughout this section, participants identify different mentors who have been very helpful throughout their educational journeys, therefore they were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Mentorship and Safety

Participants looked for mentor relationships that brought them safety, comfort, and a sense of belonging during their elementary and middle school journeys. When a participant did not feel comfortable in an environment, they searched for an adult they could trust. This adult usually gave them that sense of belonging and safety which allowed the participants to see this person as a mentor. Marin, Coco, and Rebecca experienced this need for safety while they were learning the English language in school. Marin recalled connecting with his middle school band teacher (who was also his mentor) after experiencing a lot of discomfort that came with the language barrier.

That professor really she helped me a lot and in terms of like social development because again, mentioning the fact that me coming from another country not speaking English which it was hard for me to make friends at the time. People obviously saw me as like, the weird guy, I guess you can say. Yeah, so not a lot of people would sit with me during lunch, maybe a few people but they're also ESL kids. So, having that teacher in the band, and just having the ability to go there and spend some time during lunch, playing my trumpet, and just spending time with her kind of gave me a sense of like, belonging even though like, maybe in the cafeteria, I thought I wasn't. Or I didn't belong. Yeah. So she really gave me like that sense of confidence.

Like Marin, Coco also reflected on the importance of her mentor (elementary school teacher Mrs. Kent) after recalling the challenges that came with the language barrier. When Coco was in elementary school, she had a negative encounter with her peers during recess simply because she could not speak English and here is what she recounted.

One day we were in the playground. And we were playing hide and go seek with a bunch of like other kids. And I was like, the only kid who knew how to speak Spanish. They all went to go like, hide, and I went to go look for them and they all like ran away and left me alone. And then I went to go play on the slides and they were there. And I remember

one of the kids, white, white little kid he told me, you don't belong here you don't even know English, he pushed me down, and I busted my head like, basically. And the brown kid was one that got in trouble for it.

Although Coco did experience being mistreated by her peers, she was able to find that sense of comfort through one of the ESL teacher's, Mrs. Kent. Coco mentioned, "Mrs. Kent was really nice and didn't treat me differently than the other kids." Coco valued the comfort that came with feeling like she was like everyone else. Her mentor (Mrs. Kent) created an environment where she could receive this treatment. Similar to Coco, Rebecca also appreciated the sense of comfort she felt with her mentor and kindergarten teaching assistant (Ms. Liam) when it came down to her language barrier or anything else she needed help with. Rebecca reflected on this experience and how Ms. Liam treated her in the classroom.

She would take me out of class and just like, help me and like make sure I was you know understanding or if I needed more help on my ABCs or colors like she would help me and there was never that like, feeling of, you know, like, I was dumb or anything necessarily like I didn't know or I was slower than other kids like she was very reassuring and, you know, wanted me to get to their level but without like being like you need this extra time. Ms. Liam was helpful and helped me to feel comfortable with the language barrier.

Marin, Coco, and Rebecca were able to find someone that was able to provide that sense of safety through the early stages of their educational journey. Through these experiences where each participant got to feel that sense of safety and comfort, they were able to gain a mentor relationship that they valued during this aspect of their education.

Mentorship and Encouragement

While mentor relationships that provided safety and comfort were valued in elementary and middle school, mentorship that provided encouragement was also valued by some participants during elementary and middle school. Participants looked for mentors who recognized their potential and encouraged them. Tin, Reggie, and Paige remember their

experiences with receiving encouragement. Tin's mentor was his middle school football coach who took notice of his talent and wanted to help him develop it. As Tin thought back to his middle school days, he realized the importance of his mentors at that time. He said, "everyone was doing tryouts and I was a bit nerdy. But I was faster than everyone else. The coaches took notice of my talents. While I didn't make the football team the first time, I eventually made the team." Tin's football coach helped him do things on the team that played to his strengths but also encouraged him until he got a spot on the team. Like Tin, Reggie also had mentors who recognized his potential, provided encouragement, and were invested in developing his talents during his middle school journey. Reggie recalls this experience where both his middle school teacher and his older brother provided him with encouragement in regards to an educational endeavor. Reggie said, "My middle school teacher encouraged me to go to a different high school and my brother also encouraged me to go to the same high school. He talked to our parents about letting me go to school there." Reggie had two people encouraging him to do something that would help him. Like Tin and Reggie, Paige also experienced receiving encouragement. However, she received encouragement from her second grade teacher Ms. Wyatt. Paige recalled being in second grade and struggling with reading. Paige's second grade teacher (Ms. Wyatt) noticed this and spent a lot of time teaching her how to read. Paige said, "Ms. Wyatt spent one-on-one time with me and gave me hope that I could read. She demonstrated patience and used different techniques to like help me. Ms. Wyatt was very adaptable and adapted to people's needs." While this was a challenging time in her life, Paige never forgot how dedicated Ms. Wyatt was to encouraging her and helping her. Having mentors who provided encouragement proved to be transformational during some participants elementary and middle school journeys.

Mentorship and Guidance

While some participants looked for mentor relationships that could provide them with safety and guidance in the earlier stages of their education, other participants looked for mentorship that focused on guidance for the next steps in life once they got to high school and college. Lynn, Odalis, Johnny Bravo, Mya, Kat, Emma, and Jazmyn all had experiences with receiving guidance during these stages. Lynn, Odalis, Johnny Bravo, and Mya discussed the guidance they received during their high school years. Kat, Emma, and Jazmyn highlighted their experiences with guidance during their college journeys. Overall, participants felt like guidance was important throughout their experiences.

Guidance in High School

Guidance was something that participants looked for in their high school mentor relationships. Several participants explained how they experienced guidance through their high school years. Lynn thought back to some of the more forward thinking conversations she had with her high school mentor (Mr. Moe, who was one of her teachers) about future careers. Lynn mentioned,

We would talk about careers. Or not careers but what we were gonna do after high school. And so I said he would talk about pharmacy school. And so I remember asking him about how it works with the education. "Does your wife say... How hard does she say it is because it obviously is hard.

Lynn was able to start having conversations that would be vital to her future. Like Lynn, Odalis also began having these conversations about life after school and receiving the guidance needed to prepare for that. Odalis met a young woman (Diane) who was in college through a mentorship program she was a part of. Diane gave her insight on college life. Odalis said,

I met Diane through Upward Bound. She was a college student when I was in the program. She talked to us a lot about her experience because she was an international student. I had someone on campus to connect with.

While Odalis did not go into details about what she learned from her mentor Diane, she emphasized the idea that she had Diane as a resource to provide guidance about college. Similar to Odalis, Johnny Bravo also had mentors who could provide him with guidance in terms of college. Johnny Bravo's mentors were a few of his high school teachers. Johnny Bravo recalled the support that he looked for from his mentors. He said,

They really helped me a lot because they had a lot of experience in college and I really grew close to them. I felt really comfortable in their classes and I got to know them as a person besides just being a teacher. So at that point, I just felt really comfortable asking them questions about it or any concerns I had about college or like how to, or not necessarily college, but how to advance during those high school years, especially being tough for me.

Johnny Bravo expressed comfort in being able to use his mentors for guidance through anything he needed during his high school years. Like everyone else, Mya also looked for guidance when it came down to preparing for her future. During those high school years, Mya's sister was able to provide guidance while she was applying for college. Mya reflected on all the tips her sister was able to give her. Mya said her sister helped her with the following,

Scholarships, like um kind of like telling me telling me about like what she applied to, the things that she did get, what she did to get them, what she didn't do well, and why she didn't get them. Yeah. And like kind of explain like the whole process to me because like, I didn't know anything about it. I always knew I wanted to go to college, but not the process of it.

Mya heavily leaned on the guidance of her sister to prepare for college. Guidance was very important for participants to have during their high school careers.

Guidance in College

While some participants felt like receiving guidance was important in high school, some participants felt the same way about college. Participants equally sought out mentorship that provided them with guidance during their college careers. Kat, Emma, and Jazmyn shared their experiences with this. Kat talked about the guidance she received from one of her faculty mentors since she had been in college. She explained,

I've like known him since I was a freshman here and he's super helpful just like guiding me through the research process and he's always like, he's able to like give me critical feedback will also be like super nice about it feels good just because like I am in a, in a realm that I literally don't know anything about so like me like get my foot into something new, also being supported and giving like the resources and information that I need are super helpful.

Guidance allowed Kat to feel comfortable exploring uncharted territory. Like Kat, Emma also reflected on the significance of guidance during her college career. Emma shared her experience with receiving guidance from her college peers on an assignment. She mentioned, "Tia helped me figure out how to even start that research paper I didn't know how to write. So like all of them just helped with all of my classes." Guidance from Emma's peers helped her navigate unfamiliar expectations in college. Like Emma, Jazmyn also talked about her experience with receiving guidance through her college journey. When describing what her church mentor helped her with, Jazmyn mentioned, "She provided me with teachings. She taught me how to have relationships with people. It's like a soulful rest." Jazmyn talked about the importance of guidance on her spiritual journey. While each participant had a different experience with guidance, they all mentioned the value it brought to their college experiences overall.

Mentorship During College

All participants in the study mentioned having several mentors during their college experience. These mentors ranged from professors, peers, professionals in the field, and community mentors to family members. Some of the mentors were people who either worked at

the university or attended college there. Other mentors were not from the university but did connect with the participant through an opportunity to serve as their professional mentor or as a life mentor. Some mentors worked with their mentees long-term serving as their mentor for as long as a year or more. Other mentor-mentee relationships were more short-term where the mentor only worked with the participant over the span of a couple of months or a full academic semester. The participants' mentor relationships usually began for a few reasons. If a participant needed help with something, then they would seek out the individual who could provide them with that and begin meeting with them. This sometimes turned into a mentoring relationship. Sometimes participants were a part of a mentorship program where they were assigned a mentor. In this circumstance, the participant was required to meet with their assigned mentor some predetermined number of times. Sometimes the mentorship pairings were successful, and the participant continued their mentor-mentee relationship past the time it was required. Other times, the participant recognized that the mentor was not the right fit for them, and they did not meet with their mentor again once the timeframe for required meetings was over. Mentorship pairings that were successful worked well because the mentor made genuine efforts to truly get to know their mentee and build a relationship outside of the academic conversations. Building authentic relationships took time and consistency. For mentor pairings that did not work out, things were the opposite. The mentor followed a script based on what they were supposed to be discussing with their mentee and did not make efforts to have discussions outside of that. For some participants, mentor-mentee relationships began and formed organically. While the participant was not necessarily seeking anything from the interactions they would have with a specific individual, they found the interactions to be authentic and random conversations about a variety

of topics eventually led to a mentoring relationship based on the comfort that they gained with talking with that individual.

Successful Mentor Relationships During College

While all participants developed formal and informal relationships with their different mentors, what was more important was the success of those mentor relationships. Participants reflected on their different mentor relationships and were able to identify factors that contributed to the success of those relationships. Building a friendship and dedicating time to the mentorship were the components that created positive and long-lasting mentor relationships. Building a friendship meant that the mentor made efforts to talk with their mentee about other things outside of the expected academic topics. For participants who did not get to build friendships with some of their impactful mentors, they still talked about how their mentors built a meaningful relationship that showed how much they cared. Time meant that mentors and mentees dedicated time to developing the mentor relationship. Participants shared their experiences of these positive mentor relationships.

Meaningful Relationships and Time

Two of the key components for a successful mentor relationship were creating meaningful relationships and dedicating time to those relationships. Both concepts worked hand in hand. Mentors created an atmosphere where they could foster those relationships with their mentees. Through fostering those relationships, some mentors and mentees were able to build a friendship. Mentors also made sure to dedicate time to building those meaningful relationships with their mentees. Multiple participants shared their experiences with this. Lynn talked about the characteristics that one of her high school teachers displayed that created the friendship in their mentor relationship. She said,

He was super laid back and he would always joke with us about stuff and then he started talking about his life outside of school. And so it's like we got to know him outside of school as well. One time he had his wife come in to talk about the pharmacy. So I remember that was a fun day. We were like "Oh, my gosh, did you see Mr. Morr's wife?" So, yeah. So him being really one of those super chill and relaxed teachers, I feel like gave for the relationship to form into a friendship thing.

Like Lynn, Kat also experienced the friendship aspect in her mentor relationship. Kat explained her hesitancy with the mentor relationship initially until the friendship began to form. She said,

At first I was like not super about it I was like I don't know how I feel about this mentor relationship just because I felt like we wouldn't have anything in common but then like slowly I got more confidence in like talking to him and being able to like really just make them more conversational like I always spend my time freshmen year literally in his office and just talking to him like it would be like six of us in his tiny little office like on top of each other almost and then so that relationship like I feel like it's starting to wind up being a friendship and mentorship.

Similar to Kat, Rebecca also experienced a transition from her mentor being a formal mentor to becoming a friend. She recalled what this experience looked like for her. She said,

Our mentor mentee meetings that we were required to have just turned into FaceTime calls where we would really like talk for two hours. And even if we were there just like on the phone doing homework, we just talked and talked and talked and obviously she'd get her questions in. Yeah, we would get a lot more conversation out of them. And then they turn into oh, let's go grab lunch together. And then we would find each other on campus.

Mya also had a similar experience. When talking about the mentor relationship, she said, "I mean, it was structured at first. Okay, maybe like the first, like, more to one on ones. But I mean, after that, it really was unstructured. It just felt like two friends talking." Like Mya, Reggie acknowledged the mentorship relationship being less structured in his experience. He explained, "I guess my mentorship with Joy was more informal. We did start off a little formal, but then as

we went on, we became a little more informal, discuss more things, I guess that weren't on their list sheet.”

Marin also had a mentor who made efforts to expand mentorship conversations beyond the academic realm. Marin said,

He was always wanting to meet up with me to talk about my experience at the university so far, for my classes, what I needed to help with, and just anything overall, like my personal life, my academics, we both shared an interesting passion. So he, of course, opened his ice cream business. And I told him about my, my idea as well, but opening up our family ice cream business, just like we did it out just like we had in Mexico. So he was always supportive about it. He would always tell me if I ever needed help, or if I ever needed to get connected with anyone, I could just let him know. So again, he demonstrated those mentorship traits wanting to help me, just being open to any questions or concerns.

Tin also resonated with the importance of mentors and mentees having conversations outside of the academic world. Although he did not share something about his personal experience with this, he did mention the vitality in having that friendship dynamic in a mentor relationship. As Tin reflected on what this friendship dynamic would look like he said,

We all have mentors, who got to know, you know, like, who we are like, what we were doing over the weekend, you know, our interest in hobbies where, you know, likes and dislikes, just in general, and made like, conversation a lot easier. Because, you know, it wasn't just talking about simple, you know, academic topics. It's just like, hey, are you doing anything over the weekend? What were you doing for spring break or winter break? You know, anything interesting happening?

Building a friendship was extremely important in creating a more meaningful and long lasting mentor relationship. Johnny Bravo also talked about the importance of time and the outcome of friendship while reflecting on his experience. He also chose to talk about a mentor he was paired with. He said,

Definitely the way they would be formed would definitely be them being assigned to me. I never really, I don't think there was a time where like I sought out somebody and they just became a mentor, all of a sudden, right. But definitely the way they did the process to that, as with time going, I definitely felt a little bit closer with them, you know, just talking to them, seeing them regularly or for occasion. And going back to Lilah, I mean, especially her, just seeing them, just the way we would communicate and seeing them, just felt a bit more comfortable, for sure. And then we just get real close as time went by. And instead of just growing that mentor type of bond you have with mentoring mentee, we were starting to create a more of a closer friendship than just the process of just being a mentor.

Mya also talked about time in her mentor relationships. She said, "I saw Lilah and Analise every two weeks. I end up seeing somebody like every week, and Lisa. Just kind of whenever. We really like to spend time, we became friends at that point." Time allowed Mya to build the friendship in her mentor relationship. While Paige did not necessarily build a friendship with her professor, she did talk about being close with her faculty mentor. She also indicated that time played a role in her more meaningful mentor relationships with some of her professors. She reflected on her experience of entering college during Covid and trying to build mentor relationships during that time. She mentioned,

I think, starting out at campus during Covid, where it was like all online, I think some of the some of the professors just wanted someone to care enough to go to like office hours or meet with them even over Zoom. And that just showed that you like really cared about what you were doing. And I definitely did that my freshmen year with the encouragement of the Honors Student Support Program to meet with professors and get to know them. And that really sparked some of my close knit relationships with some of these professors.

Paige demonstrated that getting to know one another in a mentor relationship was essential. She put in the time and effort to help develop these mentor relationships. Similar to Paige, Coco and her faculty mentor also invested a lot of time into their mentor relationship. While Coco did not initially want to meet with her mentor often, she later appreciated her mentor's efforts in giving time to their mentor relationship. Coco said,

We would meet every like every other Wednesday. And she would come to me, which is something that I didn't think like the assistant dean of the school would do. She shows like a real interest in like how I was doing like the first thing she was like, how are you doing this, how can I help you with like anything. But, yeah, she was like, showed the interest. And then I was always scared. But then I'm like, that's just silly.

Like Coco, Jazmyn also emphasized the importance of time for her mentor relationships. When being asked about how her mentor relationships formed and developed over time, she said,

So that's just kind of like any relationship. Its conversation after conversation. I mean, even if you talk about it like you and I talk about it with things like school, the honor student support program, and all that, like if like, eventually we make it things like... I think I'll say like we'll come in and develop that relationship further. Furthermore, we've talked about life mostly. Like time is important.

Jazmyn also felt that time was vital in establishing mentor relationships. Time and building a meaningful relationship was an impactful contribution to successful mentor relationships.

Most Influential Mentors in College

Although participants were able to provide insight on some of the things that made their mentor relationships successful, they were also given the opportunity to talk about their most influential mentors and what made them the most influential one. When asked to describe those mentors, participants had varying responses. Three participants felt that one of their professors was their most influential mentor. Four participants felt that one of their older siblings was the most influential for them. Two participants acknowledged that their peer mentors were the most influential. Five participants felt that the staff for the mentorship and honors student support program they were a part of were the most influential. One participant who was heavily involved in church felt that her church mentor was the most influential mentor during college thus far. Ultimately, these mentors helped students with their academic endeavors, emotional support, and future plans.

Characteristics of the Most Influential Faculty Mentors

When asked about their most influential mentor, some participants mentioned their faculty mentors. Faculty mentors were known to motivate students, believe in them, listen to them, be caring, and assist them with their academic endeavors such as selecting classes, doing research, and preparing for future plans. Paige, Odalis, and Coco had great faculty mentors. Paige happily expressed some of the characteristics she appreciated most for her faculty mentor. She said,

I think Dr. Motts like knows she's obviously an amazing mentor in some ways, but she also like knows people's strengths, and she can identify those so quickly, and she knows how to push people to be like the best version of them. You don't have to follow in everyone's footsteps; like you can do your research project, or you can do your collegiate experience like she's very, um, like she will motivate you to do the best you can do, which is very important to me, because she's obviously had all kinds of different levels of expertise with students and knowledge, but she knows how to recognize like what you can do. It's a very individualized mentoring not like a one-size fits all, but really getting to know you, and figuring out ways to encourage you and get you where you need to go.

Paige was able to experience a very fulfilling mentor relationship. Coco also had Dr. Motts as a faculty mentor and had positive things to say about her as well. She mentioned, “Um, well, one thing about her is she never gets mad at anything. If I tell her the answer she doesn't want to hear she'll let me. “ Like Paige and Coco, Odalis also had a positive experience with her faculty mentor. Odalis said, “she was just very understanding and open. Whenever I just want to talk about things, she was very diverse on different things. And she'd also be very open with sharing her own personal experience. I really liked that about her.” These were examples of the types of characteristics participants valued in their faculty mentors.

Characteristics of the Most Influential Family Mentors

Some participants identified certain family members as their most influential mentors. Family mentors (who were typically older siblings) provided emotional support, consistent support, encouragement, financial support, advice on how to navigate college, and academic

support. Emma, Kat, Reggie, and Coco all identified an older sibling as their most influential mentor. The reoccurring theme of the most appreciated characteristic among family mentors was the support aspect of mentorship. Emma's older sister provided her with a lot of emotional support. While reflecting on her experiences with her sister, Emma shared her gratitude for her sister's support. She said,

She's helped me like open up about talking to her more about like when I'm having a rough mental day. She's like one of the only people that know when I want her to just listen and when I want her to be nice. You don't even have to tell her. She just knows.

Like Emma, Kat was also very appreciative of the emotional support her older sister provided.

Kat mentioned,

My sister was definitely my biggest mentor and like supporter because she will always be by my side no matter what. And she kind of like encourages me when I feel like discouraged and she knows like how I am and like my own like personal attributes like outside of school that I don't just share to everyone.

Kat's sister was able to provide the support that was most helpful for her. While Reggie also received support from his older sibling, he received academic support rather than emotional support. Reggie exclaimed that his brother was his most influential mentor for several reasons.

After reflecting on his experience, he said,

It was because we shared a room. So it was easy for me to bug him for questions and get a response because he couldn't escape. He was really helpful and kind of helping me declare electrical, he was able to guide me in kind of what classes I should take and how to more or less structure my schedule to come make it as easy as possible since by the time he got to him, he had already kind of figured it out. So that he was helpful in that but even later on whenever he wasn't able to offer any help, he had friends, we had connections, who were kind of able to offer some advice on what I should do, what steps I should take.

Reggie not only received academic support from his older brother, but also connections and resources. Like Reggie, Coco also had the support of her older brother. While the characteristics

of Coco's brother sound negative, Coco appreciated that her brother cared about her future.

When describing him, she said,

He's like very, very negative. He gets very anxious about like our futures. But he's always kept like that side. I would say I'm very naive when it comes to something like I, I live on the notion that like everything works out. Like everything. But that's not how he lived. He was like, I'm not going to be dealing with similar people.

Coco's brother wanted to ensure that she had a solidified plan for her future. All family mentors provided the participants with support that was valuable to them and their experience.

Characteristics of the Most Influential Peer Mentors

The most influential peer mentors were memorable because they built a friendship with the participants. They also provided their mentees with academic support and were very honest about anything they were guiding their mentees through. Odalis said, "my most influential mentor kept it real and shared her personal experience as a minority student in the business college." Odalis valued her mentor's insight because she was a minority student in the business college as well. Mya also shared appreciation for her most influential mentor. Things that she valued about her peer mentor was her honesty, her help with selecting classes, and the way she pushed her to succeed. Mya was especially grateful for her peer mentor's guidance in switching from an architecture major to a business major. Mya said, "my peer mentor helped me with my transition for my major, my resumé, helped with my assignments for my class, and branding myself." Participants felt that peer mentors were very helpful.

Characteristics of the Most Influential Mentorship Program Mentors

Several participants also felt that their professional mentors from the honors student support mentorship program were some of their most influential mentors. Professional mentors held students accountable, helped students build their connections, helped them become a better person, and provided a familial environment within the mentorship program. Johnny Bravo

shared more about his personal experience being in the honors student support mentorship program. Johnny Bravo said, “the program was helpful because it helped me figure out how to approach college, how to become confident in myself, and it taught me how to make connections.” Johnny Bravo also talked about how the program mentors provided a support system, encouragement, and an atmosphere where students knew they could come in and talk to mentors whenever they needed to. According to Johnny Bravo, program mentors also helped students with their personal lives, academics, general guidance, and provided an open ear. Rebecca also shared her experiences about being in the same honors student support program. Rebecca talked about one honors student support program mentor and how having the same ethnic background as her really created that mentorship bonding for her. As Rebecca talked about this mentor, she said, “she is a mom figure; she is on top of everyone all the time, she keeps everyone in check; she allows everyone to have moments of reflection.” She also talked about how this mentor had accomplished a lot in her life and how she was an inspiration to her. Rebecca reflected on how meeting this mentor during her senior year of high school and how having her as a mentor throughout her college career has made a huge impact on her.

The Influence of Mentorship on Persistence

Mentorship was influential in the persistence of high-achieving first-generation college students. The main themes that arose when discussing persistence were connections and guidance. Participants found that connections were helpful in their college careers in terms of possible opportunities, resources, building community, and building friendships. Guidance was beneficial in terms of the participants’ academic endeavors, future plans, finding resources, and accountability. All participants felt that mentorship aided in their persistence during their college journeys.

Connections

Connections that came from mentors led to networking, professional opportunities, campus engagement, friendships, and finding one's community for high-achieving first-generation college students. Reggie reflected on how networking not only allowed him to have more contacts but also led to a professional opportunity. When talking about persistence and mentorship, Reggie said,

It's been very beneficial, especially in terms of networking. I guess in reference to Mr. Sans and Dr. Engle, they were able to provide me some connection to a research lab and helped me get in, as well as Mr. Sans has also been able to provide some advice on the industry since he has quite a bit of experience in that.

Reggie was able to get a professional experience out of his connection which helped him to build his resumé. Like Reggie, Marin also had some positive experiences with gaining connections from his mentor. However, Marin's experience with connections from his mentors focused more on his opportunities to be more socially engaged on campus. As Marin recalled all the ways his connections helped him, he said,

In terms of, I guess, social engagement mentorships like student government, they try to connect you with different on campus activities and programs. So it's a really great source to get yourself connected to other organizations on campus. They really helped me get involved on campus. Really got to know what I want to do on campus. Yeah, I guess. And then, in terms of professional development, and programs like this, people like Cole, who obviously are navigating like a successful college career. They know the ins and outs of mentorships. Like the Walmart internship, also they help you be able to develop yourself professionally and get to the next level that you need to be.

Similar to Marin, Jazmyn reaped the benefits of social connections. Jazmyn's peer mentor is the reason she indirectly gained connections. Jazmyn said, "My peer mentor is the reason I joined AISES. He pushed the importance of gaining a community and friends. So I got involved with the church and it helped me grow." Although Jazmyn's mentor did not necessarily give her all the connections directly, he still emphasized the importance of getting engaged and

encouraged her to join specific things. Her mentor's advice is the reason she now has a community where she fits in. Like Jazmyn, Tin appreciated the connections from his mentors because it also helped him find a community and build friends. In brief, Tin said, "I made like a lot of good friends. They definitely connected me to like a lot of different people of like, various backgrounds." Building friendships was very important to Tin. Although Odalis did not have an example of how connections from her mentor influenced her persistence, she did speak on the matter. She felt like having connections were important and mentioned, "if there was something specific that you're trying to do like developing your social capital or just kind of having the middleman to kind of help you get connected to who you need to get connected to, then connections help." While all participants had different kinds of connections that they felt were important, they all agreed that connections from their mentors helped them persist through college.

Guidance

Besides having connections, participants also felt that guidance was just as impactful for their persistence. Participants highlighted their various experiences with receiving guidance from their mentors. Paige thought back to her past and proceeded to express gratitude for the role guidance has played in her educational career. Paige mentioned,

Um, being a first generation college student like my parents didn't have like connections or the guidance to help me. Like I filled out every application, and I filled out every scholarship. So when I needed help I went to my mentors, whether that was in high school or college, because I didn't have my mom and dad to run to when things were tough. I had mentors at work who guided me along the way, who had experienced what I'd experienced. Whether they're a first-generation college student or not, and went to college, and had the same like struggles that every college student has. So my mentor has definitely, like guided me through all the processes, right along the way, because it's tough, and like getting used to a new place, and to like not know anyone, and just like offering those opportunities like this.

Paige's mentor was really instrumental in guiding her through the challenges within college.

Johnny Bravo also felt similarly about guidance in terms of navigating college. When talking about the influence of mentorship on persistence, Johnny Bravo responded and said,

I think it definitely changed those in a good way. Like I said before, I feel like without that mentorship, I don't know how I would have approached college myself. I don't know if I would be succeeding in college like I do now. And if I would be advancing in college like I do now without that mentorship. So I definitely feel like it was a big push for me. It was a really great help. And then for me, made me realize different studying tips and different ways to approach or to become better within the college experience, especially with networking with the professors.

Through guidance, Johnny Bravo was better able to handle the college experience and learn how to network through the guidance of his mentors. Lynn and Marin had slightly different experiences with receiving guidance. They valued the guidance they received because it helped them make decisions about their experiences they chose to have. Lynn needed to receive academic assistance for her school work but was not sure about doing that. She recalls how the guidance she received changed her mind. She said,

So I was able to like, strive academically because, like with my grades, because of the resources that the honors student support program provided, and like encouraging us to go to like the writing center or like the math center, you know. Like the, things we have on campus. 'Cause I, yeah. Like I don't, I don't know if I would've gone.

Like Lynn, Marin also valued the decisions he was able to make through guidance from his mentors. He recalled what the experience was like when he was trying to make a decision about scholarships to apply for. He mentioned,

We can come up to you guys and ask, what scholarships to apply for. Am I doing this right? Should I apply for this scholarship? Can I apply to the scholarship? Can I get a reference letter for this scholarship? So I guess having mentors really does help make a difference. When I guess navigating, like scholarship applications and financial aid, which is a super, like one of the huge concerns for attrition students have when coming to college.

The guidance Marin received was like a sounding board. He liked the idea of having someone to talk to. Like Marin, Emma also valued having someone to talk things through with. She recalled how helpful her peer mentors were in providing guidance on a decision about her academic major. She explained,

I chose to keep my second major because Cole was so helpful and like all of them were there a lot of people in the student government are poly sci majors yeah so like it really helped being in a group of people where like they knew the professors, how they knew the classes, how they knew to like help me with all these things.

Not only did Emma appreciate the guidance on her major, but also all other aspects of college that she was uncertain about how to navigate. Similar to Emma, Coco also had a dilemma with her major. She talked about how her mentors helped her make a decision about it. She said,

Yeah, I mean my mentors in the honors student support program are like a big part of me actually like switching the major. So I could switch my major late, so that I could do what makes me happy. I was miserable doing what I was doing in business.

Coco's mentors helped her to understand that she still had options although she was worried with it being so late in her college career to switch majors. Her mentors also convinced her to do something that would make her happy. Similar to Coco, Mya's mentor helped her to make a decision as well. Although this decision was more about Mya's wellness, her experience was still something she received guidance for. When Mya was trying to learn the balance between schoolwork and fun, her mentor had to give her advice. Mya mentioned,

I guess Alise kind of taught me to keep balanced. Okay. And so I was that person, I get too busy, like my social life is going up. I'm not thinking about hanging out, but she would like convince me to like take a break. It's not like, you know, sometimes people like, just forget this assignment. You don't need to do this, come out and hang out. She wasn't like that, but like, she would tell me like, you need to take a break.

Mya learned how to take care of herself from the guidance her mentor gave her. While participants in the study received guidance for a variety of things in their college careers, they all

agreed that guidance was valuable and influential in their persistence as high-achieving first-generation college students.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, high-achieving first-generation college students' experiences with mentorship were highlighted through results of the study. Participants explained the meaning of mentorship based on their own perception. They expanded on the development of their mentor relationships with different mentors they had throughout their life. Participants also acknowledged all of the avenues they had received mentorship through. Furthermore, they discussed how mentorship played a vital role in their persistence through their college journey. Overall, findings showed that mentorship played an instrumental role in the persistence of high-achieving first-generation college students' lives.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how high-achieving first-generation college students perceived their mentoring experiences at a public research university in the midsouth and examined what role mentoring played in their persistence. In this study, the role of mentoring in college persistence was thoroughly examined through the lens of each participant. Literature showed that mentoring was an effective practice for improving the persistence of college students at large (Girves et al., 2005). Through this study, I was able to explore if mentorship was an effective strategy for high-achieving first-generation college students' persistence specifically. Overall, this study allowed for focus on high-achieving first-generation college students.

Data Collection

For this study, data were collected through a pre-interview activity, a semi-structured one-to-one interview, and a follow-up one-to-one meeting by the request of the participant. Participants were asked to bring an artifact that represents what mentoring looked like for them. The artifacts that participants brought in consisted of items they already had or a drawing they made. Interviews were held for around 75-minutes on average with the maximum time being 90-minutes for an interview. During the interview participants answered a series of questions that allowed them to expand on their experiences as a high-achieving first-generation college student. After their interviews, participants were sent the transcription of their interview and offered the opportunity to follow-up and add any additional information to their interview. Three participants did a follow-up meeting to add additional information about their interviews.

Data Analysis Methods

A multistep process was used to analyze the data for this study. There was a total of seven steps (Lewis, 2018). The first step was to transcribe each interview (Bird, 2005). The second step was to do member checking. This allowed the participants to follow-up with any additional information for their interview. The third step included coding the data through discrete stories. The fourth step included coding data through four lenses that allowed data to be examined from participants' nonverbal communication, unexpected events, narrative processes, and the language used. Data for nonverbal communication, noted reactions to interviews, or thoughts were pulled from field notes and used as a part of this fourth step for coding (Lewis, 2018). Data for unexpected occurrences in the interview were also pulled from the field notes for this phase (Lewis, 2018). Identifying the narrative process entailed recognizing the context of the story when certain things were mentioned in the interview. In the fourth lens, the data were checked for the type of language that was used during the interview. The fifth phase allowed for participants' stories to be compared for similarities. The sixth phase required comparing the data to an existing theory (Lewis, 2018).. This phase was not recommended and was not implemented in this study (Lewis, 2018). The final phase required triangulation which allowed me to analyze the data based on the artifacts that were brought in for the pre-interview activity and the actual interviews.

Summary of Results

Perceptions of Mentoring

Participants had very similar perceptions and definitions of mentoring. Mentoring was generally seen as a form of guidance. Through guidance, a mentor would help the mentee with what is needed but not do everything for them. They would provide assistance and help the mentee learn to do things on their own. Mentoring was also seen as support. Participants felt that

a mentor should provide support to their mentee whether they knew how to help them or not. It was a plus if the mentor had the same experience as their mentee, but it was not expected to be able to provide support. Lastly, mentoring included a mentor recognizing a mentee's potential and encouraging the mentee to pursue things that they might have positive outcomes with. All participants had a positive perception of mentoring overall.

Representation of Mentorship at Different Stages in Life

Participants had different perceptions of what mentoring represented at different stages of their lives. The participant's perception of mentoring was based on what they needed during that time. In elementary school, mentorship represented safety. When a student felt uncomfortable in an environment, they looked for safety. The person who could provide this for them was considered a mentor. In middle school, mentorship represented encouragement. Teachers, coaches, or family members who paid attention to the participant's potential and encouraged them in that pursuit were seen as a mentor. In high school and college, mentorship represented guidance. Individuals who helped participants prepare for the next steps in life were deemed as mentors.

Perceptions of First Mentor Relationships

The perception of first mentor relationships were very instrumental in understanding the participant's perception of mentoring overall. Findings showed that several participants defined and understood mentorship based off of the first mentor they had. First mentor relationships also seemed to set the expectation for what mentorship would be like. The main characteristics that participants mentioned their first mentors had were being supportive, encouraging, being dedicated to giving time to the mentor relationship, and serving as a resource. Several

participants defined mentorship similarly to how they described their first mentor. First mentor relationships played an important role in understanding the perceptions of mentorship overall.

Development of Mentoring Relationships

While mentor relationships often started through an informal or formal mentor relationship, they were maintained through the mentor and mentee building a friendship and dedicating time to the mentor relationship. In a mentoring relationship, the development of a friendship included the mentor shifting the conversations with their mentee from academic topics/required topics to more personable topics. Participants became more comfortable in the mentor relationship when they felt like they were able to build a more authentic relationship with their mentor. Positive mentor relationships were also developed over time. Mentors and mentees who gave time and effort to the development of the mentor relationship tended to have successful mentoring relationships. Time meant how much time the mentor and mentee spent together during one meet-up and how often they met with each other. The concept of intentional time was demonstrated through formal mentor relationships. Through formal mentorship relationships, participants and their mentors were required to meet a certain number of times. During those set meetings, mentors spent time addressing topics that had to do with the participant's academic journey. The way time was spent in those meetings determined the quality of that mentor relationship. While informal mentor relationships did not require a certain number of meetings, those relationships were developed and sustained through making time to talk about academic endeavors and personal life. Time and building a friendship were key in developing impactful mentorship relationships.

Experiences that Fostered Mentoring Relationships

Different experiences, resources, and programs fostered the mentoring relationships that high-achieving first-generation college students had with faculty, staff, and their peers. Experiences such as going to the professor's office hours, having conversations with faculty about things outside of academics, working with faculty on research projects, being a part of student organizations, and being in student support programs fostered the mentor relationships that participants had with faculty, staff, and peers. By attending office hours and making time to meet with their professors, participants got an opportunity to get to know their professors and build a relationship with them. Working with a professor on research also allowed participants to spend time with a professor and foster a relationship. Being engaged with different student organizations, student oriented opportunities, and student support programs allowed participants to build relationships with their peers. When participants met other students who could help them with something important for their college careers, this allowed them build a mentor relationship. Formal peer mentor relationships through student programs also gave participants the opportunity to build mentor relationships with their peers. Participants were also able to build relationships with staff members who oversaw student support programs. Having these types of experiences allowed participants to foster the varying mentoring relationships.

Most Influential Mentors for High-Achieving First-Generation College Students

The most influential mentors were individuals that were genuinely invested in the mentor relationship. This investment meant providing a lot of guidance for the mentee. These mentors helped their mentees overcome their fears and built up their confidence. They recognized their mentee's potential and encouraged them to accomplish their goals. They were present as a mentor beyond the participant's academic career and put effort into helping their mentee with other areas of their lives. They held their mentees accountable in whatever they were working

on. They were very honest with their mentees about anything being discussed. Overall, the most influential mentors provided their mentees with academic, social, mental, and emotional support.

The Influence of Mentoring on Persistence

Mentorship influenced the persistence of high-achieving first-generation college students in terms of the connections and guidance that it provided to participants. Participants found a lot of value in the networking opportunities and friendships they were able to build through their mentors. Networking not only meant meeting new people, but also gaining access to an opportunity based on who they knew. Having connections also gave participants the opportunity to meet individuals they could build community and friendships with. Participants also benefitted from guidance from their mentors. Participants found that academic guidance, professional guidance, personal guidance, and having access to guidance when needed contributed to their persistence. All participants felt that mentorship influenced their persistence.

Discussion of the Findings

Many aspects of the findings for this study align with the previous literature. Participants did experience the challenges that came with being a high-achieving first-generation college student. But they also experienced the benefits that came with being a first-generation college student. All participants made references to the importance of mentorship and the impact it has had on them during their college careers. Overall, previous literature was relevant to this study.

The Challenges of Being a First-Generation College Student

According to the literature first-generation college students faced challenges with achieving academic success and college completion (Kamer & Ishitani, 2016), difficulty with transition, lower degree completion rates, higher student loan debt, and lack of support for first-generation students of color (Markle & Stelzriede, 2020). First-generation students also had

difficulty with finding social support, academic support, and academic resources (Schelbe et al., 2019). Most of the findings from this study aligned with the literature. Participants did struggle with the transition to college and relied on different forms of support and resources to get through different aspects of their college careers. Literature showed that first-generation students had lower completion rates (Markle & Stelzriede, 2020), but no participant in this study talked about dropping out of college. However, having a lack of support during this major transition could have led to this. The literature also showed that first-generation students had challenges with finding social support, academic support, and academic resources. All participants mentioned that mentorship played a role in providing the support that was needed. It created that sense of belonging that was needed until participants could form their other social and academic communities. While the literature also highlighted that first-generation students had difficulty with student loan debt, participants from this study did not mention having troubles with debt. Some did however discuss concerns with not having money to spend carelessly or not having the capacity to ask their families for money or fall back on their family's financial support. One final thing that literature mentioned first-generation college students have challenges with is a lack of confidence (Pratt et al., 2019). The lack of confidence stemmed from not feeling confident in their academic ability (Pratt et al., 2019). While participants did not mention feeling a lack of confidence within their academic abilities, they did talk about seeking out guidance from others when they did not understand something for a class or an assignment.

High-Achieving Student Characteristics

While literature did not highlight any negative aspects of high-achieving student characteristics, some participants in my study revealed some frustrations with being associated with being a high-achieving student. Being high-achieving meant that a student did not need help

with anything. There was an assumption that high-achieving students were able to figure things out on their own. The literature supports this through highlighting that high ability students tend to be independent (Rinn & Plucker, 2019). According to Rinn and Plucker (2019), high ability students tend to be perfectionists and have intrinsic motivation and independence. Some participants felt like assumptions about high-achieving characteristics caused more harm than good. In their experience, those types of assumptions made it more difficult for them to ask for help. In this situation, it was important to note that although high-achieving students were independent, it did not mean that they did not need mentorship.

High-Achieving First-Generation College Student Experiences with Support

High-achieving first-generation college students also had positive experiences within their college careers. They received mentorship and support in multiple ways. The literature showed that high-achieving students had several means of support. Some of that support stemmed from an honors program or college in general (Dulce et al., 2019). Some participants did have faculty mentors or support from different individuals from an honors college or program. Participants in this study also received support from other interventions and programs. According to Pratt et al. (2019), programs and interventions are designed to improve retention rates for students who are at risk. High-achieving first-generation students were engaged with intervention programs, mentorship programs, and scholarship programs that provided them with additional support. This support was crucial for their persistence as high-achieving first-generation college students. Mentorship was seen as a major resource among all participants overall.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory

In Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory (1979), human development was shaped by an individual's interactions with multilevel socioecological systems. Findings showed that high-achieving first-generation students were heavily impacted by the support they received or the lack thereof. Mentorship affected not only their college trajectory but also their entire life. Since participants were first-generation, they heavily relied on mentorship from varying constituents since they could not get all the answers to their questions at home. Overall, participants received assistance from different individuals in different environments.

Rendon's Validation Theory

Rendon's Validation Theory showed the effects of proactive affirmation received by in-and-out-of-class agents (Linares & Munoz, 2011). Students received this affirmation by faculty, students, academic affairs staff, family members, and peers. All participants had a mixture of in-and-out-of-class agents that helped them to be successful with different aspects of their lives. Some participants also had mentors who did not provide any encouragement or affirmations. Proactive affirmations had a positive effect on participants who received them overall.

Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model

Yosso's (2005) framework showcases the different types of capital that historically underrepresented minority students bring to a mentor relationship. Minority students use the different capitals to survive and resist varying forms of oppression. Four out of the six capitals were exemplified in the findings. Those four capitals are aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, and navigational capital. Aspirational capital refers to the student's dedication to pursue their dreams and persist (Yosso, 2005). Through aspirational capital, participants were able to persist through their college careers with the help of their mentors despite the challenges they faced. Familial capital puts an emphasis on kinship outside of blood relation which reflects

the support students provide to one another outside of the classroom (Yosso, 2005). This is also seen as lateral mentorship (Yosso, 2005). By using familial capital, participants were able to build a community with their peers and provide each other with lateral support. Social capital highlights engagement through social networks where students connect with scholars, researchers, and community activists on their own (Yosso, 2005). Some participants used their social capital to connect with faculty and eventually collaborate with them on a research project. Participants also received mentorship from their faculty mentors. Lastly, navigational capital focuses on historically underrepresented minority students navigating spaces that were not designed for their presence. Participants demonstrated using their navigational capital by having multiple mentors to help them navigate the college arena as a first-generation college student. While coming to college has presented each participant with some obstacles, participants were able to successfully get through different aspects of their college careers because they had the proper support (Yosso, 2005).

Tinto's Theory of College Student Retention and the Alternative Perspective

Through Tinto's Theory of College Student Retention, predictors of student persistence would include students having frequent and quality contact with staff, faculty, and other students on campus (Tinto, 1990). Participants explained that varying positive mentorship experiences with students, staff, faculty, and other constituents contributed to their persistence in their college journeys. However, not all mentorship experiences were helpful enough to truly make an impact on students. While this information generally applies to all participants who took part in the study, research showed that there were some additional things that were needed for the retention of students of color outside of a positive mentorship experience.. According to Maldonado et al. (2005), retention for students of color focuses on student empowerment and institutional

transformation. Through mentorship, participants who were also students of color experienced some of the crucial components needed for persistence. With the support of their mentors, students of color were able to build social networks, community, and challenge the social norms that they were expected to fill.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. For the recruitment of the participants in this study, I reached out to 16 potential participants and was able to get 14 participants to sign up. While I anticipated having 14 students take part in the study, I was only able to get 13 of them to complete the study from start to finish. One participant who signed up for the study later dropped out due to time constraints in their schedule. Another limitation of the study was in the interview aspect of the study. While I felt like I asked adequate and relevant questions to each participant, I later realized that it might have been a good idea to have a few questions about negative mentorship experiences. While a few participants still brought this topic up on their own, I got the feeling that they wanted to be asked about these types of experiences at a more in depth level. I also feel like I should have had more follow-up and probing questions about the area of the interview where participants were asked to tell the interviewer about their lives growing up. Participants seemed to want to know what all information they could talk about in this area which seemed to lead to some differences in what participants chose to share about themselves. Some participants also wanted to be asked more interview questions about who they were as a person rather than just talking about their lives growing up. I think I should have added the “tell me about yourself and who you are” question before asking about the student's life growing up. This also might have made it easier for participants to then talk about their life growing up.

The final limitation of the study was the data collection for the pre-interview activity. While I thought it would initially be best to broaden the participants options in terms of the artifact they could bring in for the pre-interview activity, I later realized that I should have had each participant write a short reflection on their artifact based on a few pre-written questions that I would have wanted them to answer. Some participants did not talk as much about how their artifact represented mentorship as they did the memory that came with the artifact. I believe that the essence of mentorship got lost in that conversation for some participants. I think if participants had an opportunity to intentionally reflect on this ahead of time, this area of the study might have had a better outcome.

Recommendations for Future Research

A few recommendations for future research emerged from the data after conducting this study and reflecting on the results. The first recommendation is to study the evolution of mentorship in more depth. After learning that mentorship can occur at any stage in one's educational career, I think it would be beneficial for educators across all levels to understand how to potentially best serve their students in terms of mentorship. That means that research would need to be conducted on the perceptions of mentorship at all levels of education. Since the type of mentorship needed over time changed for the participants in my study, I think there needs to be more research done on this to further explain this possible phenomenon. One thing to think about is whether this phenomenon is the same across all school systems. Or, do students in public schools seek out different types of mentorship than students in private schools, and if so, what types of mentorship are those students looking for? Do students from better resourced schools seek out a different type of mentorship in comparison to students from less resourced schools? Does the need for certain types of mentorship during different stages of one's

educational career evolve over time when looking at other schools at the national level, or is this phenomenon only present for this study? These are questions that could be explored when looking into this topic. In gaining more insight on this, I believe that this could help administrators at all educational levels understand what tools they will need to provide their employees with in order to prepare them for mentoring students.

Another recommendation for research would be to explore the impact that the perceptions of mentoring have on personal mentor experiences. The future study could examine the type of mentor experiences a student has had and explore if there is any relation to the way they perceived the concept of mentorship and how they allowed mentorship to show up in their lives. I think this would help anyone in a mentorship role better understand why it is important to make sure that a student has a positive experience with mentorship. In addition to looking at the general perceptions of mentoring, I think it would also be beneficial to examine first mentor relationships. This could create better insight on why someone's perception of mentoring would be the way it is. It would also potentially provide insight on the significance of a first mentor and the impact that first mentor relationships have on an individual. The final recommendation would be to research negative mentor relationships and how they might affect persistence. This was something that a participant wanted to talk more about from this study. However, they did not feel as though there were enough interview questions to expand on these experiences.

Recommendations for Future Practice and Policy

First Mentor Relationships

While participants could receive any type of mentorship during any timeframe in their lives, I do think it is important to acknowledge why focusing on their first mentor relationship is valuable. All participants had to think back to a time in their life where they were in a vulnerable

enough space to need help with something. The interactions that they had with their first mentor set the tone for how they would receive help and ask for help from their future mentors. Having a specific interaction with their first mentor really showed each participant what it meant for someone to care about them, invest in them, teach them, advocate for them, and show up for them. Participants became aware of the value of mentorship because of what they initially experienced. This was also the catalyst for them to become open to receiving more mentorship from others in the future. Emma shared having a poor mentorship experience with several mentors before college and during college. Due to several negative mentor experiences, Emma mentioned relying on her older sister who is also a college student for constant mentorship. She has only opened herself to more mentorship experiences (mostly informal) because her sister was not able to provide guidance for everything that she had questions about. If a student were to experience a poor mentorship experience as their first mentorship experience like Emma did, this could potentially lead to the hesitation to seek mentorship. A student could neglect help from others that could be a resource to them, make wrong decisions, or be more stressed because of strictly only relying on their own instincts and knowledge to get them through that particular stage in their life. For anyone who serves in a role that allows them to mentor or give advice to others, I challenge them to be more mindful about the first interactions they have with a possible mentee and the quality of mentorship they provide. On a larger scale, this would require the support of the institution. I think institutions should offer an opportunity to all employees to take a basic mentor training that will allow them to be prepared to serve in a role where they are helping someone. In case they do become a mentor, they will have a basic understanding of what good mentorship looks like. Seeing as though mentorship can happen both formally and informally, it would be better if everyone was prepared for this task sooner than later. If any

employee decides that they want further preparation on mentoring, I think that they should be able to have access to a more extensive training on mentorship through their institutions as well. Having these resources might better equip staff, faculty, and administrators with creating intentional and positive mentorship experiences. While participants from this study did not say that their first mentor relationship made them more open to mentorship in general, one could wonder how different these participants' lives could have been if they had a negative first experience. This could be the determining factor in a student choosing to be open to mentorship throughout their life.

Discussion on the Impact of First Mentors on the Perception of Mentoring

For some participants, the way they defined mentorship was related to their first mentor relationship. While this was not the case for everyone, this does bring about an important discussion. Anyone who works in an environment where there is the potential to be a mentor should be mindful of this. If someone's first mentor relationship is a poor one, then this could affect their perception of what mentoring is. If they have a poor perception of mentorship, this could lead to an individual's desire to not want to be mentored at all. It is important to ensure that every mentor relationship provided is a positive experience. For high-achieving first-generation college students who could benefit from mentorship, not being careful about this could alter their entire college experience. It is very important to treat all mentorship relationships with care.

The Importance of Broadening Mentorship Representation

A concept that came up throughout the data collection of this study was the importance of representation of mentors for mentorship programs. Two participants in the study had varying experiences in mentorship programs they were a part of because of the representation of the

mentors for that program. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rebecca is currently a part of an honors student support program that has a staff mentor who has the same ethnic background as her. Having those similarities with her mentor helped her become more comfortable with her. She mentioned that this mentor was basically a mother-figure to her. She was also very inspired by this mentor of hers. Rebecca mentioned that this mentor had a big impact on her. While she explains the many reasons that this mentor had an influence on her, the first thing that she talked about when referring to this mentor was the idea that they had similar backgrounds. Due to many of their commonalities, they were able to build a mentee-mentor relationship more comfortably. As institutions continue to create different types of mentorship programs, they will need to ensure that representation among staff is discussed. Since the quality of the mentor relationship was strengthened because of representation, it will be important for institutions to see if they are putting the right measures into place to ensure that they can provide this type of mentoring environment. Having representation could be the difference between a good or great mentorship experience or the difference between a positive and negative mentorship experience.

Recognizing Differences

Another recommendation for practice is for a mentor to acknowledge the differences in background between them and their mentees in the earlier stages of the mentor relationship. Marin explained that one of the things he appreciated most about his peer mentor was that he pointed their differences out in terms of race, degree plans, and lived experiences. This can allow a mentee to see that their mentor recognizes their differences and will respect their lived experiences. This can also help the mentee to build comfort and trust among their mentors. Ultimately, this could strengthen and deepen the mentor relationship with a high-achieving first-generation college student.

Recommendations for Practice and Policy from Participants

Participants had recommendations for anyone that would be mentoring a high-achieving first-generation college student. These recommendations were based on what they felt they needed in their mentor experiences. The recommendations were categorized into three categories: conversation pointers, ways to support a mentee, and ways to build a genuine mentorship relationship. Participants had suggestions for meaningful conversation pointers among the mentor and the mentee. These pointers would help the mentor check in with their mentee about things that were important to them. In addition to conversation pointers, participants also had recommendations for ways that mentors could support their mentees. Participants also provided tips on ways to build a genuine mentorship relationship. All recommendations were mentioned with the hopes of creating positive mentor experiences for high-achieving first-generation college students.

Conversation Pointers

Participants felt that it would be beneficial to the mentor relationship if mentors made efforts to discuss certain things that would be meaningful to their mentee. One recommendation included checking in with a student about their happiness in terms of the major they are pursuing and their college experience overall. This would go hand-in-hand with the topic of uncertainty. Along with asking the student about their happiness, it was suggested that the mentor also have a conversation with their mentee about uncertainty at the same time. This would allow the mentee to reflect on the things they were uncertain about and assess how much of that is contributing or not contributing to their happiness. A second recommendation would be for the mentor to check in with their mentee about things that their parents do not ask them about. This recommendation stemmed from the idea that first-generation college student's parents do not know how to have a

meaningful conversation with their student about their college experience. Since first-generation students' parents did not graduate from a four-year institution for the participants in this study, it is important to recognize that parents may not know what to ask or how to check-in with their student. Participants felt that it would be valuable for the mentee to have someone to discuss these things with. They also thought it would be helpful for the mentor to take on this role in the mentoring relationship. This effort shows that the mentor cares and also gives the mentee a chance to talk with someone about their college experience.

Ways to Support Mentees

In addition to meaningful conversation pointers, participants felt that there were other ways for mentors to support their mentee during their college experience as a high-achieving first-generation college student. Some recommendations focused on the mentees overall wellness. Participants felt that it was important for the mentor to be there when their mentee fails or does not do their best. They also felt like it was important for the mentor to help their mentee create good times. This meant advising the mentee or having fun and exploring their passions. Putting that emphasis on wellness also meant having conversations about wellness. One participant thought that it would be helpful for the mentor to be willing to have discussions about mental health issues with their mentee. Outside of the wellness component, participants also felt that it was important for mentors to practice empathy among their mentees. This would include being mindful of each of their mentee's lived experiences and overall realities and being sensitive to each mentee. This would also require the mentor to get to know each of their mentees and provide guidance based on their individual needs rather than generic guidance.

Ways to Build a Genuine Mentor Relationship

On top of providing insight on helpful conversation pointers and ways to support mentees, participants also thought it was important to give advice on ways to build an authentic mentor relationship with high-achieving first-generation college students. The first tip included viewing the mentor relationship as a friendship. Participants felt that it was important for the mentor to treat their mentee like a friend. The second tip emphasized not making assumptions about the mentee and getting to know them well enough to understand their individual needs as opposed to mentoring them through a very generic lens. In addition to building a true relationship with the mentee, participants thought it would be good for the mentors to have less structured conversations. This meant making room for the conversation to drift to other areas of discussion outside of what a mentor would typically talk about with a mentee. Being open to having conversations around varying topics creates the opportunity for the mentor to deepen the mentor/mentee relationship beyond conversations at the surface level. The final tip was to be genuine about the mentor relationship overall. Being genuine with a mentee looked like communicating often and showing interest in the mentee's overall well-being.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I examined the findings for connections to previous literature and recommendations for future research and practices in the field. Findings were aligned with previous research and theoretical frameworks, and new findings were added as a new perspective. A few recommendations for future research highlighted doing more in-depth research on the perception of mentorship at all levels of education, exploring the impact that the perceptions of mentoring had on personal mentor experiences, and examining negative mentor experiences. Recommendations for practice and policy were all based on creating better and more informed practices for mentors who would be mentoring high-achieving first-generation

college students. While the practice of mentorship has shown itself to be influential in the persistence of high-achieving first-generation college students, the perception of mentorship is the core foundation of this phenomenon. Understanding the experiences of the recipient of mentorship and making better practices based off their experience is the true catalyst to making a meaningful and powerful change.

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Appendices

Appendix A – IRB Protocol Approval



To: Michelle J King
L00013291null

From: Douglas J Adams, Chair
IRB Expedited Review

Date: 11/07/2022

Action: **Expedited Approval**

Action Date: 11/04/2022

Protocol #: 2208413387A001

Study Title: Perceptions of Mentoring among High-Achieving, First-Generation College Students

Expiration Date: 08/04/2023

Last Approval Date: 11/04/2022

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Kate Mamiseishvili, Investigator

Appendix B – Participant Consent Form

Perceptions of Mentoring among High-Achieving, First-Generation College Students

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Principal Researcher: Michelle King

Faculty Advisor: Ketevan Mamiseishvili

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

You are invited to participate in a research study about the perceptions of mentoring and the impact mentoring has on high-achieving first-generation college student persistence. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a full-time undergraduate high-achieving first-generation college student.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Who is the Principal Researcher?

Michelle King, M.Ed.
College of Education & Health Professions
University of Arkansas
1 University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-5694
mjking@uark.edu

Who is the Faculty Advisor?

Ketevan Mamiseishvili, PhD
College of Education & Health Professions
University of Arkansas
1 University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-3781
kmamisei@uark.edu

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how high-achieving first-generation college students perceive their mentoring experiences at a public research university in the midsouth, and examine what role mentoring has played in their persistence.

Who will participate in this study?

Undergraduate college students from the High Achieving Student Support Program who meet the criteria for the study and fill out the demographic survey will be asked to participate in the study. Participants will need to be full-time undergraduate college students that are high-achieving,

first-generation, have a 3.5 GPA or higher, and have completed their first year of college. Between 10 – 12 students will be asked to participate in the study.

What am I being asked to do?

Your participation will require the following: Answering an initial demographic survey, completing a pre-interview activity, participating in a 75-minute one-on-one semi-structured interview, and the option to do a follow-up meeting to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

Reflecting on past mentor experiences may solicit emotional responses. To further process such experiences, I will connect you with other support.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

Hopefully, sharing stories of high-achieving first-generation college students' mentoring experiences will help this institution and other institutions recognize the importance of mentoring and reevaluate how institutions demonstrate their support for general mentoring and mentoring initiatives.

Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?

Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon e-gift card as compensation for taking part in the study.

Will I have to pay for anything?

There will be no cost associated with your participation.

What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?

If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study. Your relationship with the High Achieving Student Support Program or your High Achieving Student Support Program scholarship will not be affected in any way if you refuse to participate.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym of their choosing to protect their confidentiality. All recordings of interviews will be destroyed upon the data being transcribed and verified by the participant. Data from this study will be stored on a protected computer with a password.

Will I know the results of the study?

At the conclusion of the study, you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You may contact the Principal Researcher, Michelle King. You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study?

You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Faculty Advisor as listed below for any concerns that you may have.

Michelle King
University of Arkansas
1 University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-5694
mjking@uark.edu

Ketevan Mamiseishvili, PhD
University of Arkansas
1 University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-3781
kmamisei@uark.edu

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Integrity and Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Research Integrity and Compliance
University of Arkansas
109 MLKG Building
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
479-575-2208
irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

Participant's Signature

Appendix C – Interview Protocol Form with Interview Questions

Interview Protocol Form (Creswell, 2012, p.194)

Study: Perceptions of Mentoring among High-Achieving, First-Generation College Students

Date:

Time of Interview:

Place:

Interviewer:

Participant:

Questions: Participants will be asked several questions and will have an opportunity to respond to each one.

1. Please tell me about your life growing up – where you are from and what your life was like growing up. (Who influenced you growing up?)
2. Tell me about the artifact that you brought that represents what mentoring looks like for you.
3. How would you define mentoring?
4. Describe the first mentor you remember having?
5. Describe any mentors you have had prior to your collegiate experience?
6. Describe any mentors you have had during your collegiate experience? (When in your collegiate experience did they serve as your mentors? Are they a student, staff, or faculty member? Are they on or off campus?)
7. Describe your most influential mentor during college? (How were they helpful?)

8. What mentor programs were you involved in before college or during college that provided you with mentors? (Which mentor relationships have formed outside of any mentor programs?)
9. How did you meet your mentor(s)? (Describe how your relationship with them formed and developed over time).
10. How often do you meet with your mentor(s)? (Who initiates these mentor/mentee meetings?)
11. Describe the types of things you and your mentor(s) discuss when meeting. (What types of things does your mentor assist you with and how do they assist you with those things? Who guides the discussion that occurs between you and your mentor(s)? Who initiates the conversations?)
12. Describe your experience being a first-generation high-achieving college student.
13. How has the mentorship you received influenced your academic and social success as you continue to persist in college? (How has mentorship been helpful when dealing with any goals you wanted to accomplish or any challenges you might have faced?)
14. What other things do you wish you had a mentor to help you with outside of all the things you have identified having assistance with so far?
15. What suggestions would you have for someone that is mentoring a high-achieving first-generation college student in college?
16. Is there anything else that you wished I would have asked you about during the interview?
17. Is there anything else you would like to share that is important considering everything that we have discussed?

Appendix D – Email Correspondence

First Email

Subject Line: Research Study on the Perceptions of Mentoring with Michelle King

Dear Student,

I hope that this email finds you well!

I am reaching out to invite you to participate in a study on the perception of mentoring and how it influences the persistence of high-achieving first-generation college students.

Participation will include one pre-interview activity, one interview, and one follow-up email exchange. For the pre-interview activity, each participant will be asked to bring in an artifact to the interview that represents what mentoring looks like for them. Artifacts can include items such as photographs, drawings, art, relational maps, writings, scrapbooks, etc. The interview will last about 75-minutes and will take place on campus at your preferred location. Following the interview, participants will be sent an email with the transcription from their interview and will be asked to review the document for accuracy. Participants will be given the option to do a follow-up meeting (via phone, Zoom, or in person) to discuss the accuracy of the transcripts. Participants will also be able to use the follow-up meeting to add additional thoughts they want to share about their experiences. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed and will not include any identifying information. Participants will choose a pseudonym that will be used for anything related to the study. Your participation in this study will help me to better understand the impacts of mentoring, share practices that could be implemented to improve mentoring, and share the value of mentoring with professional colleagues. You will receive a \$25 Amazon e-gift card as a thank you for your time and efforts. Eligible participants should meet the following criteria: identify as a first-generation college student (for this study, the term first-generation student will be defined as students who are the first in their immediate family to graduate from a four-year university or college), have at least a 3.5 cumulative weighted college GPA or higher, be a full-time student (enrolled in at least 12 credit hours or more a semester), and have at least completed their first year of college.

Please view the consent form attached to this email. If you are willing and eligible to participate in this study, please complete the demographic survey and indicate consent at this link by (said date): https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5dRXC4SSgtBkVdc

I will be in touch soon to schedule an interview with you. I appreciate your willingness and consideration for taking part in this study. If you have any questions or concerns about anything, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you!

Michelle King

Second Email

Subject Line: Research Study on the Perceptions of Mentoring with Michelle King - Interview Scheduling

Dear [Participant Name],

Thank you for filling out the demographic survey and for your willingness to take part in this study. The next phase of the study will be the interview. Please use the link to the Doodle Poll below to indicate an interview time that works best for your schedule.

From there, I will email you a confirmation email with the confirmed date and time that you have selected and the location. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Michelle King

Third Email

Subject Line: Research Study on the Perceptions of Mentoring with Michelle King - Interview Confirmation

Dear [Participant Name],

Thank you for selecting an interview time from the Doodle Poll. This is confirmation that I have you down for an interview at said date and time in said location.

In preparation for the interview, please bring in an artifact that shows what mentoring looks like for you. For this study, artifacts can include items such as photographs, drawings, art, relational maps, writings, scrapbooks, etc. In addition, attached are the interview questions if you would like to review them beforehand.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions before the interview. I look forward to meeting with you then!

Thank you,

Michelle King

Fourth Email

Subject Line: Research Study on the Perceptions of Mentoring with Michelle King - Interview Reminder

Dear [Participant Name],

I hope you're doing well! Just a reminder that your interview for the study on the impacts of mentoring on high-achieving first-generation college student persistence is scheduled for (said date, said time, location). I anticipate that the interview time will be about 75-minutes.

In preparation for the interview, please bring an artifact from the pre-interview activity that shows what mentoring looks like for you. Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to meeting with you!

Thank you!

Michelle King

Fifth Email

Subject Line: Research Study on the Perceptions of Mentoring with Michelle King –
Transcription Review

Dear [Participant Name],

Thanks so much for taking the time to participate in the interview for the study *Perceptions of Mentoring among High-Achieving, First-Generation College Students*. Attached you will find the transcription of our conversation. Please review the information and let me know if there is anything incorrect or if everything is accurate. If you wish to discuss the accuracy of the transcription, please let me know and we can arrange a meeting.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you!

Michelle King

Sixth Email

Subject Line: Research Study on the Perceptions of Mentoring with Michelle King: Amazon E-Gift Card and Thank You Note!

Dear [Participant Name],

Thank you again for participating in the study “Perceptions of Mentoring among High-Achieving, First-Generation College Students”. I enjoyed learning from your interview! As a token of appreciation for sharing your time and energy, please find your attached \$25 Amazon e-gift card.

Thank you again, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Michelle King

Appendix E – Demographic Survey

Please share your first and last name.

Please choose a pseudonym that the researcher will use in the study. This alternate name will be used when documenting anything related to the study and will be used to maintain your anonymity:

Email address:

Hometown:

Major(s):

Gender pronouns (For example, he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/their etc.):

Current Year in College:

- Second Year
- Third Year
- Fourth Year
- Fifth Year

Are you a first-generation college student based on the definition? (For this study, the term first-generation student is defined as students who are the first in their immediate family to graduate from a four-year university or college):

- Yes
- No

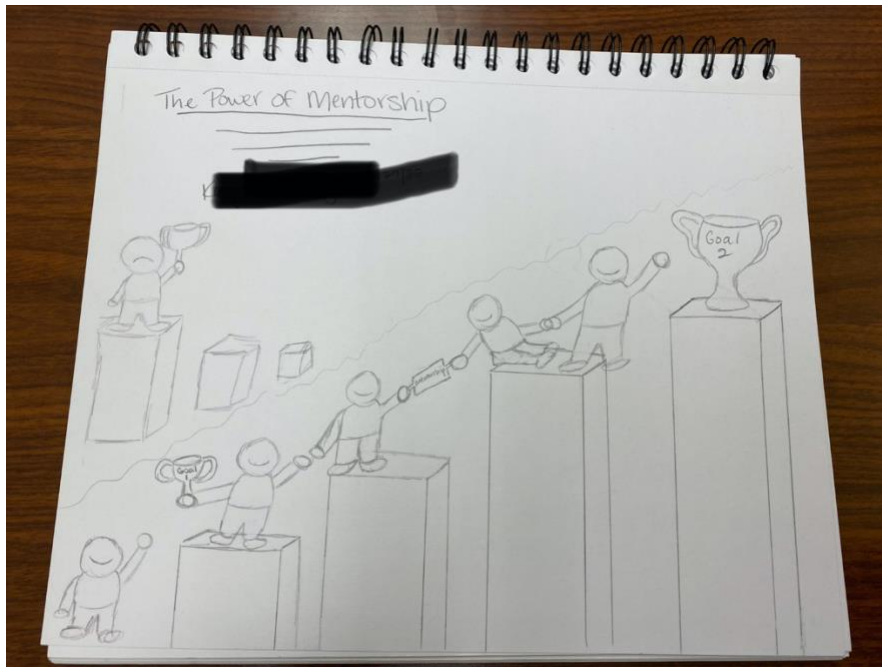
Do you have at least a 3.5 cumulative college GPA or higher?

- Yes
- No

Are you enrolled at the university full-time? (This study recognizes full-time status as carrying a minimum of 12 semester hours in a semester)

- Yes
- No

Appendix F – Artifacts



Artifact 1. Mya's picture of mentorship. Photo taken by Mya



Artifact 2. Reggie's picture of audio amplifiers. Photo taken by Reggie



Artifact 3. Rebecca's picture of her magenta color pencil



Artifact 4. Marin's picture of his high school diploma



Artifact 5. Tin's picture of his deck of cards