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EXAMINING THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES  
WITH SAME RACE MENTORS

by

CRYSTAL L. LOCKE

(Under the Direction of Daniel W. Calhoun)

ABSTRACT

Beginning with civil rights reforms in the mid-1960s, African Americans have made great strides toward the pursuit of degrees in higher education. While African American females tend to matriculate and graduate at higher rates, their male counterparts do not fare as well in the higher education arena. Retention of African American males in college is an ongoing challenge for higher education leaders, as this population continues to have difficulty matriculating and persisting through to graduation (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2012). One area that has shown promise in increasing retention of African American males is interaction with same race mentors. Research suggests that African American males have a more meaningful college experience when they are mentored with people with whom they can culturally relate (Brown, 2013; Moore & Tolliver, 2010). Although studies indicate African American males who had same race mentors display higher self-efficacy (Stefon, 2011), improved graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), and a more positive college experience (Chen, Ingram & Davis, 2014), additional research in this area is needed.

Using a phenomenological approach, this qualitative study sought to determine the

impact having a same race mentor had on the collegiate experiences of five African American males who successfully graduated from colleges in Georgia. Data collected through semi-structured interviews addressed the overarching research question: What are the perceptions of African American male college students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college experience? and the two sub-questions related to this study: 1) To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' persistence in college?; 2) To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' self-efficacy regarding feeling as though they belong in the higher education environment? The participants shared that same race mentor relationships improved their college experience through providing intentional guidance and support. Additionally, they believed the presence of more African Americans serving in faculty and staff roles could help provide additional aid and mentorship to males within higher education, leading to an increase in retention and graduation rates for this population. Finally, a discussion of implication of these findings is provided, along with recommendations for future research.

**INDEX WORDS:** African American students, African American males, Retention, College experience, African American mentors, phenomenological qualitative study

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

To my father, Charles Daniel Baker. Dad, you affirmed that if you had breath in your body you would not miss this graduation. Well, the Most High had different plans, and you left this earthly realm in January. Thank you for your eternal love and belief in my ability to persist and achieve. I wish I could turn the clock back and spend more time with you, but I am eternally grateful for the conversations we had and the time we did spend. Rest on my friend and know that I will continue to make you proud and share the love with others that you have embedded in me.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The number of African American students pursuing and completing higher education degrees has steadily increased over the past 40 years (Brock, 2010). Despite this positive trend, many African American undergraduate students struggle in college, and retention and graduation remain significant issues for this population (Ingeno, 2013). Factors associated with African American undergraduate students' failure to persist and graduate include the following: a lack of a sense of belonging (Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008; Williamson, 1999); the underlying need to promote self-awareness (Robertson & Mason, 2008; Watt, 2006); the issue of retainability (Rodgers & Summers, 2008); and a lack of African American mentors at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Kelsey-Brown, 2001).

The factors above are even more prominent when the gender of the student is considered (Ingeno, 2013). Although African American males have high aspirations of attending institutions of higher education, they comprise less than 6% of the United States (US) undergraduate population (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Research further shows that 70% of African American males do not complete their undergraduate degrees within a six-year time span (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Watson (2006) found that African American male undergraduate students experience more difficulties than most other subgroups of students attending institutions of higher education.

The reasons for these struggles include academic integration, social support, finances, and family background (Dixon, 1999). Parker, Puig, Johnson, and Anthony (2016) determined that African American males in the higher education arena reported feelings of displacement, disrespect, isolation, and stress imposed by racial issues. Additionally, African American males' educational underachievement contributes to their negative portrayal as unintelligent, incapable,

disadvantaged, and students who are at risk to fail (Kim & Hargrove, 2014). The issues with African American males' college retention do not originate once they matriculate, but begin in their formative years (Howard, 2008). They can experience difficulty navigating the academic arena beginning in primary school and continuing throughout their educational careers because of societal stereotypes and expectations that are placed upon them early in life (Howard, 2008). Negative stereotypes can lead to a stigmatization that impacts both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of African American males in higher education. In addition, they often understand the necessity of maintaining their own group's sense of identity, integrity, and social cohesion (DeFrietas, 2012).

Dating back to the 1970s, there has been research on the disproportionate numbers of African Americans who attended universities versus the number who graduate, and the elements higher education leaders believe play a role in their retention (Black Student, 2005). Robertson and Mason (2008) noted that faculty involvement and classroom environment were contributing factors that affected the African American male college experience. Grier-Reed et al. (2008) argued that academic and personal support, extracurricular activities, and racism were other factors that affected the African American males' college experience. However, African Americans' self-efficacy, the sense of belonging and believing in one's own ability to succeed, was seldom addressed in the research. Moschella (2013) found that self-efficacy for African Americans is determined when they feel as though they are relevant in the educational community. Mentorship plays an integral role in the African American community, which is also applicable to higher education (Sinanan, 2016). An empirical study by Payne and Suddler (2014) noted this differed based upon institution type and community affiliation while concluding that an issue for African American students at PWIs was the scarcity of African

American mentors presence on campus. Payne and Suddler (2014) suggested the need for a shift in the educational climate on PWIs through developing and promoting inclusiveness in institutional academic and social environments. This inclusiveness may be addressed by embracing diversity and cultural differences so that the African American students' presence will continue to be valued and prevalent at PWIs. In contrast, the academic and social environments at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been found to create a comfortable learning environment while promoting positive self-efficacy of their student population (Palmer, Davis & Maramba, 2010). In an effort to counteract the negative stigma that has been placed upon African American males, universities may further investigate the issues this demographic has endured.

### **Background of the Study**

Purnell (2012) noted that historically the road to educational equity for African Americans has been difficult. Prior to the Civil War, formal education for African Americans throughout the United States of America was minimal (Esters & Strayhorn, 2013). In 1862, the Morrill Land-Grant Act was enacted, which gave federal lands to the states for the sole purpose of opening colleges and universities. Unfortunately, few of these newly opened colleges allowed African Americans to be admitted and receive formal higher education. Twenty-eight years later, this act was revised and specified that states using federal land-grant funds must either make their schools open to both African Americans and Whites, or open segregated Black colleges (Esters & Strayhorn, 2013). As a result of this legislation, 17 institutions (later dubbed HBCUs) were specifically created to offer educational opportunities to African American students who would not typically be accepted to college (Esters & Strayhorn, 2013).

Today, the problems are no longer issues of access, as African Americans have a plethora

of college choices; instead they are more about retention (Rodgers & Summer, 2008), graduation (Strayhorn, 2013), and the improvement of the college experience for African American students, particularly African American males (Parker et al., 2016). Often, African American males experience difficulties navigating the higher education arena and the barriers that often accompany their societal demands (Reeder & Schmidt, 2013).

Einarson and Clarksberg (2010) emphasized that an integral component of student success in the college atmosphere is to have contact with same race faculty. Broome and Davis (2017) cited that the retention of African American males in college is directly related to interactions with African American faculty and mentors. Similarly, Strayhorn and Saddler (2009) mentioned that same race mentoring relationships had shaped the students' career selections, socialization, grades, and retention. These interactions can be invaluable to the males' academic and social development both inside and outside the classroom and can lead to increases in retention rates, provide students with more memorable college experiences, and enhance students' self-efficacy (DeFrias, 2012). Hence, providing emotional support and psychological well-being through same race mentorship relationships can help African American male students conquer barriers they face in the higher education arena (Grier-Reed et al. (2008). Grier-Reed et al. (2008) noted the importance of having same race mentors and the impact they have on the African American males' college experience, but this is still a relatively unexplored area of study.

Implementing same race mentorship programs on college campuses may impact retention of African American students attending institutions of higher education, however the limited number of African American mentors and role models available on college campuses makes this proposition difficult. Watkins (2011) noted that nearly half of all African Americans who attended PWIs (42%) never had an African American professor during their tenure. Ross (2007)



concluded that insufficient hiring practices or a general inability of institutions of higher education, particularly PWIs, to attract and retain African American faculty and staff are contributing factors to the retention of African American males. Additionally, there are several studies comparing the experiences of African American undergraduate students at HBCUs versus PWIs; these studies address the scarcity of African American mentors, as well as issues in the retention of African American faculty and students at college campuses (Chen et al., 2014; Reeder & Schmitt, 2013; Yarbrough & Brown, 2012). While there are many studies on the retention of African American males, there is limited research on the impact of same race mentor relationships on African American undergraduate males' experiences (Griffin, 2012).

### **Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study**

Research has been conducted on the importance of recruiting African Americans to attend institutions of higher education (Grier-Reed et al., 2008), but little research is available on how the college experience impacts retention and completion from the perception of the student. Research shows the paradoxical relationship of degree attainment aspirations with persistence rates for African American males but is limited from the perspective of students' perceptions of their experiences (Brown, 2013; Ingeno, 2013). Additionally, analyzing the college experience of African American males while focusing on improving their self-efficacy is seldom addressed.

Limited research (Brown, 2013; Carey, 2012; Hylton, 2013) indicates that same race mentorship does positively impact African American male collegiate experiences. Similarly, little research exists that provides a voice for the African American males' successful progression through the higher education system. Attention to an inclusively diverse learning environment continues to be necessary, as there are increased numbers of African American students matriculating into arenas of higher education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was

to explore and analyze same race mentorship experiences of African American males who successfully graduated college, and to determine how these experiences may have shaped the students' persistence and transition through to graduation.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching question in this study was: What are the perceptions of African American male college students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college experience?

In addition, the following sub-questions helped further explore this topic:

1. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' persistence in college?
2. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' self-efficacy regarding feeling as though they belong in the higher education environment?

### **Procedures**

The intent of this study was to gain insight into the perceptions of African American male graduates from HBCUs and PWIs in Georgia, in an effort to uncover how having a same race mentor shaped their college experience and self-efficacy. The researcher's intent was to ascertain same race mentor experiences without regard to gender between the student and the mentor. Since this research intended to provide an in-depth evaluation of the lived experiences of African American males, a qualitative approach was warranted. To further examine the impact same race mentors had on the college experience of African American males, the researcher conducted a qualitative study using the phenomenological approach. Husserl (1970) determined that phenomenology is the study of how people describe situations and experience them through

their senses. Husserl (1970) further derives he or she can only know what they experience through what causes them a meaningful awakening because of a new-found awareness.

Further, one's involvement determined the way in which his or her experience was interpreted. Roberts (2010) stated that when research was conducted in real-world settings and when the information will not be manipulated, then it may be considered naturalistic inquiry. Since the researcher sought to discover the experiences and perceptions of participants involved in same-race mentorship, a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews was appropriate for this study. Joyner, Rouse, and Glatthorn (2013) noted “a qualitative perspective emphasizes a phenomenological view in which reality inheres in the perceptions of the individuals” (p. 73).

To thoroughly examine the lived experiences of African American males who had same race mentors while attending an institution of higher education, the researcher identified alumni of four-year state institutions in southeastern Georgia. These alumni graduated within five years of the study, and all had a same race mentor while enrolled in college. A purposeful sample was initially used, followed by a snowball sampling technique to identify additional participants for the study. This technique was effective in allowing the researcher to access additional African American males who may have met the research criteria for eligibility. Once participants were selected, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and data were collected and analyzed. Data were analyzed using deductive analysis, allowing the researcher to take the data from individual ideas to develop succinct themes, which then allowed for the evolving of categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interpretive validity was utilized, and member checking occurred, which allowed the participants to verify that the information reported accurately detailed their experience.

### **Significance of the Study**

As research indicates, African American undergraduate males have lower retention and graduation rates compared to other demographic populations. While there is no one determining factor, there are many contributing issues related to lower retention and graduation rates. In reality, the problem of retention does not begin once African American males receive acceptance into college. The problem has been prevalent within the African American community for years and should first be addressed on formative education levels. As a result of unresolved formative issues faced by African American males, leaders of institutions of higher education must deal with retention and graduation problems within this population.

This study was significant because it gave a voice to African American male students and revealed their experiences with same race mentors in higher education. Educational leaders working at HBCUs may find value in the study's findings as they relate to their common purpose of educating African Americans in an ever-changing global society. Further, educational leaders may realize that the problem of retention of the African American male goes beyond focusing attention on diversity and should include uncovering the barriers that often prevent African American males from successful degree completion.

Higher education leaders, particularly those working at PWIs, may also find value in this study's findings. The study further aids in identifying the positive factors that impact the African American male college experience, while providing higher education leaders with additional information about the components of mentor relationships that may assist in the matriculation and graduation of African American males.

Hiring officials and college administrators may find the results of this study beneficial as they determine effective ways to recruit and retain African American faculty or staff. Most

importantly, the people who will most likely benefit from the results of the study are the African American male students serviced by the higher education community, as they will have the opportunity to see how having a same race mentor can shape their college experience and play a role in their progression to graduation.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Several terms used in this project may need further clarification, especially for readers unfamiliar with the topic. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, a number of key terms and acronyms are described below.

**Historically Black College or University (HBCU).** The term Historically Black College or University is a term created by the Higher Education Act of 1965, where federal funding was used to open institutions of higher education in which former slaves could attend while adjusting to freedom (Stefon, 2011).

**Institutional Racism.** The term institutional racism is defined as the campus racial climate, racial differences in access, outcomes, and attainment of persons of color in higher educational institutions (Harper, 2012).

**Mentor.** The term mentor is someone who provides emotional support and may have a shared career interest (Carey, 2012).

**Persistence.** The term persistence is continued college enrollment through to graduation regardless of difficulties or obstacles (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

**Predominantly White institution (PWI).** The term Predominantly White Institution is used to describe institutions of higher education in which Whites account for over half of the student population (Brown & Dancy, 2009).

**Self-efficacy.** The term self-efficacy is a people's belief about their abilities to produce

appropriate degrees of performance that exerted significance over events that affected their lives. He further notated that self-efficacy directly influenced how people feel, think, behave and motivated themselves (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, Strayhorn (2008) defined self-efficacy as the degree to which students feel attached, a part of, or joined to a campus.

**Systematic racism.** The term systematic racism is when institutional racism is embedded in public policies and negative stereotypes (Wiley, 2014).

### **Chapter Summary and Organization of Paper**

Research has been conducted on the importance of recruiting African Americans to attend institutions of higher education (Grier-Reed et al., 2008), but little research is available on how the college experience may impact the retention and completion for the African American student from the perception of the student. Further, there is limited research on how instituting same race mentor relationships may contribute to the retention and overall college experiences of African American students, particularly the African American male. To address the overarching research question and to better understand the extent to which African American alumni of PWIs and HBCUs identify a need for same race mentors to ensure persistence and transition through to graduation, a qualitative phenomenological study was conducted. The study aimed to provide rich data to describe African American males' perceptions of how having a same race mentor shaped their college experiences. The researcher hoped the findings of this study will help educational leaders identify solutions which may aid in the retention of the African American presence in institutions of higher education.

Chapter one introduced and established the significance of having same race mentors and, and its relationship to the success of the African American male attending institutions of higher education. In addition, chapter one provided a brief insight into the challenges institutions

have in retaining African American males and how this could be related to the lack of African American faculty and staff present on campuses available to serve as mentors. Further, the college experience of the African American male and whether same race mentors aid in their retention were discussed. Finally, this chapter included the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, a description of the procedures, an overview of the theoretical framework, and a description of key terms. Chapter two provides an in-depth review of the literature and previous research related to same race mentors and the college experience of African American males. The methodology and specific procedures used to gather data for the study is found in Chapter three. Chapter four reveals the findings of this qualitative study, and chapter five concludes with a thorough discussion of the research phenomenon and includes implications for educational leaders and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

This chapter is comprised of a review of literature relevant to this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the college experiences African American males who had same race mentor relationships while they were students. As such, this literature review includes the following topics: the plight of African American males in the United States, African American students in higher education; factors influencing retention and graduation for African American students (and more specifically, African American male students); and African American mentors and role models. Additionally, the objective of this review is to provide the reader with a better understanding of the self-efficacy of the African American student attending institutions of higher education.

#### **The Plight of African American Males in the United States**

Before discussing issues of African American males in higher education, it is important to explore formative experiences of African American males in American society. Understanding these issues sets the stage for factors involved in African American males' social and academic relationships. Dr. Umar Abdullah-Johnson, a certified school psychologist and world-renowned lecturer, has stated that in the United States today, there is a *War on Black Boys* (2014). In his documentary, Abdullah-Johnson (2014) revealed that one out of four African American boys will not graduate from high school and two out of four African American boys will spend some time in the criminal justice system. Abdullah-Johnson (2014) further noted that African American boys will be in the school-to-prison pipeline, which means that these boys will either graduate or drop out of high school and eventually end up incarcerated, and that African American males are often faced with obstacles that are designed to derail them.

Additional research corroborated Abdullah-Johnson's assessment that African American



males have a difficult path to success (Howard, 2008; Marklein, 2014; Swaine & McCarthy, 2017). The school-to-prison pipeline hurts African American males in society. As a result of being in the penal system, they experience greater difficulty attaining employment and the opportunity to be a productive citizen, while also experiencing feelings of isolation, rejection, inadequacy, and failure (Ford, 2013; Perry & Bright, 2012). Post-incarceration African American males have difficulty attaining employment and are often excluded voting and educational advancement, which limits their abilities to achieve equal opportunities and provide for their families both financially and emotionally (Perry & Bright, 2012).

Additionally, African American males are tasked with the daunting responsibility of overcoming bias. Racial bias is often caused by an inequality in police encounters, either via bias in police decisions on who to stop and interact with, or the detrimental and deep-rooted impacts of racial segregation and concentrated poverty (Kramer & Remster, 2016). Further, helping officers become aware of their own unconscious biases enables officers to see situations for what they are rather than through the lens of their stereotypical fears and misunderstandings. These stereotypical fears have led to the deaths of several African American males at the hands of police officers (Markman, 2015). These inequities in police treatment began being recorded in the 1990s with the high-profile case of Rodney King, who was videoed being brutally beaten by police in California (Scott, 2015). As technology has expanded, the reporting of the severity of these police interactions has only escalated. The "I can't breathe" slogan was plastered across the country when police were recorded killing Eric Garner, who was selling loose cigarettes, with an illegal chokehold (Scott, 2015). As police officers were pinning him to the ground, Garner relentlessly screamed: "I can't breathe" (Scott, 2015).

Two years prior, Trayvon Martin, an unarmed teenager, was killed by a community

watch organizer for looking “suspicious” while walking through his neighborhood wearing a hooded sweatshirt (Yartey, 2016). Further examples of unmitigated police killings continued in the high-profile cases of Philando Castile (Shapiro, Brown & Wan, 2016), Freddie Gray (Buoziis, 2018), and Tamir Rice (Kramer & Remster, 2016). The reality remains that African American males have to be trained on how to cooperate with police in street encounters and taught to become conscious of the biases that are often associated with African American males (Kramer & Remster, 2016). The plight of the African American male does not disappear once African American males matriculate into higher education; it transcends into the collegiate environment. To understand the issues faced by African American males in higher education, through the lens of their formative experiences, an overview of the history of higher education opportunities will be explored.

### **History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were designed with the premise of providing a quality education for those who were often not afforded the opportunity to advance their education and skills (Thornton, 2017). In 1920, the Morrill Land-Grant Act was revised and specified that states using federal land-grant funds must either make their schools open to both African Americans and Whites, or open segregated Black colleges (Esters & Strayhorn, 2013). As a result of this legislation, institutions were created to offer educational opportunities to African American students. (Esters & Strayhorn, 2013). In addition, the Higher Education Act of 1965 coined the term HBCU and determined that schools accredited before 1964 and that provided higher education learning opportunities for African Americans, should receive additional federal funding (Avery, 2009).

The necessity of HBCUs prevails today, as it did on its onset, due to the continuous

racial inequities of our era (Cantey, Bland, Mack & Joy-Davis, 2011). Since their inception, HBCUs have granted students the opportunity to pursue higher education while providing the cultural, intellectual and psychological experiences that are essential to shaping African American students' self-efficacy (Moschella, 2013). HBCUs successfully promoted a welcoming environment for African American students while providing avenues for students to establish meaningful personal identities, cultivate personal relationships, and gaining social acceptance (Bracey, 2017). Despite only representing four percent of the nation's colleges and universities, HBCUs awarded 22 percent of all bachelor's degrees earned by African Americans (Thornton, 2017).

Furthering the educational advantages of African Americans was essential for institutions of higher education. HBCUs have successfully recruited African Americans matriculating into the higher education arena, but like PWIs have experienced difficulty retaining African American male students (Richardson, 2012). Across the country, numerous programs have been instituted to promote retention of the African American male in higher education. Brooks et al. (2012) noted that although several programs are in place, few of the programs addressed the needs of the African American male student. Richardson (2012) determined that since HBCUs were created to offer educational opportunities to African Americans, that they understood the necessity of cultivating a racially sensitive environment and ensuring that the African American student is actively engaged on campus. Richardson (2012) further noted that HBCUs employed the following tactics: utilization of service learning, entertainment, cultural awareness, mentoring and creating an inviting atmosphere if they desire to increase the retention of the African American population.

HBCUs offered an avenue for African Americans to become educated, however the recruitment and retention of African American faculty remained problematic. Research shows that a vast majority of African American who hold terminal degrees work within the K-12 sector as opposed to higher education, or at Primarily White Institutions (PWIs) as HBCUs are unable to match salary compensation (Cantey et al., 2011). Nonetheless, extensive research is being done on how to retain the African American student, but the recruitment and retention of African American professional employees is seldom addressed.

Recruitment and retention of African Americans in higher education is not a passing issue, but a critical issue that exists with both African American students and African American employees. Because of the premise upon which HBCUs were founded, they are more successful in recruiting and retaining African American male students and employees. HBCUs focus on creating a learning environment where academic success is emphasized, self-efficacy is promoted, and empowering the entire being both academically and socially (Stefon, 2011).

### **The African American Student in Higher Education**

Strayhorn (2013) noted that college student enrollment has dramatically increased over the past 30 years. There are more than 19 million African American students who are enrolled in over 4,200 higher education institutions across the country, comprising 12% of total college enrollments nationally (Strayhorn 2013). In addition, African American women outnumbered African American males pursuing post-secondary education two to one (Strayhorn, 2013). Of all African American males seeking degrees in higher education, two-thirds of them leave before completing a program of study, which subsequently gives them the highest attrition rate among college attendees (Strayhorn, 2013). Although data show positive trends regarding African American students attending institutions of higher education, they continue to struggle with

persistence. Ingeno (2013) argued that the most prevalent reason for lower retention of African American students was the impact of the college experience, especially at PWIs.

Research showed that retention and degree completion were significant issues for African American college students. Factors associated with the failure to persist and complete college included the following: a lack of a sense of belonging (Carey, 2012); the underlying need of self-efficacy (Griffin, 2012); the issue of persistence (Marbley, Bonner, Williams, Morris, Ross, & Burley, 2013); and the lack of African American mentors at PWIs (Hylton, 2013). Research has also shown that African American students experienced an array of challenges when they transitioned from high school to higher education (Abdullah-Johnson, 2014; Howard, 2008; McCoy, 2014; Swaine & McCarthy, 2012). However, McCoy (2014) noted that students of color often experienced even greater difficulties and challenges. These challenges included but were not limited to, requisite mentors and role models, lack of familiarity with the higher education arena, and a disconnect between the culture of higher education and the culture of the student's community (McCoy, 2014). Further, it is often an unstated double standard that African Americans were expected to encompass the ideologies and beliefs of their white counterparts. W.E.B. DuBois (1903) captured this idea when he developed the concept of a "double consciousness," meaning that African Americans were often forced to have two identities and were expected to view themselves similar to the way they were viewed by their white counterparts (p. 3).

The dilemma of African Americans in higher education is not limited to enrollment and access (Thornton, 2017). According the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), the United States Department of Education noted that from 1996-2006 there was an increase of 1% in the graduation rate of African American students, while all other demographics had 5% gains

in graduation rates. While gains have been made regarding the number of African Americans enrolling and attending college, techniques to retain this population must continually be addressed to ensure that these students matriculate and graduate (Palmer et al., 2010).

### **Retention and Graduation of African American Students in Higher Education**

Student retention is a significant problem for the higher education community. Rucker and Davis-Showell (2011) found that to retain students from one year to the next, universities must value and respect students, as well as fulfill the anticipated needs of the student. The researchers further noted that retention was contributory to students' satisfaction with the school's treatment toward diversity, campus life, student support services, and campus climate. Ritchey (2015) revealed that African American students enter college with different levels of self-identity. Therefore, institutions of higher education need to be sensitive to the students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses when considering the issues associated with retention.

Chen et al. (2014) conducted a comparative study of student engagement and satisfaction at an HBCU versus a PWI. Students who attended the HBCU were more engaged in the college community and in turn, stated that they were satisfied with their college experience. The students who attended the PWI were not as involved in the campus community and consequently did not have as favorable of a college experience (Chen et al., 2014). Marbley et al. (2013) also concluded that HBCUs had a positive influence on African American students' cognitive, academic, and interpersonal development. Both Chen et al. (2014) and Carey (2012) argued that PWIs have not had the same success as HBCUs in retaining and graduating African American students. Carey (2012) determined that the problem seemed to lie with African American students' dissatisfaction toward the educational environment, as well as their self-efficacy and ethnic development.

Ritchey (2015) claimed that despite social and educational advances, mainstream America continued to operate under the premise that everyone should fit into the White middle-class value structure. As a result, African American college students faced a unique set of circumstances (Brown, 2013), such as feeling as though they were out of place and did not belong (Wiley, 2014). In addition, racial inequities, family and cultural differences, and difficulties adapting to the college experience remained an area of challenge for this population (Marbley et al., 2013).

There were several other factors that impacted the retention and graduation rates of African American students attending PWIs. McCoy (2014) revealed in his study on understanding how African American students transitioned to a PWI, that family expectations profoundly influenced the students. Students did not understand the college pedagogy, they experienced difficulties transitioning from their urban home environment to the campus environment, and the students were often underwent a cultural shock. McCoy (2014), who supported the research findings of Guffrida (2005), noted that the racial climate at the university was a strong predictor as to whether an African American student would graduate. McCoy (2014) also determined that there would be a higher likelihood of the student graduating if the college presented a nurturing environment. Baber (2012) further concluded that African American students' engagement on campus continued to pose great difficulty. Baber (2012) determined that unlike their White classmates, African American students often experienced a racially hostile climate at PWIs. These hostile feelings often led to a sense of alienation, inhibiting an establishment connection and commitment to the college environment. Baber (2012) referred to the study of Grier-Reed et al. (2008), who reported that the lack of knowledge about the college process, institutional racism, poor health, and social isolation were additional

factors that contributed to lower graduation and retention rates. According to Grier-Reed et al. (2008) the university's provision for emotional support, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being may help African American students conquer the challenges that impede them from navigating the higher education arena.

Ritchey (2015) further noted that when African Americans do not feel as though they are a part of the mainstream population on campus, they often band together and form their own alliance. This alliance is often referred to as 'sub-culture' and serves as a means to cope with the campus environment. These sub-cultural communities allowed African American students to keep their heritage separate from the rest of the campus, and also allowed them to develop their own race-specific community. African American students attending PWIs often placed themselves in subpopulations where they felt comfortable and where they felt their thoughts and values would be understood (Payne & Suddler, 2014).

Emphasis on diversity could make a difference in the students' progression and feeling of belonging because they would feel included in the educational environment (Ritchey, 2015). The acceptance into the campus community and acceptance of one's culture played a vital role in the success of the African American student on higher education campuses (Moschella, 2013). One factor preventing African American students from connecting with their PWI is their level of grit, explained as the determination to achieve set goals despite the obstacles and factors derived to derail or hinder (Strayhorn, 2013). The lower the grit, the harder it is for them to connect. Kim and Hargrove (2013) further noted that African American males' abilities to succeed were directly linked with resiliencies, which included the students' abilities to succeed academically regardless of the challenges, life circumstances, and risk factors that were designed to prevent African American males from succeeding. Chen et al. (2014) determined that when



schools developed curriculum and programs to include all populations, then students were more likely to be successful and thus, the school may have higher graduation rates than a school that ignored the underlying need to diversify the learning community.

**Retention and graduation of African American males.** Numerous programs and tactics have been implemented to promote retention and persistence of African American males in higher education. Brooks et al. (2012) noted that there were few programs that concentrated on the specific needs of the African American male to persist and graduate. Richardson (2012) argued that realistically, PWIs should employ some of the same tactics that HBCUs implemented to retain African American males. HBCUs were created for African Americans specifically and have had success in retaining and graduating this sector of the population (Richardson, 2012). HBCUs understood the importance of working on the total person by ensuring that racially sensitive environments were in place for all students, while also ensuring that students were actively engaged in campus activities (Reeder & Schmitt, 2013). Acknowledging the success HBCUs have had with retaining and graduating African American males, PWIs may consider employing some of the same tactics the HBCUs have rendered successful such as: incorporating the utilization of service learning, entertainment, developing cultural awareness, instituting race-specified mentoring programs, and creating an inviting atmosphere for all students (Richardson, 2012).

Several researchers have focused their studies on the African American male college student (Brooks et al., 2012; Coonrod, 2012; Wiley, 2014). Evidence of the study initiated by Wiley (2014) determined that institutional, or systemic racism, were embedded in many public policies, which negatively affected the student. Wiley (2014) further noted that African American males endured racist stereotypes and psychological stress while interacting on campus.

Furthermore, Harper (2008) realized that the absence of African American males' voices shaped their college experiences. The realization of the disparities of the African American male on college campuses has created a need for initiatives to recruit and retain this population.

Brooks et al. (2012) discussed a few examples of successful retention programs focused on African American male students, which included the Black Man's Think Tank (University of Cincinnati), the Student African-American Brotherhood (Georgia Southwestern University), the Black Male Initiative (Texas Southern University), and the Meyerhoff Program (University of Maryland Baltimore County). The previously mentioned programs presented African American males with the opportunities to openly discuss their issues, to participate in tutorial programs, and to be exposed to positive African American male role models. Essentially, the programs provided the academic, financial and social support necessary for the African American males to persist.

Harper, Davis, Jones, McGowan, and Ingram (2011) and Wiley (2014) found that there were other issues that impacted the retention of African American males including the involvement of faculty, institutional settings, stress management, classroom environment, academic and personnel support, extracurricular activities, and racial battleground fatigue; all of which collectively played an integral part in African-American males' retention rates. African American male students on college campuses have expressed concerns regarding the lack of African American role models, self-efficacy, and racial loyalty (Moschella, 2013).

Racial prejudice, social alienation, family support, finances, academic integration, and false stereotypes that mainstream America have about the African American male continued to pose a problem for African American males in general (Harper et al., 2011). Further, the issue of African American males needing race-specific mentors as an avenue to improve their college

experience was seldom addressed, and thus, a gap in the literature has been identified and further research is needed.

### **African American Male Self-Efficacy at Institutions of Higher Education**

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as peoples' beliefs about their abilities to produce appropriate degrees of performance that exerted significance over events that affected their lives, and that self-efficacy directly influenced how people felt, thought, behaved, and motivated themselves. Additionally, Strayhorn (2008) defined self-efficacy as the degree to which students felt attached, a part of, or joined to a campus.

Strayhorn (2008) further revealed that African American males who had positive interactions with people who differ from them culturally may impact their sense of belonging. He noted that there were several variables that affected African American males' sense of belonging such as social class and student achievement (Strayhorn, 2008). Addressing African American males' basic needs aided in their self-efficacy and college experience. Reid (2013) determined that self-efficacy directly shaped academic achievement, performance expectations, competence, and retaining positive attitudes towards academic abilities. Reid (2013) further noted that students who believed they belonged in their educational environment excelled in more challenging courses, were more accurate at solving complex problems, actively engaged in the learning process, were better managers of their time, and had a more satisfying college experience.

Rodgers and Summers (2008) discovered that in an academic self-concept study of African American males on their academic achievement and self-concept, that despite the fact that upon matriculating into the PWI, those students were more academically sound than their counterparts who entered the HBCU. Further, the students who attended the PWI had a lower

degree of college satisfaction. Rodgers and Summers (2008) also found that African American students who attended the PWI experienced lower academic achievement, and that their academic self-concept suffered even though they entered with higher grade point averages than their counterparts who entered HBCUs. The study resolved that if PWIs intended to retain African American males, they must consider students' motivations and sub-populations within the context of their ethnic or racial identities.

#### **African American Males Self-Efficacy at Predominantly White Institutions.**

Strayhorn (2013) determined that African American males' academic success at PWIs was directly impacted by having meaningful interactions and relationships with university faculty and staff, coupled with active engagement in campus activities. Further, African American males attending PWIs had more negative experiences, suffered higher attrition rates, and had lower academic success than their counterparts attending HBCUs (Esters & Strayhorn, 2013).

Strayhorn (2008) confirmed that campus climate and faculty interaction directly influenced African American males' sense of belonging, which drastically shaped their self-efficacy and college experience.

Harper et al. (2011) relayed that African American males often felt isolated because of false stereotypes that have stigmatized their existence at PWIs. Often, mainstream America characterized African American males as underprepared, at-risk students emerging from low-income families, and dangerous thugs from inner cities (Harper et al., 2011). These negative stereotypes drastically altered their college experience and sense of belonging in the academic environment.

**African American Male Self-Efficacy at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.** Esters and Strayhorn (2013) found that African American males feel more

welcomed at HBCUs because the institutions maintain environments with those whom the students could culturally relate. Esters and Strayhorn (2013) determined that because of the cultural commonality, African American males' cultural and racial identities allowed these students to thrive academically. Subsequently, HBCUs maintained a profound cultural legacy that empowered the students while giving them a sense of purpose and determination to succeed (Richardson, 2012). Quite often those students were first generation and carried the weight of the family to eliminate generational curses while continuously striving to succeed (McCoy, 2014). Further, students who attended HBCUs experienced greater psychological adjustment and self-image (Brown, 2013).

### **Retention of African American Employees in Higher Education**

Not surprisingly, PWIs have a difficult time with the recruitment and retention of African American faculty and staff, while HBCUs have a higher success rate in recruiting and retaining African American employees despite the paucity of salary compensation (Richardson, 2012). Historically, HBCUs were the only avenue for people of color to embark on the higher education journey. Hence, HBCUs were designed for African Americans to embrace the importance of creating a culturally sensitive environment that encouraged African Americans engagement on campus (Richardson, 2012). Richardson (2012) found that HBCUs employed the tactics of using service learning, providing avenues for entertainment, promoting cultural awareness, encouraging mentoring opportunities and ensuring an inviting campus atmosphere. Richardson (2012) suggested that if PWIs wanted to increase their overall African American student population, that they consider employing some of the same techniques focused on retention. Further, college leaders needed to create an atmosphere where racism and isolation were not tolerated while creating environments where inclusion and belonging was encouraged.

Payne and Suddler (2014) determined that there must be a shift in the educational climate at PWIs and the way to institute those changes were through developing and promoting inclusiveness in the institutional academic and social environment. This inclusiveness may be addressed by embracing diversity and cultural differences so that the African American presence would be valued and prevalent at PWIs.

Before adequate discussion of the issue with the retention and advancement of the African American employee at PWIs can occur, deliberate focus on the challenges higher education leaders face with identifying, recruiting, and retaining qualified people of color must also be addressed. Once African Americans were identified as eligible to be hired on college campuses, Jackson (2003) discovered that people of color were less likely to be hired as administrators and were forced to assume lower, less demanding positions. Not only were discriminatory practices influencing the number of African Americans in higher education, the even larger dilemma for academia continues to be the limited number of African American people willing to, or currently working, in the higher education arena.

African Americans working at PWIs often feel isolated and out of place (Pittman, 2012). Some of the barriers that impede their growth and academic experiences were racism, differential access, lack of power, time disparities, and lack of commodity (Moore & Tolliver, 2010). These obstacles continued to limit opportunities for African Americans working at PWIs across the country. Unequal opportunity and the unstated provision of racism prevailed, and has continuously influenced the doctoral attainment, likelihood of success, promotion rates, and the retention of African American faculty (Grier-Reed et al. 2008). Along with blatant and discrete discriminatory practices, African American faculty are often overworked and overburdened with the responsibility to fulfill the needs of African American students through outreach and service

("The Nation," 1998). Therefore, there is a need for initiatives to continue to provide diversity to higher education academia's professional environment.

### **African Americans in the Professoriate**

Researchers have discussed the sparse number of African American faculty at institutions of higher education in America (Madyun et al., 2013; Pittman, 2012; Watkins, 2011), while further addressing the growing need for African American faculty in the higher education arena. Watkins (2011) highlighted that administrators at PWIs stated that there was a lack of African American professors on campus because they did not exist or did not have the necessary qualifications to be hired by PWIs. Pittman (2012) further noted that African American faculty only make up 4.9% of full-time, tenure-track professors in the United States.

### **African American Mentors in Predominantly White Institutions**

Research dispelled the myth that the majority of serious crimes in inner cities were committed by African-American youth (Balkaran, 1999). However, the characterization of African American males as criminals continued in our society. The negative stereotype placed upon African American males continued to affect the African American community, as well as individuals' prospects for employment and advancement (Perry & Bright, 2012). Focusing mainstream America attention on positive outcomes of the African American male population was essential in altering the perception many White Americans have when referring to African American males. (Leach, 2011). One way to possibly help to answer and change the understanding of African American males was by producing and providing more role models for this demographic (Carey, 2012).

Research continued to validate that African American males were not graduating at the same rate as their White male counterparts (Brown, 2013). Brown (2013) also determined that

although there were limited African American faculty at institutions of higher education, participation in race-based student organizations enabled the male students to meet faculty and staff. Students who interacted with same race mentors had a more positive college experience, displayed higher self-efficacy, and had improved graduation rates (Brown, 2013). Further supporting the findings of Moore and Tolliver (2010), (Brown, 2013) noted that African American students were more successful when they were mentored by people with whom they could culturally relate. Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, and Bonous-Hammart (2014) further determined that the lack of African American presence as faculty and mentors on PWIs adversely impacted the graduation potential for the African American student, specifically African American males. Further, Griffin (2012) concluded that African American students' interaction with African American faculty provided a quality college experience because the professors had greater commitment to the student's success both academically and socially.

In a mixed methods study performed by Carey (2012), African American males looked for particular characteristics when desiring a mentor. The study revealed that African American men believed the following components were significant in mentoring: personality, community, success, spirituality, providing inspiration or challenge, mentorship, education, family, emotional support, and shared career interest and proximity. However, the limited number of African American faculty and staff present in the higher education arena continued to pose a problem for the students in finding a mentor, and specifically in finding a mentor who displayed the characteristics mentioned above. Research suggested that there was a need for African American students to be mentored by African American faculty and staff, and thus the focus of this study would be addressing this need.

Research continually demonstrated that all students need mentors in which, they could



culturally relate and contact to elicit advice and encouragement. Griffin (2012) noted that African American faculty have demonstrated great models of success and were especially needed for the African American student attending a PWI. Griffin (2012) also stated that it is essential for African American students to be influenced and mentored by people who have experienced the same struggle; however, this continues to pose a problem for academia because there is a limited number of African American faculty servicing institutions of higher education.

Research has concluded that there were a limited number of African Americans, specifically males, to act as mentors. Brown (2013) noted that the lack of African American men in general, were not limited to the college arena, but also existed within the African American community. The majority of teachers that African American males encounter in the classroom were White females, who were generally unable to relate with the African American male both in a mentor relationship or culturally (Howard, 2008). Brown (2013) determined that a mentor would have a more significant impact on the African American male student if they had the commonality of race. DeFrietas (2012) concurred with Brown (2013), but further concluded that African Americans garnered a higher level of success both academically and socially when students were engaged in mentoring relationships with faculty.

Griffin and Reddick (2011) concluded that there was a high demand for African American faculty in higher education and noted that students needed the support of African Americans as mentors. DeFrietas (2012) concurred with Griffin and Reddick by suggesting that the demands were extremely high for African Americans who could meet the requirements to be employed on a PWI and who could serve as mentors and role models. African American mentors on PWIs generally formed more meaningful relationships with their students and invested a great deal of time and energy helping their mentees become successful DeFrietas

(2012).

Mentoring continually played an integral role in the African American community. If it was apparent that the pursuit of higher education was a realistic ambition for African American students, specifically African American male students, they must be adequately prepared and supported by those similar persons that have already experienced the realities of attaining degrees in higher education (Sinanan, 2016). Zambrana, Ray, Espino, Castro, Cohen, and Eliason (2015) suggested that although there was a need for African Americans to serve as mentors of African American students, the requisite presence of African American faculty and staff in higher education continuously created a dissonance because of the limited number of African Americans represented in higher education. Hylton (2013) suggested that if African American students do not have positive interactions with faculty and staff on campus, they were less likely to feel as if they belonged in the campus community and in turn became cognitively dissonant with the university. Rodgers and Summers (2008) continued to increase awareness that the critical issue of retaining African American students at PWIs was to increase the number of African Americans' existence overall.

PWIs were encouraged to acknowledge the idea that African Americans whom not only attended a PWI, but African Americans who were employed by PWIs, often experience the same levels of racism and prejudicial attitudes (Harper, 2012). One avenue to help eliminate those feelings of alienation and overall isolation from the campus community were for the PWI to institute an inclusive social and academic environment, which embraced diversity and cultural differences. More specifically, the instituting of same race mentoring relationships may significantly impact the college experience for the African American student attending a PWI.

## **African American Educator Contributions to Higher Education**

African American faculty members continually make invaluable contributions to the educational community. Madyun et al. (2013) highlighted that the presence, contributions, and influence of African American faculty assisted students in higher education by developing intercultural confidence. The researchers noted that the development of intercultural awareness helped students effectively function in a diverse U.S. and global society (Madyun et al., 2013). A cross-cultural awareness may also assist students in altering personal perspectives to assist in adapting and appreciating unfamiliar cultural environments. Zambrana et al. (2014) noted that diversifying college faculty subsequently played an essential role in advancing knowledge, fostering different perspectives, and providing equitable distribution to a global society. The researchers further noted that it was the responsibility of higher education institutions to provide this diversity by ensuring that a quality education was available to all, and that diversity occurs in the delivery of education (Zambrana et al., 2014).

Several researchers determined that African American faculty mentor relationships were essential to the retention of African American students on PWI campuses (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011; Dahlvig 2010; Moore & Tolliver, 2010). Einarson & Clarksberg, 2010) noted that empirical studies over several decades have reported that out-of-class contact with faculty is associated with increases in students' effort, persistence, academic achievement, intellectual and personal development for all students. The interaction with faculty also warranted a more satisfying college experience.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter included a comprehensive literature review on topics relevant to this study including an overview of formative issues in African Americans' lives, African American

students' history and profile in higher education, factors influencing retention and graduation for both the African American student, the African American male student, and African American males' self-efficacy at PWIs and HBCUs. Finally, the chapter included with factors influencing the retention of African American faculty and staff in higher education, African American contributions to higher education, and how exposure to and interactions with this demographic may affect the college experience of African male college students. As noted in the research, the retention of African American male students may increase if universities institute same race mentoring relationship for these students.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The number of African Americans pursuing and completing higher education degrees continues to increase. In spite of these positive strides, retention and persistence continue to be problematic for this population (Ingeno, 2013). African American students continue to struggle with the college experience because of their feelings of isolation, self-efficacy, self-awareness and the lack of African American mentors in the higher education arena (Grier-Reed et al., 2008; Kelsey-Brown 2001; Robertson & Mason, 2008). The consideration of gender often exasperates the issue of retention for the demographic and African American males face even greater difficulty in persisting than all other counterparts (Watson, 2006). Like their counterparts, African American men have intentions of pursuing higher educational degrees but are faced with enormous barriers that often derail their plans (Watson, 2006).

African American males continue to struggle with academic integration, social support, finances, and family background (Parker et al., 2016). They are often faced with the necessity to be the voice for their community, experience feelings of battle fatigue, and contend with the idea of being racially disrespected (Parker et al., 2016). Since the college experiences of African American males are seldom addressed, this study will investigate if having a same race mentor assisted in the successful graduation of a purposeful sample of African American males', as well as if the mentorship impacted their college experience.

#### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze same race mentorship experiences of African American males while they were in college and how these experiences may have shaped the students' persistence and transition through to graduation. As such, the overarching research question for this study was: What are the perceptions of African American male college

students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college experience?

In addition to the primary research question, the following sub-questions will help further explore this topic:

1. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' persistence in college?
2. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male self-efficacy regarding feeling as though they belong in the higher education environment?

### **Research Design**

Given that the purpose of this study was to explore and analyze same race mentorship experiences of African American males in college and how these experiences may have impacted the students' persistence and transition through graduation, a qualitative research approach and phenomenological design were used. Qualitative research is suited for studying text, image data, data analysis, and drawing conclusions (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers endeavor to interpret and analyze others' lived experiences (Merriam, 1998). The lived experiences studied in this proposal were those of African American male alumni who had same race mentors during their college experience at a Primarily White Institution (PWI) and/or a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to draw conclusions about if and how the presence of African American mentors influenced the college experience for this African American undergraduate males. A qualitative approach to this study allowed the researcher to provide vivid descriptions of the participants' lived experiences of both being a male and an African American who attended an institution of higher education.

The phenomenological design was most appropriate for this study because it employs the

use of analysis of statements, the generalization of meanings, and description (Creswell, 2014). In this case, the phenomenological framework is a relevant philosophic methodology that was used to describe the phenomenon of African American male college students' experience. Additionally, while analyzing and understanding the everyday life experiences of the African American male, phenomenological methods were appropriate because it mediated the validity of the epistemology (van Manen, 2007). Further, this approach was used as a lens to analyze the primary purpose of the study, which was to explore and analyze how the presence of same race mentors shaped persistence and transition through to graduation in African American male college students. A phenomenological design was used for this study because the theory uses the participants' experiences to garner personal realities through the eyes of the participants. The researcher used the participants' own words to develop general themes, which acted as the basis for this phenomenon. Perceptions were derived from African American male experiences and dialogue with others. It is the aim of this study to provide rich data to describe the African American males' perception of how having a same race mentor shaped their college experience.

### **Participants**

The initial use of a purposeful sample seemed appropriate in this study because it “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Purposeful selection occurs when the researchers intentionally choose individuals that will help the researcher understand the problem and research question (Creswell, 2014). The intent of using a purposeful sample allowed the study to be structured in a way to provide rich data on whether African American males need to have same race mentors. Since the research questions focused on the same race mentor experiences of African American males and the potential

impact on college persistence, it made sense for the participants to be individuals who have already completed their degree requirements.

Creswell (2014) suggested that the phenomenological design calls for three to ten participants. While Patton (1990) indicated that qualitative sample size must be determined by the resources available, objectives of the study, the time allotted, virtually the rules for determining sample sizes are unspecified. As such, the participants in this study were narrowed to include a purposeful sample including: a minimum of four to a maximum number of eight African American males who self-identified themselves as alumni of institutions of higher education within the southeastern region of Georgia; had graduated within the last five years; and indicated they had a same race mentor while in school. This demographic was chosen because of researcher accessibility. A group of African American male alumni was initially selected from those who were present at a fraternity meeting where the study was outlined, and the interview screening questions were administered. Additionally, the researcher implemented a snowball sampling technique to find additional suitable participants. Snowball sampling is one of the most common forms of purposeful sampling. "This strategy involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation" (Merriam, 2016, p. 98). For this study, the participants selected from the fraternities recommended other acquaintances who met the specifications of the study.

In the United States (US) and abroad, there are five African American based fraternities. Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) noted that African American fraternities' in the US have a rich history and date back to the early 1900s. These international organizations consist of graduate alumni and undergraduate chapters on almost every college campus and in every state in the US. In African American communities, fraternity members actively contribute to education and



outreach, while continuously working to advance the community (Smith et al., 2007). This participation occurs once the members have graduated from college and are working to be active societal contributors.

The researcher gained permission from the gatekeeper of the local chapter of the national African American fraternity to contact their members. Because the researcher is a member of a national sorority, the researcher had access to gatekeepers from the five African American male fraternities. According to Creswell (2014), gatekeepers are individuals who provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to occur. Once permission was obtained from the fraternity president, the researcher emailed the active fraternity members requesting their participation. These particular organizations were chosen because it allowed the researcher to have access to a variety of African American males who were college graduates from different institutions and with different backgrounds. Participation was not limited to this group since the male fraternity members contacted for the study were encouraged to recommend other males who met the criteria, and whom they felt might be willing to participate and provide meaningful information to the researcher. As such, this process gave the researcher a diverse pool from which to select potential participants. All participants who were chosen had to have a same race mentor while in college.

To finalize the participants, the researcher conducted a pre-screening to aid in participant selection (see Appendix C). Upon completion and reviewing of the pre-screening document, the researcher then determined who qualified to continue in the process of being interviewed based upon which individuals seemed to have the most knowledge and experience with having a same race mentor. Those selected after the pre-screening process then received a participant letter, which described the necessary requirements (see Appendix B). To protect the rights of all

involved parties, consent forms were provided to and signed by all the participants. The consent form detailed the purpose of the study, the interview protocol, the confidentiality of the interview materials, and the terms of voluntary participation. Each participant was provided a copy of the consent form and was required to return it to the researcher prior to participating in the study.

### **Researcher as Instrument**

Qualitative research requires an instrument that can assimilate various sources of data, integrate the information, and render a sensible interpretation of the social action (Berg, 1998, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Patton, 1990, 2001, 2002b). In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of data collection. The data were collected through human instruments, and not generated through questionnaires or machines (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

It is through the researcher's "eyes and ears" that the data were collected, information gathered, settings were viewed, realities were constructed, and data were analyzed and interpreted (Lichtman, 2006, p. 12). Only human beings are capable of such diverse requirements (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Hunter & Schmidt, 2004; Lichtman, 2006). Furthermore, Babbie (1998), Berg (1998), Chadwick, Bahr, and Albrecht (1985), Denzin and Lincoln (2003), and Merriam (1998) agree that when individuals are used as instruments in research, there is always room for imperfections and errors. As stated by Merriam (1998), "The investigator as the human instrument is limited by being human – that is mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere. Human instruments are as fallible as any other instrument" (p. 20).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Punch (1988) said, "The qualitative researcher should also explain if their role is emic—

an insider, who is a full participant in activity, phenomenon, or the role is more etic—from an outside view, more of an objective viewer" (p. 132). While there were a variety of definitions for insider-researchers, commonly insider-researchers are those who choose to study a group to which they belong, while outsider-researchers do not belong to the group under study (Breen, 2007). The researcher's role in the current study was an insider. Not only can the researcher be categorized as an insider because of the researcher's racial affiliation, but also because the researcher is a member of a sorority. In the African American community, both fraternities and sororities collaborate as brother and sister organizations, which allowed the researcher access to the fraternity members because of her affiliation with a sorority.

For this study, the researcher employed the use of interviews as a means of collecting data. Interviews allowed the researcher to have control over the line of questioning while simultaneously permitting the participant to provide relevant information to the researcher (Creswell, 2014). In particular, semi-structured interviews are more open-ended and allow the researcher to "introduce the topic, then guide the discussion by asking specific questions" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 5). Semi-structured interviews were administered to elicit open-ended discussions about whether each participant believes that the presence of same race mentors contributed to his college experience as an African American male college graduate.

### **Interview Protocol**

Semi-structured interview protocol questions were used for this study (see Appendix D). Questions were developed by the researcher based on the review of the literature and the research questions for this study. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher selected three African American male college alumni who were not included in this study to serve as a panel of experts to answer the interview questions as a pilot. This practice was instituted to establish

content validity. Content validity helps determine if the questions asked to elicit researchable information and allowed the researcher to generalize from a phenomenon enabling relevant content to be obtained (Brod, Tesler, & Christensen, 2009). Essentially, content validity means that the questions being asked were understood by the reader and were relevant to the research. Questions on the interview guide were revised as needed following the pilot test. The interview guide contains ten items (see Appendix D) focused on topics such as the students' college experience, their sense of belonging, and their thoughts on same race mentors.

### **Data Collection**

Permission to conduct the proposed study was obtained from the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once IRB approval was received, participants were initially recruited from an alumni chapter of a local fraternity. The researcher discussed the purpose of the study with the local fraternity presidents. Since the study was comprised of participants who already graduated from an institution of higher education, permission from these institutions to do research on their alumni was not necessary. The participants were selected once they completed the five screening questions, which the researcher gave to them at their monthly chapter meeting (see Appendix C). Upon meeting the selection criteria of being an African American male alumnus from an institution of higher education in Georgia, having graduated within the last five years, and having had a same race mentor while enrolled at an institution of higher education, informed consent was obtained (see Appendix E). After administering the screening questions (see Appendix C), three participants were selected to participate in the semi-structured interview protocol (See Appendix D) because they met the criteria of being African American males who previously graduated from an institution of higher education in Georgia. Although several of the participants screened met the requirements

mentioned above, only three of them could discuss their experience with a same race mentor. After the fraternity members were selected to participate in the study, the researcher inquired if they knew of anyone else who met the specifications of the research and may be interested in participating. Two additional participants were recommended by the males selected to participate in the study. Letters of informed consent were shared with participants upon completing the screening process.

Data were obtained from each participant's audio-recorded interview session which took place in the researcher's office. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes. If the participant had difficulty answering the interview questions or if the researcher decided that additional information was needed, the researcher followed-up with probing questions. Bernard (1995) said the key to successful interviewing is learning how to probe effectively, to stimulate an informant to produce more information without injecting oneself into the interview process, thereby resulting in ascertaining a personal reflection in the data. The researcher instituted the three types of commonly used interview probing techniques (Gorden, 1998): 1) detail probing where the interviewer asked a question such as when and where did your first mentoring experience occur?; 2) Elaborate probing which addressed the question by asking participants to provide more information about that experience and how those experiences helped or hindered the participants?; and 3) Clarification probing which asked the participant to explain their thoughts and elaborate on their previous statements.

A journal of the researcher's field notes containing perceptions of the participants, reflections on the interviews, and possible themes derived from the data was kept. Interpretive validity, which measured the meaning of participants' behavior and the perspective of individuals being interviewed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), was applied by the researcher to ensure

information were accurately recorded and interpreted to ensure understanding of each participants' feelings and opinions. The researcher ensured that all data collected remained confidential so that no participant could be identified. The data will be kept on a secure password protected computer for a minimum of three years and then destroyed per IRB protocol. The researcher did not have direct contact with students currently attending an institution of higher education, so no additional meetings with or permissions from higher education school officials were required.

The qualitative role in data analysis was to make sense of the text and descriptive data derived from the field notes obtained during the interview process. Descriptive data take the form of words and pictures, which allowed the participants to illustrate and corroborate their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). "It involves segmenting and taking apart the data (like peeling back the layers of an onion), as well as putting it back together" (Creswell, 2014, p.195). Data were examined to generate general themes that were used to understand the data's intended meaning.

First, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings. The interviews were recorded to ensure the accuracy of the interview data. Transcribing allowed the researcher to reasonably format the data and to continuously hear the data. The repetition of hearing the data allowed the researcher to become familiar with the data and to notice common themes that emerged.

Next, the researcher read all transcripts and reviewed all field notes. During this phase of the data analysis, the researcher began identifying specific quotations that supported the common themes that were emerging. A deductive coding system along with Atlas.ti (version 7, 1997) computer software was suited in qualitative research because the software aided the researcher in establishing codes from what is present in the document to summarize and create variables or

categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, a coding scheme was created during this phase of analysis which allowed the researcher to define the themes to be analyzed and to disseminate the notated information into reasonable categories. The coding scheme subsequently identified passages of texts or meaningful phenomena by applying labels to them, which indicated examples of a thematic idea. The coding process further allowed the researcher to quickly retrieve and collect all the text and other data that they associated with a thematic approach so that the concepts can be examined together and compared. After reading and organizing all collected data, the researcher was able to gain a more comprehensive sense of the research material.

### **Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

The qualitative research perspective relies on whether findings are accurate from the viewpoints of the researcher, participants, and readers. Trustworthiness referred to the researcher's checking for accuracy of the results by employing specific procedures. The validity procedures that were applied to this study were triangulation and member checking (Creswell, 2014).

Triangulation was used to build a justification of the themes. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that "triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at last, do not contradict it" (p. 266). Triangulation does not eliminate the risk of misinterpretation or misrepresentation; it does, however, "reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, [because] we employ various procedures, including redundancy of data gathering and procedural challenges to explanations" (Stake, 1994, p. 241). Interviews and field notes were used in the data triangulation process for this study. Data triangulation was beneficial in allowing the researcher to compare the participants' phenomenon. Additionally,

methodological triangulation was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to compare the participants' common themes. Further themes were derived from various participant perspectives, which added to the validity of the study.

The other validity procedure applied to this study was member checking, which helped the researcher to determine the accuracy of the findings. The researcher took the transcripts of the interview and the themes derived from the researcher's analysis back to individual participants for a review of interpretation and characterization of their conversation. Revisiting the interview allowed the participants to determine whether the findings and transcription accurately reflected their thoughts and perceptions (Creswell, 2014).

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

As the researcher was the instrument in the data collection process, there was a possibility of personal bias. Every attempt was made to decrease the degree to which personal beliefs interfered with the research process (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011; Hunter & Schmidt, 2004; Lichtman, 2006). The researcher ensured that there were not any leading questions, but instead that all of the research questions were open-ended questions. Additionally, the researcher assured that all of the information relayed to the participants was thoroughly analyzed, interpreted and confirmed by the participants.

Another limitation of this study was that the participants were limited to either members of Greek fraternities or friends of fraternity members in Georgia, which represents a small sector of the African American male population. The males represented in the study represent a unique sector in the African American community because they are men who pursued and completed higher education. This mere anomaly may cause them to view the world and experiences differently than their male counterparts. Additionally, the participants self-identified themselves



as alumni of institutions of higher education within the southeastern region of Georgia, have graduated within the last five years, and indicated they had a same race mentor while in school, which may also be a limitation. The researcher did not investigate the validity of previous claims but believed them to be true because they were active members of the graduate chapter of the male fraternity. Again, to be a member of the graduate chapter, you would have graduated from an institution of higher education, but the particular school and location were not validated because they were not relevant to the study.

The study was delimited to only selecting African American males who attended a higher education institution in southeastern Georgia. This small population mandates that results cannot be generalized to all African Americans who attended institutions of higher education. Another delimitation is the use of only Greek members (or friends of Greek members) from the five black fraternities in Georgia, who do not necessarily relay the opinions of all African American males who graduated from an institution of higher education. These participants were chosen because of the accessibility to the researcher.

Lastly, there was one assumption in this study. The researcher assumed the participants in the study responded honestly during the interviews, meaning that regardless of their present situation, the African American male students responded to the interview questions based on the totality of their experiences of whether having same race mentors and role models aided in their overall college experience, matriculation, and the probability of graduating.

### **Chapter Summary**

This qualitative study was used to explore and analyze how the presence of same race mentors impacted persistence and transition through to graduation in African American male college alumni. Data were collected from African American male alumni of both PWIs and

HBCUs in Georgia. Semi-structured open-ended interview questions were administered to five African American males who alumni of institutions of higher education in Georgia were. The interviews determined if having a same race mentor impacted their college experience. All qualitative data were analyzed to formulate answers to the research questions of this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze same race mentorship experiences of African American males while they were enrolled in college, and how those experiences may have shaped the students' transition and persistence through to graduation. Chapter one of this dissertation introduced the barriers that African American males encounter when navigating the college process and whether same race mentor relationships aided in persistence for the African American male. A review of the literature, in the second chapter, supported how their pre-college knowledge, social network systems, self-efficacy, and relationships influenced their probability of success. The third chapter outlined the phenomenological approach of the study designed to garner the college experiences of African American male graduates. This chapter provides information collected from the interviews of five African American male college alumni study participants. The aggregated data will answer the following primary research question: What are the perceptions of African American male college students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college experience?

The following sub-research questions are also addressed:

1. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' persistence in college?
2. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' self-efficacy regarding feeling as though they belong in the higher education environment?

These themes featured and elucidated the barriers and challenges African American males faced when matriculating through the college process and how having same race mentors

assisted them in addressing these challenges

Data collected through the interviewing of the five African American male college alumni revealed, through the voices of the participants, that having a same race mentor helped them navigate the college arena. Additionally, the participants highlighted that their experiences with same race mentors helped them persist, while encouraging them to continue to set and attain goals. Lastly, the participants indicated that their determination to succeed and believe in themselves, coupled with the involvement of their same race mentors, facilitated their ability to persist and graduate. Further discussion of the participants' experiences will occur in chapter five.

### **Introduction of Participants**

Although all participants in this study were African American males, each had diverse backgrounds including (1) first-generation college student, (2) non-traditional student, (3) provisionally accepted student, (4) institutional type attended, (5) involvement in extra-curricular activities, and (6) varying socioeconomic status; thus, a purposeful sample selection was implemented of African American males meeting a variety of criteria. All participants were graduates of a four-year institution in Georgia. Three of the participants were from small Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), with enrollments between 3000-5000 students and the other two participants attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), with student populations ranging from 20,000-40,000 students. One of the participants was a first-generation college student, and one of the students was provisionally accepted to the PWI. A provisional acceptance means that the student did not meet the minimum admission requirements and required additional learning support courses to aid in his college readiness.

As a requirement for the study, all of the participants' mentors were African American,

but the mentors all had different roles at the university in which the participant attended. Two of the mentors were staff members, one of the mentors was a football coach, and the other two mentors were professors at the university. Additionally, one mentor served a dual role of professor and pastor for his mentee. Table 4.1 provides an overview and biographical description of each participant. The anonymity of the participants is protected as any identifiable information was removed or altered, and pseudonyms were assigned. The students' college major was included to give an insight into the academic interest of the participant. Table 4.1 also consists of the position their mentor held and whether or not the participant was a first-generation college student.

Table 4.1 *Participant Profile*

Participant	Age	Major	Fraternity Member	Mentor's Role	Institution Type	Years Graduated
Steph	23	Business	Yes	Professor	HBCU	4
Courtney	22	Homeland Security	Yes	Staff	HBCU	1
Leon	24	Healthcare	Yes	Staff	HBCU &PWI	5
Mario	25	Psychology	No	Professor/ Pastor	HBCU &PWI	3
Junior	23	Criminal Justice	No	Coach	PWI	2

### **Participant and Mentor Profiles**

Below, profiles of each participant and mentor are provided. Note, although all participants are African American, they come from diverse home and socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, each mentor played a unique role in the lives of the participant extending beyond academics.

**Steph**

This participant was a business major at an HBCU in Georgia. He has been working in the managerial field for the last three years. Both his mother and father attended and graduated from college with bachelor's degrees. His mother is currently working on a nursing degree, and their socioeconomic status puts them in the realm of middle-class America.

Additionally, Steph was a college athlete who played football while maintaining a B average in college. He also is a member of a local fraternity and stays actively engaged in community service. Steph's mentor was a business professor on campus who helped him formulate his goals and life's ambitions. He credits his mentor with helping him to determine that business was the proper major for him, aiding him being accepted into graduate school, and aiding in job attainment upon graduation.

**Courtney**

This participant was a Homeland Security major at an HBCU in Georgia. He has been working actively in his field for the last year as a security agent. Both his mother and father have post-bachelor's degrees and are advocates for higher education. Additionally, Courtney was involved in Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) while in college and is considering joining the Coast Guard. Courtney maintained a B average and was in a fraternity while in college. He currently is actively involved in community service and dedicates his spare time training athletes from his high school. Courtney's mentor was a staff member who instantly became an integral part of Courtney's life. His mentor provided a safe place where Courtney could go to work through life's problems and was a person who would offer him advice.

**Leon**

This participant was a Dental Hygiene major at an HBCU in Georgia. Because his

HBCU participated in a consortium and did not offer medical related courses, he took his dental courses at a nearby PWI. He was not originally from Georgia but has made Georgia his home since graduating from college. He is not a first-generation college student since his mother has a master's degree. However, all of his siblings have advanced degrees because his father wanted to ensure that they had equal opportunity for success.

Further, his father owned several businesses and was able to pay for all of his children to attend college. Leon maintained a C average while in college and pledged a fraternity during his junior year. He remains active in his fraternity and commits his time to mentoring young men. Leon met his mentor when he first arrived on campus and instantly became a part of her family. She provided a home away from home for Leon and was able to assist him with his program of study. He continued to stay close with his mentor and her family until her death. She provided a haven for Leon, and he credits her with his ability to complete his program.

### **Mario**

This participant was a psychology major at an HBCU in southeastern Georgia and attained his master's degree from a PWI in the same geographic area. He was born and raised in the city in which he attained his college degree. His parents were not college graduates; therefore, he was a first-generation college student. He was a traditional student who had non-traditional responsibilities. He enrolled into a southern university at 18, immediately had a child, and married his high school sweetheart. Mario is from the inner city and took out several loans to pay for his college degrees. He was very motivated and determined to provide a better life for his wife and children while maintaining a B average as an undergraduate and an A average in graduate school. Since graduating with his master's degree, he has been actively working as an Academic Advisor at a higher education institution. Steph referred Mario because he was not a



member of a fraternity. Mario's mentor was not only his professor, but also serves as his pastor. He credits his mentor with encouraging him to attend college so that he could provide a better life for his family. His mentor was actively involved with Mario's decisions while he was in school and continues to provide support and guidance to Mario today.

### **Junior**

This participant was a criminal justice major at a PWI in southeastern Georgia. His parents met at an HBCU in Georgia, but neither graduated at that time. His mother later went on to get her bachelor's degree, and his father never finished college. He and his mother were actually in college at the same time. Junior grew up in the inner city and realized early on that his athletic ability could provide a better life for him and financial assistance for his family. Therefore, he was on a football scholarship at his college. Junior maintained a C average while being a scholar-athlete and currently works as a probation officer in his hometown. Courtney referred Junior because he is not a fraternity member. Junior's mentor was his college football coach. He felt fortunate to have the opportunity to be coached by an African American football coach who invested a great deal of time in him. His mentor was not only interested in his football success, but his overall success in life.

### **Emergent Themes**

Several themes emerged through the interview protocol and addressed the research questions that guided this qualitative study. The themes that addressed the primary research question included the African American males' (1) **love of community**, (2) **feeling of inclusion vs. exclusion**, and (3) **need to conform to the status quo**. The overarching theme that correlated with the first sub-research question was the African American males' **mentor as their driving force**. Lastly, the theme that corresponded with the second sub-research question was

African American mentors' **igniting self-efficacy and success into the lives of the participants**. To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' voices, each theme was explicitly defined, corroborated, and expanded upon with participant quotes.

### **Primary Research Question**

*What are the perceptions of African American male college students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college experience?*

#### **Theme One: Love of Community**

The African American males' love for community was defined through the love and support the participants had for each other, while feeling compelled to protect and serve their communities. In the eyes of the participants, love and community represented an environment where the participants felt safe, wanted, and needed. All participants mentioned how it was vital for them to feel accepted and a part of the college experience. The males' varied backgrounds and academic preparation may have affected academic success; however, the one constant ingredient that ensured perseverance, through the eyes of the participants, were their feelings of inclusion in the college arena and the role their mentors played in the process of acceptance and persistence. The same race mentors affirmed that completion was their only option, while availing themselves as the participants' surrogate mothers and fathers.

Steph stated:

When I first arrived on campus, it was an eye-opening experience. Like I said, I transferred to State from a really small university. Now State is considered a small university too, but when I got there, it was a sight to see. I made a lot of friends instantly. I had a lot of friends that were from high school, um, it was an eye-opening experience because I was instantly treated like family. I knew I was

in a place that felt like home and one I grow in and graduate from with a good degree... My mentor felt like my mother. She would not let me go wrong in my decision making and always made me feel welcomed, even when she had a lot of other things going on at the time.

As in all unexpected or new experiences, perception played a key role. Steph continuously reiterated the sentiment that this was an eye-opening experience and that he was excited to meet the challenge. The idea that the school embraced him and felt like home contributed to a positive college experience. Additionally, Courtney shared:

I was able to identify my mentor... and this helped me to graduate on time... From the beginning of my freshman year, I had a mentor that helped me to get through the process and whom I visited several times a week for advice or just to check in and let them know what I was doing. I know this relationship helped me to graduate and to enjoy my time in college.... My mentor made sure that I felt at home and that I was in a good place. He checked on me regularly and was there for me whenever I needed him. My mentor was my parent away from home and was someone I could always trust to give me good advice.

Being prepared for college and having the pre-requisite knowledge aided in the college experience of Courtney. He was able to deal with the challenges that come with college and not the lack of knowledge about the college process that many African American males face because they are first-generation college students.

Although Mario was a first-generation college student, staff members at the institution embraced him, which helped him persist. Mario stated:

As a student, because I started in the summertime, it was very welcoming. The

city itself was very low key but very, um, they big on hospitality but, um, the peer mentors that we were assigned to were very engaging and interactive with us so I kind of connected immediately...It felt like home it felt like a family. Like I said they were very welcoming and anything I needed, any questions I had or the resources I needed to be aware of they were very engaging in that matter.... My mentor was also my pastor and always made sure I got to church on Sunday and had a good meal to eat before I returned to campus. I never felt like I was alone once I got to college.

Each young man had different experiences, but they all stressed the importance of feeling accepted while in college and the role their mentors played in that process of acceptance. It was important for them to not only feel accepted once the first arrived on campus, but it equally as important for them to feel accepted as they matriculated through the college arena.

### **Theme Two: Inclusion versus Exclusion**

The participants' desire to be included and valued in their community was the participants' definition of inclusion versus exclusion. America's distribution of equality significantly impacted the participants' lives. Often, the participants of this study wanted to receive equitable treatment while being recognized for the contributions they made to both the learning environment and society. Inclusion versus exclusion permeated throughout the research. Because participants were often stereotyped, they struggled with trusting and feeling as though they belonged in their learning environments. The opposite of belonging, a feeling of exclusion, often transcended from their educational settings to their communities. This feeling of isolation often impacted their persistence and affected their perception of themselves. The mentors were able to hinder self-doubt through encouraging the males in this study to become

active members of both their institutions and communities.

Mario stated that his mentor encouraged him to "not just survive, but to thrive as an African American male, and to show other African American males how to do the same thing."

Leon stated that because he came from a predominately white high school, he felt comfortable talking to everyone, but he was disheartened when:

The professors at the PWI did not make themselves accessible...I did not give up and kept seeking their assistance so that we could get the information we needed to be successful in the dental hygiene program...plus my mentor stayed on me about making sure I continued to ask for assistance even if they did not act like they wanted to help.

When Junior graduated, he and other African American alumni stayed involved with the university and tried to ensure that the students who came behind them felt more included in the university and were offered the same opportunities as other groups. His mentor told him to, "give back your time to the university and be sure to share your experiences with others so that a more inclusive environment can be created for not only you [the athlete] but also the other African American students on campus." Lastly, the killing of African American males at the hands of police officers sparked Courtney's mentor to encourage him to participate in protests that were occurring around the community. His mentor stated that:

If you stand for nothing, you will fall for anything, and me and my fraternity brothers participated in the marches that the city had, protesting and letting the world know that we were not going to just stand back and be killed without standing up for ourselves and our community.

Being valued as both students and society members tremendously impacted the

participants' acceptance into the campus environment. Throughout the interviews, participants felt they must be understood and supported. This level of support and commitment often differed among racial and socioeconomic lines, and this differentiation often impacted the African American male participants. Their mentors supported them socially, emotionally, and academically, while also guiding their progression through life as a college student.

### **Theme Three: Conforming to the Status Quo**

Conforming to the 'status quo' was defined as the necessity for citizens to follow the rules set by a white-centric culture. This expectation often created a dissonance for the participants because of the lack of understanding and knowledge of African American males' backgrounds. The negative stereotypes associated with African American males often posed a great deal of discomfort to the participants and adversely affected their lives. Additionally, the participants believed that they had the responsibility to alter people's mindsets of the typical African American man because of the false perceptions relayed on media outlets. Participants discussed that if African American males wanted to feel safe in America, they had to adapt to the white-centric established norms. Each of the participants had examples of when they thought they had to react differently than other individuals and how their mentors aided them in coping with that reality. Steph said:

When we go into action being unified, you know, how can I put this, basically if you're unified together and you're not basically taking any crap then it's like looked upon like especially African Americans, it's like looked upon like your being disruptive. For example, when the Freddy Gray incident happened, a very popular African American activist was arrested. This man actually attended uhh Morgan State ...he graduated from Morgan State, and he was actually arrested up

there ... he was a real popular athlete up there, and he was portrayed as and considered a thug. They did not consider him as an educated young African American male.... My mentor encouraged me to continue to fight for what I believe was right but always made sure I understood that there is a way to do everything.

Steph's mentor ensured that he understood that he had a right to defend himself, but he needed to use his intelligence to fight his battles. She encouraged him to learn when to speak up and when to be silent. His mentor showed him that he should participate in the protest and most importantly he should exercise his right to vote. She taught him that the most efficient way to institute change is through altering policy, which could occur if young people become purposeful about voting and participating in the processes that were designed to facilitate change. Steph recalls his mentor's advice:

Even though we have to move a little differently, we can still stand for what we believe is right. She encouraged me to express my opinion in an educated and non-confrontational way. She would always say that it is not always what you say but how you say it and that helped me to deal with a lot of situations.

Further, African American males are often expected to be more conscientious of their attire because of the precedence set in the Trayvon Martin case. Trayvon Martin was an unarmed teenager who was killed by a community watch organizer for looking suspicious while walking through his neighborhood wearing a hooded sweatshirt. Mario affirmed:

I like to wear ties and bowties, and that's just not on Sunday... because it speaks

volumes, no one can judge you beyond that or below that when you present yourself well not just looking the part, but you speak the part as well. You automatically have a certain level of respect and don't have that much to prove... but if I walk in with a hoody at the wrong place at the wrong time you know, they are not going to see me as an educated black male, and I have to be prepared to accept whatever society throws at me. A hoody has been made to have a negative meaning, and if a black man wears a hoody, they are perceived as a criminal and can be shot by police without reason. Therefore, because of the example set by my mentor, I try to stay dressed up, so I hopefully do not have to worry about being negatively targeted by any group.

Mario's mentor established precedence through his actions. He provided guidance and set an example of how to be a successful African American man. He showed him how to dress and how to demystify the "angry black man" illusion. He continuously showed him how to be a positive role model not through his preaching or words, but through example.

Further, Junior said when discussing how African American males have to adapt to the societal norms placed upon them, rather than being themselves, that his mentor helped him to realize his worth and provided affirmation that he should be proud of who he was and his accomplishments. Junior stated:

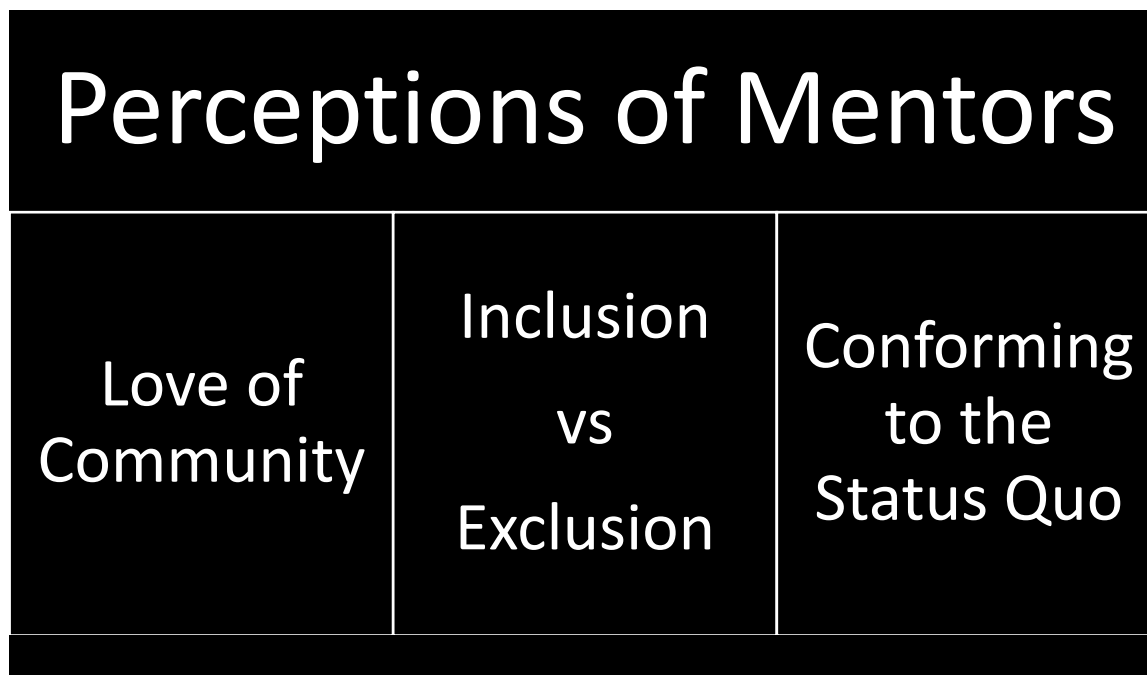
My mentor helped me to realize that it was not my problem that they may be afraid of me, but it was their problem and that I could not spend my life compensating for my size and complexion... To my dismay, there were a few instances in college where with me being a black man, a big black man at that, made certain situation and circumstances uncomfortable for both me and others.



For example, I would feel uncomfortable being a young black male, with an athletic build, um sitting one on one in my professors' office, who were mostly middle-aged white women. I knew that everything I did and said had to be non-threatening to her without even knowing what she would consider as threatening.

After interviewing and interacting with the African American male participants, the idea that consistently permeated was that African American males often have the responsibility of debunking myths that derived through false media characterization. On several occasions, the participants discussed that the media often portrayed African American males as thugs and criminals and it is often the responsibility of the African American male to change the preconceived notions of both educators and society. African American males often felt targeted because of their skin color and the misconceptions that society associated with African American males as a whole. According to participants, they often carried the burdens of their families and were not able to focus solely on their academic goals. The presence of a mentor often helped the African American male participants determine ways to continue and endure regardless of their situation.

The emergent themes from the data that corresponded with the primary research question were the African American males' love of community, their feelings of inclusion versus exclusion, and their need to conform to the status quo. The design of Figure 4.1 below was developed from the researcher's understanding and perception of the African American community. Black and White often indicate strength in the African American community and are the colors used in many mentor programs. The box shape encompasses and signifies protection, which is the duty many African American males embrace. Figure 4.1 illustrates the ideologies that emerged from the primary research question.

Figure 4.1. *Mentor Perceptions*

#### Sub-Research Question 1

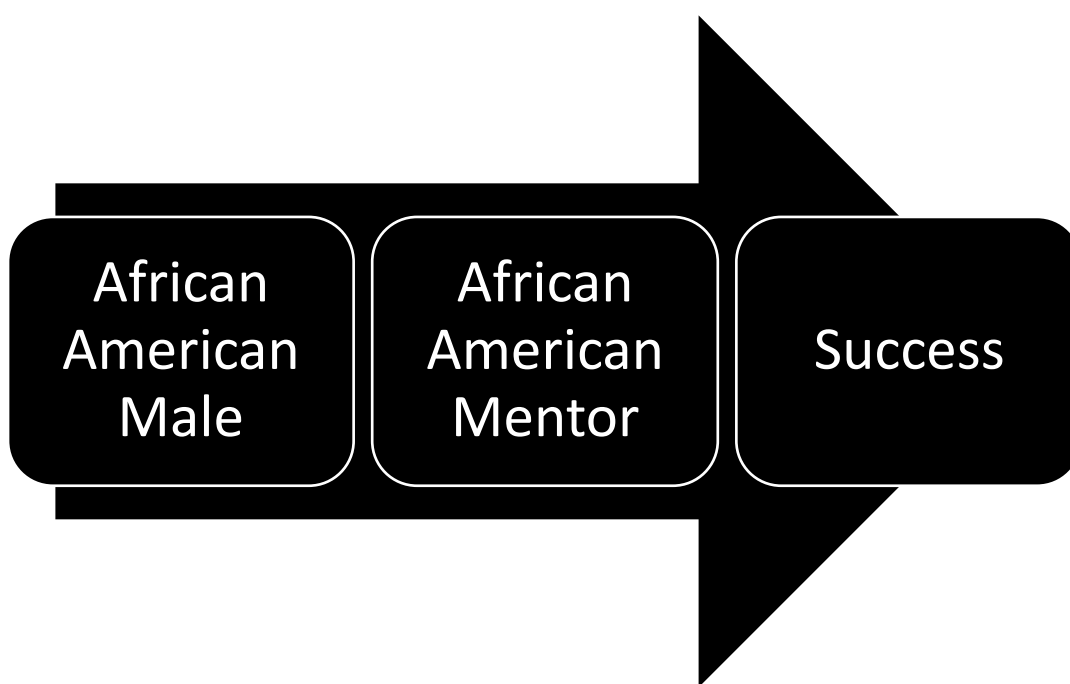
*To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' persistence in college?*

#### **Theme Four: African American Mentors were the Driving Force**

African American mentors being the driving force of their mentees' persistence through the college environment was defined as the participants felt as though they belonged in the college arena while being encouraged, supported, and empowered by their mentors. Participants of this study shared that for African Americans to feel included, they need organizations or groups of people that remind them of their possibilities, and a group in which they can culturally relate. The culmination for the participants occurred when they were embraced, welcomed, and accepted by the college arena. The participants revealed that a same race mentor aided them in this transition and helped them to cope with being judged for factors of which they have little

control. The underlying theme that emerged was that the African American mentors were the driving force who enhanced the participants' grit and propelled them to persist and graduate. The directional arrow used in Figure 4.2 indicates progression. The end result is not achieved without the supporting components. Black and White often indicate strength in the African American community and are the colors used in many mentor programs and will be used throughout the chapter. Figure 4.2 further delineates the tenets that emerged with the idea of persistence in the college environment.

Figure 4.2. *Mentors as Driving Force*



Each of the participants stated that their mentor helped them persist through the college arena. Mario expressed that when he "got tired or discouraged, his mentor would not allow him to quit." Similarly, Steph affirmed that his mentor was "his sounding board and continuously encouraged me to be the best student I could be." Junior articulated that his mentor would have "special study sessions for me to get caught up on assignments and would get me the help I

needed to do well in my classes.” Courtney credits his mentor with encouraging him to:

Stick with my major instead of frustrated with a professor. My mentor helped me stay on course because had I changed majors I would not have graduated on time and plus I was only going to change majors because I did not want to face a professor who I felt did not care about me. My mentor helped me to see my value and rather the professor liked me or not; I could pass that class and any other class he taught.

Similarly, Leon acknowledged that his mentor helped him to make it through the issues he was having at the PWI medical school. He stated, “She would have study sessions for me and would point me in the right directions for tutoring so that I could pass the class even if I was not getting assistance from the professors at the PWI.”

Each of the participants revealed that their mentor encouraged them to persist and not allow situations to derail them from achieving their goals. They each shared various scenarios and instances that would typically hinder them and cause them to retreat. They credited their mentors with giving them the tools to persist even when they felt they could not succeed. They realized that their success was in their hands and that they could not fear the unknown or run from situations in which they had little control.

Leon shared:

They [his mentor and her husband] were able to discuss matters outside the school activities as well as academic situations. You know they were just more sensitive to my issues and especially my mental health issues because more than likely she had experienced the same issues. She understood that this program was difficult and was causing me a lot of stress. She tried to find ways to continuously

communicate with me and to allow me to do different things that would allow me to not be focused on school. That is why she and her husband would let us come to their house during the weekends you know to change our environment and let me have a different atmosphere. You know I still studied on the weekends but was not on campus, and they were willing to help if I needed. I think they did this for me because they understood what I was going through and knew that I was a good kid who was a long way from home.

Whereas Junior, expressed:

I was clueless that it was my duty as a student to pick my classes; therefore, the second semester I was registered for no classes. I do remember seeing students the last couple of days of the semester in and out of the computer labs, but I assumed they were either checking their grades or trying to turn in last-minute work to their professors...The lack of knowledge and preparation really put me behind, and I had to fight to recover... Once my mentor realized that I really did not know the processes he helped to make sure that I learned the processes and checked with me during open registration time to make sure that I was registered for classes and to check to see which professors I would have the next semester. We both knew that I could not have another semester where I failed most of my classes and that I had to be proactive and not reactive.

Junior's and Leon's mentors realized that they struggled with the processes and pressure of the higher education arena, which caused them to feel alone often, isolated and inferior. The mentors afforded participants opportunities to seek guidance while assisting in the expansion of the participant's knowledge and understanding of the processes. Further, the mentors filled the

gaps for the participants from the vantage point of a parent while serving as a higher education authority; one who could guide not only the student, but also the parents who sometimes were unaware of the higher education protocol. The mentors essentially facilitated an understanding of the pedagogy and the expectations associated with the college arena while providing a haven for the participants.

### **Sub-Research Question 2**

*To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male's college students' self-efficacy regarding feelings as though they belong in the higher educational arena?*

#### **Theme Five: Igniting the African American Males' Self-Efficacy and Success**

The participants' realization that they had eminent control and culpability over their lives defined their self-efficacy and success. The participants collectively described the idea of them being responsible for their own success. Mario's mentor encouraged him to participate in a campus leadership organization that introduced prospective students and parents to the university. The enhancement of self-efficacy for Mario occurred from this relationship and opportunity. He stated:

There again you have an African American male in a leadership role and being the voice of an institution. Those high school students or parents come for a tour, and they see myself or another one, my brothers, where they see an immediate connection between us and their student.

Steph portrayed self-efficacy and confidence when he stated, "My mentor groomed me to be able to walk into any situation and feel confident, relevant and prepared for the task at hand."

Courtney's confidence coupled with self-efficacy was evident in his campus interactions. He credited his mentor with giving him the confidence to pledge and to become actively involved in

the campus arena. Courtney shared:

I was in everything on campus and was still able to keep my grades up...my mentor always told me to have a balance but to enjoy my college experience. He said you only live once and enjoy this time while you are still young. I enjoyed it and was active in student government, social organizations and I myself was a mentor to incoming freshman and sophomores.

Junior expressed:

My mentor taught and encouraged me to walk with my head up despite my size and the attention I drew. He taught us to be proud of who we were and although we were revered on campus to always remember our purpose and why I was there. He helped me to no longer be self-conscious, but to be self-confident.

Leon demonstrated his self-efficacy when he stated that he “learned how to identify with brothers who were leaders, ambitious and ready to face upcoming situations...My mentor made that possible by making sure that I was in contact with the right people at the right times.”

Often, the expectations of a student-athlete differ from those of the other students. Coupled with being an African American male, the expectations have many impediments. Junior stated that it was helpful for him to have a mentor and teammates that understood his situation. He described these feelings, saying:

Having these relationships helped me to keep trying when I felt tired or overwhelmed. I knew I was not in this alone and other people I could talk to or who I could see were doing the same things I was doing. It was tough, but I made it. My mentor helped me to realize that things in life will not be easy. He would

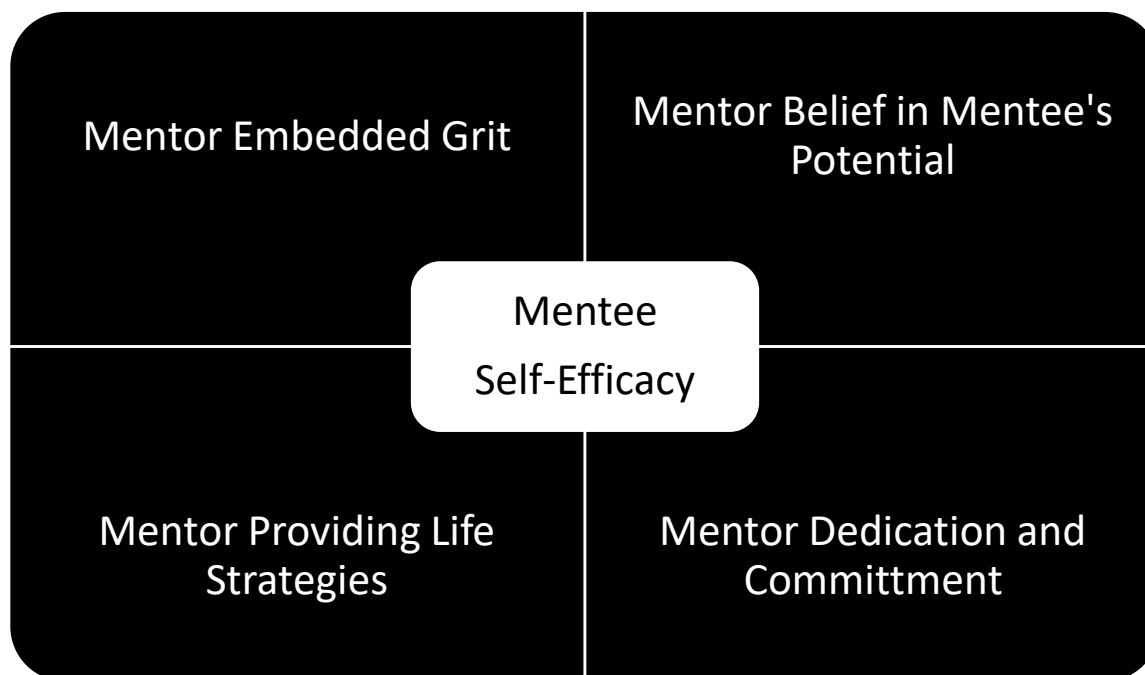
often say that being a black man in America is tough. You will often find yourself in racist situations, or there will be times you will be afraid. In those times you must continue to push forward, make good decisions and remember that you are capable of conquering the impossible.

The participants' acknowledged they were often forced to rely on their abilities, determination, and grit while using mentor-provided strategies to develop their moral compasses. The qualitative interview process revealed a number of the participants' inner strengths and confidences, and those confidences aided in their success navigating the college arena. Being mentored by African American male coach enhanced Junior's inner confidence. He explained:

Growing up watching sports, seeing African American coaches was slim to none, but actually having one to take the time with me and that mentored me was great because I began to realize that African Americans are in every position and they can do anything which was different from the thought process of the African American being the athlete and the athlete only.

When African American males were surrounded by people who believed in their abilities and were committed to their success, often the result was that they gained confidence in themselves and impacted their inner strength. The tiled matrix in Figure 4.3 below represented four components deriving a whole. Each of the components contributed to the African American male gaining inner-strength and confidence which bred self-efficacy. Figure 4.3 represented the role same race mentors played in shaping the participants life.



Figure 4.3. *Mentee Self-Efficacy*

The active involvement of same race mentors assisted and promoted more positive college experiences for the African American males while fostering a progressive shift in the males' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Based upon participant feedback, it appeared that the resilience and the determination of African American males continued in spite of the roadblocks they faced. Further, it was evident in the interviewing process that the presence of a same race mentor helped the participants navigate both their college experience and life as an African American male.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the participants of the study, analyzed their experiences and backgrounds, and revealed the themes that emerged based upon their college experiences. The findings of this research produced several themes. The themes that addressed the primary research question included the African American males' (1) **love of community**, (2) **feelings of**

**inclusion versus exclusion** and (3) **conforming to the status quo**. The overarching theme that correlated with the first sub-research question was the African American **mentor being the driving force** for the African American mentee. The theme that corresponded with the second sub-research question was **the igniting of self-efficacy and success** for the African American participants. These themes shed light on the obstacles African American males face when trying to matriculate through the college arena and navigating the world. Chapter five will attribute meaning to the findings as they relate to the research questions, explore and analyze the concepts that emerged from the data, and provide recommendations to the higher educational arena with strategies to retain African American males.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

Transitioning from secondary education to higher education is often the path for many students. The African American community does not differ from these societal norms and anticipates students matriculating into the higher educational arena, with the expectation of them successfully persisting and graduating. Extensive research is available on the matriculation of the African American student; however, minimal research exists surrounding the college experience of African American males. Additionally, analyzing the college experience of African American males while focusing on improving their self-efficacy is seldom addressed.

Research indicated that same race mentorship does positively impact African American male collegiate experiences (Brown, 2013; Carey, 2012; Hylton, 2013), but it is limited. Little research exists that provides a voice for African American males' successful progression through the higher education system. Attention to an inclusively diverse learning environment continues to be necessary, as there are more and more African American students matriculating to arenas of higher education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore and analyze same race mentorship experiences of African American males who completed a college degree, and to determine how these experiences may have shaped the students' persistence and transition through to graduation.

The first chapters of this dissertation addressed the barriers that African American males encounter when navigating the college process and whether same race mentor relationships aided in persistence for the African American male participants. A review of the literature supported how their pre-college knowledge, social network systems, self-efficacy, and relationships influenced their probability of success. A qualitative study using a phenomenological design was

used to ascertain the college experience of African American male graduates using open-ended interview questions. A presentation of the data occurred from information collected and gathered through the interviews of five African American male college alumni from both Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the southeastern part of Georgia. The data explored the experiences that these males had with same race mentors in higher education, and further explored this phenomenon through individual and comparative analyses. Data analyzed answered the primary research question: What are the perceptions of African American male college students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college experience? Additionally, the following sub-research questions were addressed:

1. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' persistence in college?
2. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' self-efficacy regarding feeling as though they belong in the higher education environment?

The experiences of African American college alumni guided the research study, answered the research questions, and allowed the data to emerge themes. The themes and participant definitions of the themes that addressed the research questions are listed below.

Primary Research Question:

**Love of Community.** The African American males love for community was defined through the love and support the participants had for each other, while feeling compelled to protect and serve their communities.

**Feelings of Inclusion versus Exclusion.** The participants' desire to be included and valued in

their community.

**Conforming to the Status Quo.** The necessity for citizens to follow the rules set by a white-centric culture.

Sub-Research Question 1:

**The African American mentor being the driving force for the African American mentee.**

The participants felt as though they belonged in the college arena while being encouraged, supported, and empowered by their mentors.

Sub-Research Question 2:

**The igniting of self-efficacy and success for the African American participant.** The participants' realization that they had eminent control and culpability over their lives.

These themes shed light on the obstacles African American males faced when trying to matriculate through both the college arena and world. These themes featured and elucidated the barriers and challenges African American males often faced when matriculating the college process, and how having same race mentors assisted them in conquering these challenges while aiding in their progression through the higher education arena.

Data accumulated through the interviewing of African American male college alumni confirmed that having a same race mentor helped them navigate this unfamiliar arena. Additionally, experiences with their same race mentor enabled the participants to persist while encouraging them to continue to set and attain goals. Therefore, the African American male students' necessity to succeed and believe in themselves, coupled with their experiences with their same race mentor, facilitated their ability to persist and graduate.

The Declaration of Independence explicitly stated that all men are created equal and should be afforded the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. According to

participant feedback, the above-mentioned basic principles and simple directives were often overlooked or rewritten when considering the rights of African American males. These variations do not only occur on the lands of the law, but also in the classrooms that were designed to not only educate but to do so with equality (Rebel & Wolfe, 2008).

African American males realized that life would be challenging, but it was in their handling of said challenges that would define them as men. According to Parker et al. (2016) there are four significant psychological and social changes that impeded the African American male population throughout history. Those challenges included constructing an identity and defining themselves, developing and maintaining close relationships, coping with racism and discovering adaptive possibilities while continuing to hold true to their inner self of being African American (Parker et al., 2016). However, the realities remained that African American males matriculating through the higher educational arena had feelings of isolation (Parker et al., 2016), racism (Grier-Reed et al., 2008; Williamson, 1999), stereotyping (Wiley, 2014), and stigmatization (Harper et al., 2011). However, those students who had a same race mentor experienced feelings of higher self-efficacy (Brown, 2013), a more positive college experience (Moore & Tolliver, 2010), and the opportunity to build lasting relationships (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

As illustrated in this study, the connection between college persistence and same race mentor relationships for African American males is often unrecognized. However, the data collected from participant interviews produced themes that informed five phenomenological principles. The five culminating aspects are the African American male's love of community; feelings of inclusion versus exclusion; the need to conform to the status quo; a mentor being their driving force; and mentors igniting self-efficacy and success into the participants.

### **Analytical Concepts Connected to Findings**

Using a phenomenological framework approach, this study intended to determine the impact that same race mentors had on the experiences of the five African American male college graduates. Throughout the data analysis process, several emerging themes evolved. The ideas that addressed the primary research question included the African American male participants' (1) love of community, (2) feelings of inclusion versus Exclusion, and (3) conforming to the status quo. The overarching theme that supported the first sub-research question was the African American mentor being the driving force for the African American mentee. The theme that corresponded with sub-research question two was the igniting of self-efficacy and success for the African American participant. To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' voices, each theme was explicitly defined, corroborated, and expanded upon with participant quotes.

**The African American males' Love of Community, Inclusion versus Exclusion, and Conforming to the Status Quo.** The aforementioned themes tremendously impacted the perceptions of the African American male participants in this study. Colleges that focused on creating a welcoming college environment often encouraged students to instantly become involved in social organizations and create inclusive environments which fostered havens for its students while exuding persistence. The African American males who felt accepted to the college environment each expressed the importance of them having organizations and places in which they felt that they culturally belonged. They wanted to be in an environment where they felt safe and protected. When they were not in that environment, they felt isolated and uncomfortable. As stated by Junior:

To my dismay, there were a few instances in college where with me being a black man, a big black man at that, it made certain situation and circumstances

uncomfortable for both me and others. For example, I would feel uncomfortable being a young black male, with an athletic build, um sitting one on one in my professors' office, who were mostly middle-aged white women. I knew that everything I did and said had to be non-threatening to her without even knowing what she would consider as threatening.

Additionally, African American males are often faced with the necessity to debunk the myths that society has created to demoralize and disenfranchise them, particularly the implications that African American males are dangerous and unmotivated. These beliefs have been instilled in mainstream America about African American males which are exasperated by the medias' portrayal of them. As Abdullah-Johnson (2014) referenced, the school-to-prison pipeline is a prevalent media portrayal, but recent data show inverse trends in this pipeline. The reality is that there are more black males enrolled in college than incarcerated in the prison system. Figure 5.1 below shows this trend:



Figure 5.1. *National Prisoner Statistics*

	Total Black Men in Prison/Jail*	Black Men Enrolled in Postsecondary Education
2000	829,200	717,491
2001	842,000	712,724
2002	851,600	964,056
2003	857,300	1,003,742
2004	826,700	1,014,474
2005	837,700	1,070,591
2006	831,100	1,081,647
2007	858,600	1,107,892
2008	870,800	1,072,536
2009	864,100	1,175,319
2010	844,600	1,341,354

\*Source: BJS, National Prisoner Statistics Program, Federal Justice Statistics Program, National Corrections Reporting Program, Survey of Inmates in State and Local Correctional Facilities, and National Inmate Survey 2010.

\*Source: Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education System, Enrollment Survey 2000-10.

**African American Mentors are the Driving Force.** African American males want to be viewed as equal citizens and treated ethically. Unfortunately, numerous situations demonstrated that the African American male was not treated equally (Kramer & Remster, 2016; Markman, 2015; & Scott, 2015). These injustices often created ‘an angry man’ who does not trust authority. Mentors instilled in the participants the knowledge to survive despite challenges and injustices. The phenomenon was corroborated by the mentors who consistently shared strategies and provided reminders of the necessity to exceed expectations. The males' interviewed each had their insights on this and demonstrated the sentiment in a variety of ways. Participants believed that tolerance was an understood roadmap to success in the African American community. The idea of functioning under a microscope and being mindful of how one is perceived was evident in the day to day lives of African Americans, specifically the African American males in this study.

Steph’s mentor was able to help him understand that the reality of adapting to situations

and embracing challenges was an essential component of achieving his life's goals. Steph's mentor stressed the importance of being a pioneer for change and often reminded him that he was an educated African American male who could shift the perceptions if he opted not to defy them, but to adapt. Steph further felt:

It is not fair, but it is the reality that we live, and you know we have had to learn to just live by the rules that society has made just for us and no other group... if you want to be successful.

Mario credited his mentor with his culmination to manhood. His mentor showed him how to believe in himself and embrace adversary. Mario shared:

Now, I am not intimidated. I'm not inferior; I'm confident in who I am, um, but, yet humble enough to realize and not be naive enough or oblivious of what's going on around me...I had to make certain decisions to you know better myself ... my mentor helped me to come to this realization because he would always say that you can recover from any situation and be better than you were when you got into the situation.

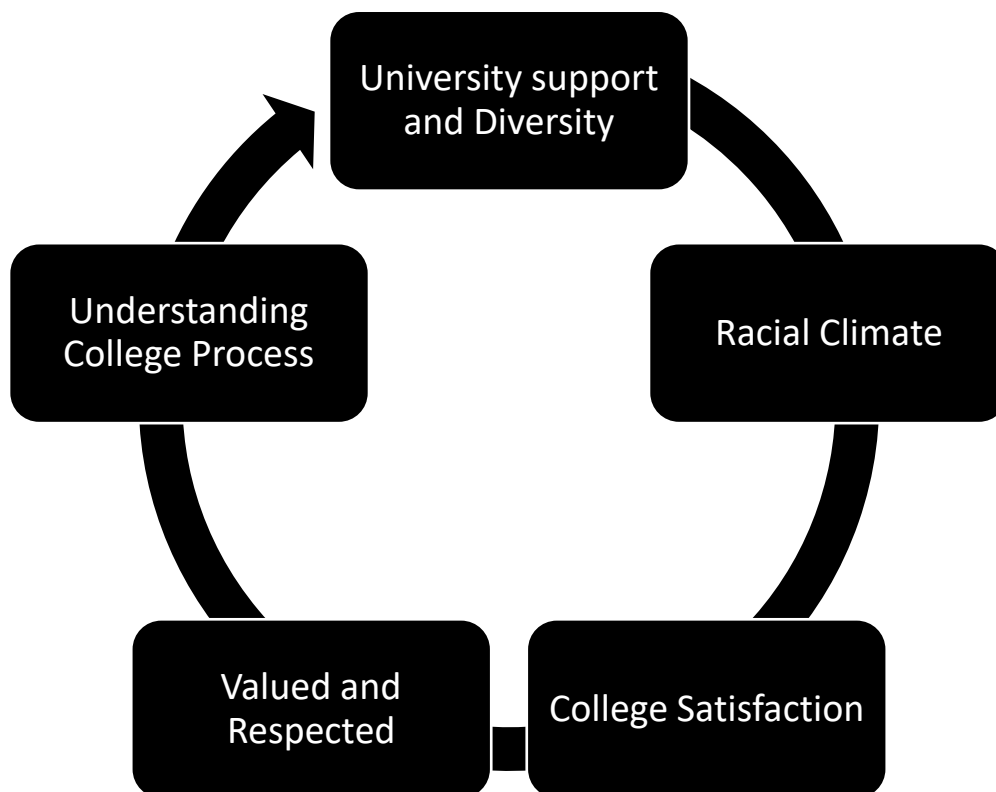
African American mentors were able to shift the mindsets in their mentees. The mentors embodied strength and belief that their mentees could persist through any challenges and obstacles. The mentors provided their mentees with strategies to cope with situations that were often designed to derail. Perseverance was the only option allotted to the mentees and the mentors ensured that they equipped their mentees with the knowledge to navigate inequitable situations while maintaining their integrity and dignity.

**African American mentors igniting self-efficacy and success.** In order for African American males to truly feel as though they belong in the college environment and to feel as

though that success is attainable, institutions must first recognize and then destigmatize the stereotypes that are attached to African American males. The males must feel as though they are accepted and respected. Further, initiatives ensuring African American males are prepared for the college experience before they arrive on a college campus. Guidance counselors should provide an informational session to students and parents informing them about standardized testing and financial aid.

Additionally, schools cannot change the norms that African American males face in society, but they can ensure that an educational environment is a safe place where students will be valued and accepted for who they are and not who we want them to become. By ensuring acceptance and intrinsic motivation then the institutions of higher education will ensure that a quality education is provided for every student, every day regardless of their race, socioeconomic status or gender. The results of this research coupled with the review of literature revealed that the following were obstacles which prevented African American males' persistence and ultimately impacted their self-efficacy. The continuous cycle reflected the relationship each obstacle had on the African American male.

Figure 5.2. *Obstacles Impacting the African American Males Self-Efficacy*



### **Returning to the Research Questions**

To address the initial research questions that guided this study, a wide array of information was discovered and revealed regarding retention and the college experiences of African American males. The participants were extremely motivated to share their experiences with same race mentors to demonstrate the impact of academia relationships with African American male college students. The primary research question provoked rich discussions and introduced the needs of the African American male to have same race mentors. Below was the correlation of the answers to the original research questions.

The primary research question read: What are the perceptions of African American male college students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college

experience? The participants collectively agreed that having a same race mentor was monumental in their successes and abilities to graduate. These same race interactions impacted their self-efficacy and confidence. Same race mentors aided in directing their paths not only in the classroom, but in life. These relationships impacted their academic and social development while molding them into being confident and productive citizens who understood white centric norms. Additionally, mentor relationships were helpful because the African American male participants were often misguided and misdirected, but the mentor relationships provided a safe environment for them to receive advice and to help them make impactful life decisions. Most importantly same race mentors were beneficial to the African American male participants because they had an open line of communication from people understood their dilemmas and most likely had the same experiences. They were able to see images of themselves being successful and impacting their communities, which influenced them to do the same for future generations.

The findings from the participant interviews supports the review of the literature from chapter two. African American males with same race mentors have more positive college experiences, display higher self-efficacy, and have improved graduation rates (Brown, 2013; Moore & Tolliver, 2010). Additionally, an inclusive educational environment (Moschella, 2013; Ritchey, 2015) impacted their sense of belonging (Palmer et al., 2010; Richardson, 2012; Ritchey, 2015) and overall college experience. Further, the African American male participants in this study persisted when they were mentored by people with whom they could culturally relate (Allen, et al., 2014; Brown, 2013; Guffrida, 2005; Marbley et al., 2013; Payne & Suddler, 2014).

The first sub-research question read: To what extent did having a same race mentor affect

the African American male college students' persistence in college? The participants of the study affirmed that having a same race mentor impacted their ability to persist. For most participants, their mentor served as a second mother or father which enabled the participant to feel secure and in a welcomed environment. Despite the situations designed to derail to them, they persisted. Research supported the idea that African American males often faced enormous difficulty with matriculation through the college process. Some impediments that the males often encountered were the lack of a sense of belonging (Carey, 2012), the issue of persistence (Marbley et al., 2013), and the lack of African American mentors (Hylton, 2013).

Additionally, African American males were faced with obstacles when navigating the college process. They often experienced an unfamiliarity with the college process and little similarities between their normal lives and the higher educational arena (McCoy, 2014). Further, if universities created initiatives that focused on African American male students' emotional support, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being, then they had a more positive college experience which increased their likelihood of persisting (Grier-Reed et al., 2008).

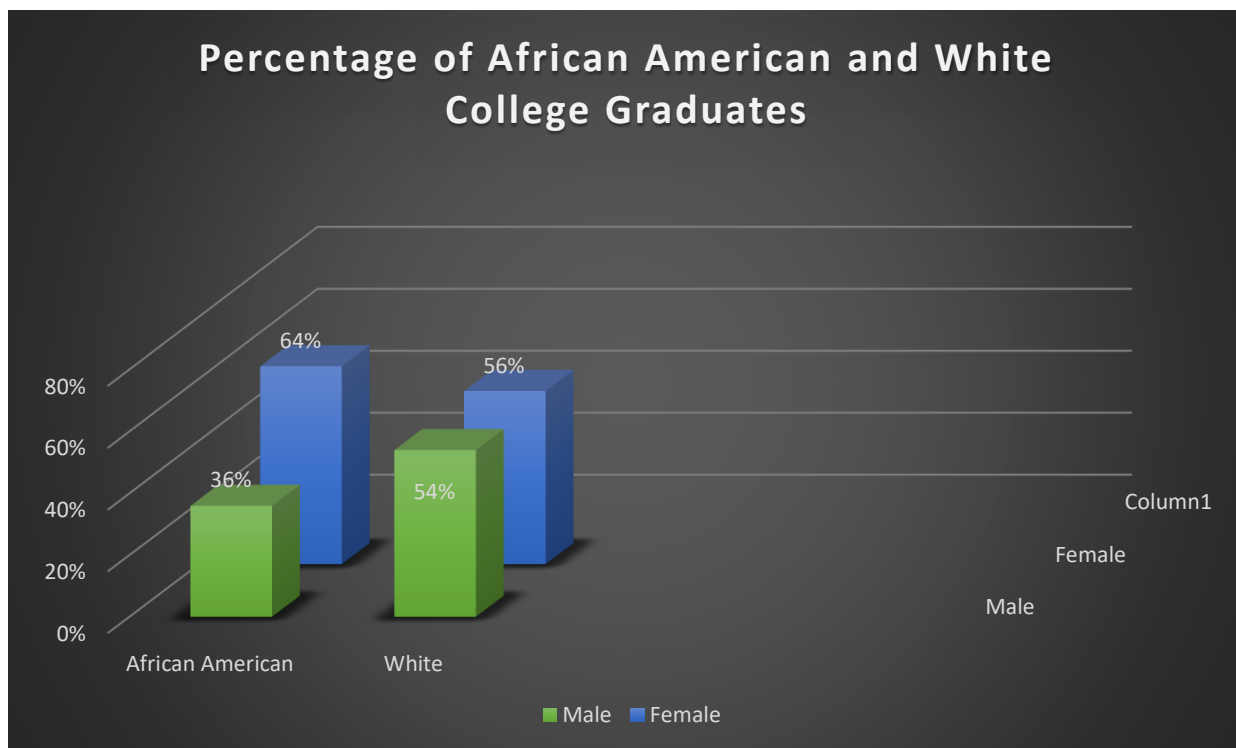
Higher educational opportunities were often a dream for many, but a reality for only a few. African American males' graduation rates are substantially lower than African American females and their White counterparts. A diversified learning environment, including African Americans serving as mentors, helped to alleviate the difficulties African American males had with persisting and graduating. Chen et al. (2014) resolved that when schools provided an inclusive environment for all populations, then students were more likely to be successful and thus, the school could have higher graduation rates as opposed to schools that did not make concessions for diversity.

Each participant had a same race mentor and was able to discuss those mentor

experiences. The participants substantiated the value in their same race mentor and recognized the importance of there being faculty or staff available to serve as a mentor. The original design of the HBCU and the availability of mentors availed greater for completion success for the African American male. PWIs seemingly had a more difficult time providing the same race mentor opportunity for the African American male because of the daunting numbers of African American mentors qualified to serve in the higher educational arena.

McCoy (2014) noted that students of color often experienced even greater difficulty and challenges. These challenges included, but were not limited to, requisite mentors and role models, lack of familiarity with the higher education arena, and a disconnect between the culture of higher education and the culture of the student's community. Junior had the opportunity to have a same race mentor but recognized the lack of available mentors and the impact that it had on his friends who did not have a same race mentor. Many of Junior's classmates did not complete their college degrees. The diagram below, retrieved from the U. S. Department of Education (2017), denoted the importance of addressing the retention issues of African American male students. African American males matriculate to the higher education arena, but the diagram below reiterated the issues institutions have with retention through to graduation of this demographic.

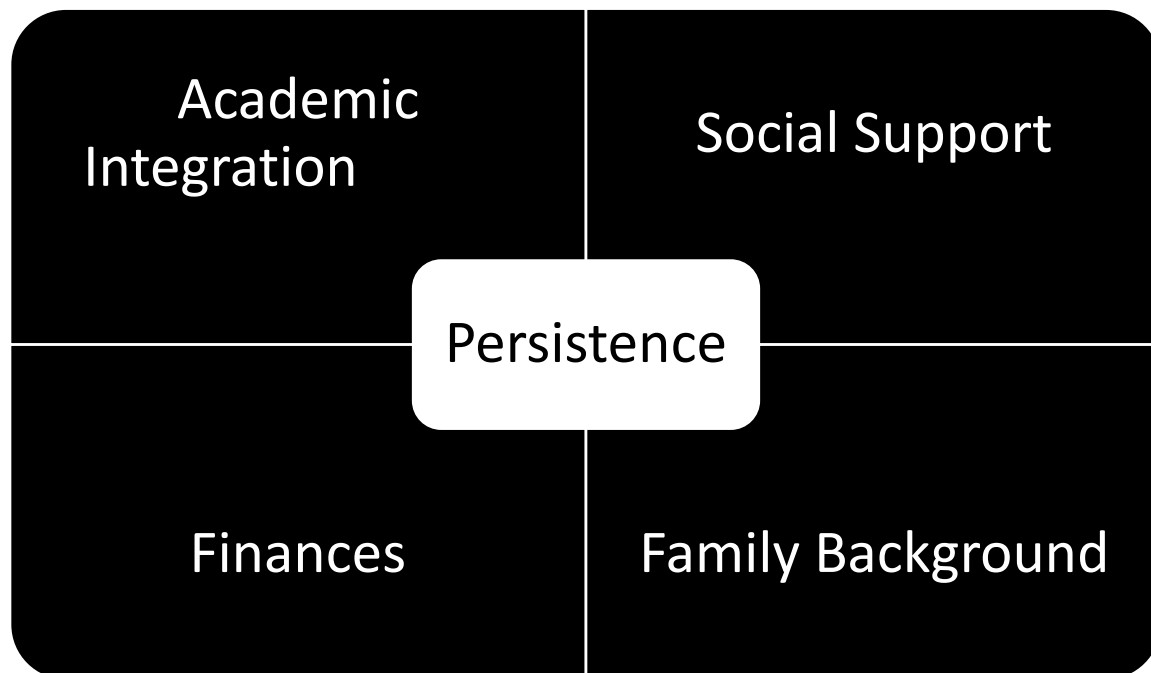
Figure 5.3. *Percentage of African American and White College Graduates*



African American males are qualified to continue their educational pursuit through enrolling in institutions of higher education. Additionally, African American males often entered with the intent of completing their collegiate program; however, various factors impacted their success. Below is Figure 5.4, a four quadrant to a whole chart denoting the elements necessary to help the African American males' achieve persistence in higher education. This chart derived from the themes that permeated in the review of literature regarding the college experience and persistence of the African American male.



Figure 5.4. *Barriers Impacting Persistence*



According to Dixon (1999) African American males often fail to progress because of academic integration, social support, finances, and family background. The aforementioned barriers were factors that significantly impacted the college experiences of African American males. Each participant acknowledged that the factors influenced their ability to persist and helped to shape their future. For some, family background and love of community was their motivation for completion, while for others understanding the academic language made it possible for them to persist. Each of them agreed that the ability to secure finances played an integral role in their ability to attain a college degree, coupled with the support they received from campus entities and specifically their mentor.

However, if persistence to graduation is the goal for African American males, then universities will need to ensure that the university exudes a sense of community and inclusiveness (Payne & Suddler, 2014), while also noting the concessions the men often have to

make to be successful in society (Marbley et al., 2013). Additionally, if universities wish to retain this population, then they will have to create opportunities for the African American males' confidence to be boosted while understanding that a key ingredient to success for this population include having same race mentors.

The second sub-research question read: To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American males' self-efficacy regarding feeling as though they belonged in the higher education environment? Bandura defined self-efficacy as the ability to persist enhances one's self-efficacy (1977). This idea was particularly relevant in the lives of African American males as they often attended college to end generational curses. Further, the ability to matriculate into the higher educational arena not only impacted the young African American men, but also systematically impacted their families.

Mario understood the necessity of not becoming a product of his environment. He stressed that he came from a difficult past and grew up in the inner-city housing development. He realized that he had to rewrite his path to not only improve the life of his family, but also his mother's. Mario is indebted to his mother for her grit and her determination to work several jobs so that she could provide a safe place for him to reside. He also appreciated that she surrounded him with positive role models so that in her absence, he was involved in a structured environment. Mario said, "it's my responsibility, as an individual, to make sure that I don't become a product of it [his environment], so I had to make certain decisions to better myself." Accordingly, Junior also grew up in the inner city and realized early in life that his athletic ability could provide an avenue to help his family procure a better life.

Junior shared:

the childhood game that I learned to love soon became a job... once most people I

bumped into started telling me that this would be a great way to put my family in a better situation. Ultimately, being decent in sports at an early age put me in a position whereas if I felt as if I was the leader in my family whose job was to one day make life better for everyone even though it was never directly stated.

Essentially, my family depended on me to do something they were never able to do which was to get out of their current situation of poverty and to live what they believed to be the American dream.

Moreover, the African American male participants often looked at the college experience as an opportunity to escape their current situation and to meet family expectations. Further, both the males and their families expected the college environment to be a place where they felt accepted, valued, and respected. African American males need some semblance of themselves and have an environment where they will not be judged but valued because of their contributions.

Although not the sole focus, the study marginally shines a light on the broader issue of being an African American male in today's society and the media perception of the African American male. The findings of Balkaran (1999) disclosed that the commitment of serious crimes in inner cities were by a very small proportion of African-American youth. The tendency to characterize African American males as criminals continued in our society. The negative stereotype placed upon African American males continued to affect the African American community, as well as their prospects for employment and advancement. Leach (2011) stated that if African American youth do not see images of themselves achieving academic success, educational priority will seldom exist. All of this study's participants agreed with Leach (2011) and reiterated that African American students need to see African American mentors and role

models working in various fields and embedding seeds of knowledge into their campus community.

This research study further reiterated several arguments that should be addressed. African American students need to have a sense of belonging, feel like their culture is accepted on campus, and that emotional support provisions be accessible on college campuses (DeFrietas, 2012; Hylton, 2013; Moschelle, 2013). A prevalent issue for higher education arenas noted is that African American faculty members represent a small number of university professors (Madyun et al., 2013; Pittman, 2012; Watkins, 2011). Griffin (2012) determined that the lack of African American faculty and staff contributed to the issues African American males have with adapting to the college environment. Reddick (2012) concluded that there was a necessity for having same race mentors and role models. He determined that mentors of other races are often not culturally sensitive, nor are they familiar with the challenges that face African American male students.

The findings of this study revealed that African American students, males specifically, often must confront the college community regarding their ignorance of the African American culture. Hooks (1992) defined the role of African American students at PWIs stating, "When the minority voice is conveyed in the classroom, it is piecemealed into the learning process as a 'side dish' to the White American entrée" (p. 2). Pragmatically, African American males are often faced with the responsibility to persist despite the stereotypes and barriers placed upon them because of the traditions associated with them since the dawning of their arrival in America. Finally, it was necessary to incorporate the African Americans' culture, needs, and perspectives into the fabric of all institutions of higher education. Whereas, same race mentor relationships significantly contributed to the African Americans males' abilities to persist despite the systemic

impediments designed to defeat.

### **Researcher Positionality**

As a qualitative researcher who understood that the researcher biases might be transparent, therefore, it is necessary for the reader to understand both the researcher's personal and professional background. The researcher's personal experiences have facilitated the understanding about same race mentors at institutions of higher education. As an African American, from the time of entering kindergarten until high school graduation, the researcher was often faced with feelings of being displaced and misunderstood. The researcher never saw people who looked like the researcher or even living in the researcher's community; these factors brought feelings of loneliness and isolation. The fact that the researcher never had an African American teacher, role model, or mentor throughout the researcher's formative education often created a disconnect from the educational environment.

Upon completing high school, the researcher believed there had to be a way for all students, regardless of background, to have the opportunity to learn in an environment in which they felt comfortable and where they felt they belonged. Ensuring that students everywhere would be able to have someone with whom they could culturally relate, and who understood their needs became the researcher's life mission, which was accomplished when the researcher became a teacher.

Growing up, there were African Americans in the community who were teachers, so becoming a teacher was an attainable goal for the researcher. However, the idea of being taught and mentored by a person that looked ethnically familiar, who understood the researcher's circumstances, and who achieved similar goals was lacking. For these reasons, attending an HBCU was necessary for the researcher's growth and development. Prior to the researcher

attending college, there was no exposure to an African American college professor or a person who possessed a terminal degree.

Being influenced by one particular African American professor was something that changed the researcher's life and will never be forgotten. The professor saw the potential in the researcher that others did not. The professor instilled in the researcher the idea to never give up, despite obstacles or life instances that may derail from persisting. The professor encouraged the researcher to work within the educational field to make a difference and to become a role model and mentor to other African American students. The professor challenged the researcher to break down barriers that may hinder progress and to persevere towards the goal of becoming a Doctor of Education. Years later, that goal has almost been achieved and the professor made an actual difference in the researcher's life.

In addition, as a parent of an African American male, the researcher has witnessed first-hand the barriers that this population faces. As an administrator in the public-school system, the researcher has observed African American boys being alienated and misunderstood by their teachers. As a faculty member, the researcher has encountered young African American men who believed that world was against them and needed to be shown that they were cared about and that someone believed in their ability to succeed. The researcher has had an opportunity to view same race mentors and the college experiences of African American males through the eyes of a parent, teacher, school administrator, professor and mentor. Each view is deemed different depending on the perspective but informs the researcher's analysis.

### **Implications and Opportunities for Application**

There is research that has recognized the importance of same race mentorships' impact on the college experience of African American males (Blake-Beard, et al., 2011; Brown, 2013;

Dahlvig, 2010; Griffin, 2012; Moore & Tolliver, 2010). However, some higher education institutions have not addressed the issue as effectively as others. The focus in higher education shifted to having a diverse environment, rather than explicitly focusing on groups' unique needs both individually and equally. The intent of this study was to recognize diversity as an issue that needs to be addressed continuously; however, special attention needs to be given the African American male population because they experience greater difficulty with retention and graduation than other demographics in the higher education arena. With limited research about the importance of having same race mentor relationships available to African American male students and its relationship with persistence for this population, this study offers several implications that can inform numerous entities within the higher education arena.

### **Higher Education Administrators**

Although this study is limited in scope, it does offer valuable insight into the higher education community. Higher Education Administrators have the daunting task of creating an educational environment which will provide a quality education for every student. Persistence and retention of African American male students directly impact the growth and student population of a university. African American males often matriculate to the higher education arena, but often experience difficulty persisting. Strayhorn (2013) suggested that one way to retain African American male students was by not only addressing the social and academic needs of the student, but also by creating opportunities for same race mentorships to occur.

**Community and Same Race Mentorships.** The researcher recommends that programs need to be instituted to create an environment of inclusion and motivation. Programs already in existence in the African American male communities are the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 100 Black Men and Fraternity outreach groups. Additionally, implementing programs already

established may effectively assist in retaining African American males. Programs already in existence on some college campuses include the Black Man's Think Tank, the Student African-American Brotherhood, the Black Male Initiative, and the Meyerhoff Program. The aforementioned programs provided a haven for the males to discuss societal and academic issues while promoting self-identity and community activism.

One factor that research showed continuously impacts African American males' persistence in the educational process was having same race mentors. The same race mentor relationships for the participants in this study were crucial. These relationships aided them in knowing how to progress in their day to day lives and navigate their campuses. The mentors shared with the participants blueprints of conforming to the status quo, strategies to handle encounters with authorities, and served as sounding boards for the African American males while also providing familiarity with the higher education arena. The African American males were able to see people who shared the commonality of achieving goals, while exchanging positive techniques and knowledge with others.

As this study highlighted, having same race mentorships is a critical component to African American males' college experiences and as such, higher education administrators should allocate funding and resources to starting African American male mentorship programs on their campuses. There are several same race mentorship programs in existence and could be modeled to fit other campuses. Some examples of institutions with same race mentorship programs include: the University of Cincinnati, Georgia Southwestern University, Texas Southern University, and the University of Maryland Baltimore County. Universities can use current African American male student leaders to serve in the capacity of creating new mentorship programs for other African American males on their campuses.



**University Hiring Practices.** Realistically, the primary issue is identifying, recruiting, and retaining qualified people of color while taking heed to the adverse rates they are hired in the higher education arena. Attention to the recruitment and retention of the African American faculty member is essential. One consideration is to start introducing the idea of becoming a college professor and the importance for African Americans to attain terminal degrees in the formative years of their educational preparation. The aforementioned strategy may aid in filling the gap for not the only African American males in higher education, but the African American community in general.

Leaders in the higher education arena must first address the issue at hand, which is that there are a limited number of African Americans who are qualified and willing to serve in the capacity of higher education administrator or faculty member. The major issues surrounding PWIs' difficulty with recruiting and retaining this population range from the limited number of African Americans who were credentialed to serve as a college administrator or faculty member. Due to the limited number of African Americans who were qualified to serve in this capacity, the issues were not limited to the PWI, community but was an issue for the higher education arena in general.

The participants of this study reiterated the necessity of having same race mentor relationships and how those relationships assisted in their persistence. For African American males, the presence of African American faculty and staff members far exceeded the realm of mentor. These relationships transcended into surrogate parents and confidants. The mentees depended on these relationships to not only help them persist through the college arena, but through life. Same race mentor relationships are necessary for the growth and advancement of African Americans in higher education.

Leaders should also note the tactics and techniques HBCUs used to recruit and retain the African American professional. An assumption is that African Americans comprise a majority of administrator and faculty positions at HBCUs. However, the truth is, that although most HBCUs have African Americans in the senior administrative levels, many of the faculty members who serve the students, encompass a wide range of diversity. Although a majority of African American faculty members who attain the status of tenure occurred at HBCUs, the reality is that if HBCU's were no longer in existence, African American faculty rates would diminish because HBCUs comprise only three percent of the nation's colleges and universities (Strauss, 2015) and African Americans, in general, constitute three percent of college-level faculty (Department of Education, 2017).

College administrators may also find value in the results of the study by recommending professional development seminars to their faculty and staff members, particularly hiring managers. Seminars that focus specifically on intra-racial relationships, racial awareness and acceptance, and racial equality in the classroom are essential for faculty and staff working with students. One distinct way to address this issue is to bring in professionals to train faculty and staff on these issues. Evaluations from professional development opportunities should be shared with hiring officials. The hiring officials may find the data collected in this study beneficial when they develop their recruitment initiatives for faculty and staff members.

To increase the number of African Americans eligible to apply for these higher education jobs, educators from all grade levels should begin encouraging students to attain higher degrees. Attaining terminal degrees in their subject matter will enable African Americans the ability to serve in the capacity of both professor and mentor. In the meantime, universities should begin recruiting credentialed K-12 professionals to matriculate to the college arena. The recruitment of

K-12 professionals may aid in filling the recognizable gap. By addressing the daunting number of African American credentialed to serve in higher education, the students will be significantly impacted because they will be learning from individuals with whom they could culturally relate.

### **Higher Education Students**

This study is most impactful for African American students, particularly African American males. The students may find this information useful when they are deciding which institution to attend and when deciding which facets of various institutions meet their desired needs. The focus may be on creating environments where the students feel welcomed and included. Further, the students should be given a same race mentor both on the level of student and higher educational employee. Students should begin holding universities accountable for providing diversity and should question rather they would be assigned a same race mentor during their school visits. If the university is unable to provide these essential same race relationships, then student could continue their search of other universities. If institutions begin losing money, then they may be prompted to ensure that same race mentorship opportunities are available. The participants of this study were able to acquire their mentors from either being their professor, advisor, or coach, and recognized that there is a need for same race mentors in the higher education arena. Every aspect of the student's progress has the potential to impact the institution's growth.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Additional research is recommended to expand the scope of the study. Based on the findings of this study, African American male college students benefited from having same race mentors and role models who helped them maximize their college experiences. Due to this study's limited scope, further research could be done in the following area to solidify the findings

of this research. Further research on African American males' need for their institution to exude a sense of community and inclusion while providing support to the males when they are forced to conform to societies status quo. Institutions of higher education must also realize that same race mentors are the driving force behind African American males persistence, self-efficacy and success.

Additionally, the findings of this study revealed that African American males must progress against every odd, face barriers with persistence and create subpopulations that would embody an atmosphere that provided them with the ability to rise above negative stereotypes. Lastly, the study revealed that their self-efficacy, college preparation, and the necessity to reach academic goals was achievable when their mentors fostered and influenced their inner strength and confidence. The aforementioned realities are areas that could further be explored to narrow the educational and equity gap for the African American male college students. This study sought to explore and analyze same race mentorship experiences of African American males who completed a college degree and to determine how these experiences may have shaped the students' persistence and transition through to graduation.

Further research may be done on the recruitment of African Americans in the higher education arena to serve in the capacity of same race mentor. Analysis of the roles those same race mentors played in the African American males' day to day life may also prove to be beneficial to both the institution and the individual. The study further solidified the necessity of African American males to have same race mentorship relationships and how those relationships impacted their college experience, while recognizing the limited number of African Americans to serve as a mentor in the higher education arena. Additionally, the study identified how the same race mentor was able to assist the participant with persisting through life, while

encouraging them to be a trendsetter and good role models for the youth to follow. Lastly, the inclusion of other important and necessary segments of the participants' life such as parent's educational background, and the diversity of their educational community could allow for the triangulation of data.

### **Conclusion**

It has become clear that African American male students, in general, are under tremendous stress which adversely affects their navigation of the college experience. The researcher understood that a lack of belonging and inclusiveness will continue to exist if it is not purposefully addressed particularly at PWIs. The most significant factor that encouraged persistence was the availability of a same race mentor. Notably, the African American males in this study were able to address the primary research question: What are the perceptions of African American male college students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college experience? This study also addressed two sub-research questions: 1) To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' persistence in college? 2) To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' self-efficacy regarding feeling as though they belong in the higher education environment? However, the lack of African Americans in the profession could continue to pose a problem for other African American males. Numerous African American men were unable to participate in the study because they did not meet the selection criteria of having a same race mentor.

As noted in the research, the recruitment, retention, and sustainability of the African American presence on campuses continued to pose an issue. College satisfaction for the student increased when there was more African American presence on campus, specifically in the

position of professor, which was solidified by the participants of this study. African American students need to have people on campus with whom they can culturally relate and people whom they feel understand their plight. Researchers further noted that if African Americans do not have positive interactions with African Americans on campus to act as role models and mentors, concentrating specifically on faculty relationships, the students are less likely to feel as if they belong.

The research ultimately showed that African Americans, in general, face the same realities when entering institutions of higher education. Just as students need same race mentor relationships, faculty could also benefit from those same relationships. To meet the needs of African Americans, in general initiatives should occur, so that recruitment, retention, and sustainability of the African American on campus was no longer an afterthought, but a priority. Theoretically, research uncovered numerous ways to improve African American presence, but the fact remained that the shortage of African Americans in higher education continued to create a dissonance.

### **Impact Statement**

For years there has been the discussion about the “war on African American boys”. African American males are exiting from the back door of the schoolhouse and entering into the front door of the prison system (Abdullah-Johnson, 2014). The question arises why is this a natural progression for so many African American males? Where is the ball being dropped? How should the problem be addressed?

Education begins at home. Parents are the first teachers, but due to various factors such as the women’s rights movements, the late 1970’s early 1980’s drug epidemic, and the welfare reform initiatives, many African American fathers have been removed from the homes. During

the era of the 1960's African American families fought to make progress both educationally and socially. This period marked the beginning of the end of the strong nuclear family, which included both the mother and father working collectively to raise productive citizens. What better way to destroy a family, but to break up the nuclear structure of the family. Many fathers were removed from homes because of financial hardships, welfare reforms, or continuously incarcerated for minor infractions requiring maximum sentences.

Unfortunately, the cycle of destruction of the African American male continued. From violence within their communities to police brutality. At some point, it must stop, and the most realistic way to approach change, outside of becoming more supportive of one another, was through the educational system. The system of education must be reformed. If African American boys are not taught to read by the third grade that they most likely will drop out of school and fall into that school to prison cycle. The question arises why are they not being taught to read in a timely manner? The most obvious reason is the difficulty for the current teachers to relate to the male population.

The majority of formative educators are White centric Americans, who have probably never lived in the inner cities, which can make them easily influenced by the societal norms of fearing African American males. The media majorly contributes to the false perceptions of cultural norms, which consequently contributed to the detriment of African American males. However, knowledge is power and the more that educators interact with the African American population they will realize that they have been spoon fed a myth. The African American male can be afforded a more quality education once harmful myths are demystified about the danger of the African American male being dangerous. In addition to changing the perception of the African American male initiatives need to be made to encourage more African Americans to

become teachers. Students often learn from those who they feel like they can relate to both socially and emotionally.

It is no longer acceptable to ignore the issue of race in America, particularly against African American males. Americans must first realize that there is an issue, address the issue and change the societal norms. Logically, one should begin addressing these issues within the education system. Education is broader than the classroom, must be inclusive, and should provide knowledge for all people. It is imperative that citizens realize that education is the foundation for our future leaders. Education does not stop in the schoolhouse but resonates in the streets on a daily basis. Education, or the lack thereof, is evident in the way we interact with others, and by how we choose to include populations that are often feared. It is particularly apparent when one has positive interactions with people of different ethnicities. Martin (2016) stated that education is the most vital issue facing Blacks because it is tied to income equality, the prison system, and every critical issue facing this population. If African Americans have opportunities to become educated, then they are on the road to being empowered.

This study further exasperated the importance of having same race mentors and how those mentors impact the life of African Americans and particularly the African American male. This study solidified that African American males are in dire need of a shift of perception and are working to achieve the American Dream. African American males are continually progressing through the barriers designed to derail and achieving unsurmountable successes. If higher educational arenas shift to promote inclusive environments for the African American male the realities for this population will not be as dim. This population will, in turn, realize their potential and begin to shed that light with the rest of the world. Educational equality, equity, and



accessibility are the tenets that drive this world, and African American males are ready to take that realm.

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## APPENDIX A

## Research Questions in Relation to Interview Protocol Questions

1. What are the perceptions of African American male college students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college experience?
2. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' persistence in college?
3. To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male self-efficacy regarding feeling as though they belong in the higher education environment?

Research Question & Sub-questions	Protocol Question(s)
What are the perceptions of African American male college students regarding the impact of same race mentor relationships on their college experience?	<b>4,8,9</b>
To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male college students' persistence in college?	<b>5,7,8,9</b>
To what extent did having a same race mentor affect the African American male self-efficacy regarding feeling as though they belong in the higher education environment?	<b>2,6,7,8,9</b>
General Background Questions	<b>1,3</b>

## APPENDIX B

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**DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT**

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## Participant Letter

Dear Participant:

My name is Crystal Locke, and I am a professor at Savannah State University. My intent is to conduct a research project entitled Examining the Experiences of African American Males with Same Race Mentors at Institutions of Higher Education, which is a requirement of my doctoral program at Georgia Southern University. The study will consist of me conducting interviews of African American males who have graduated within the last five years from an institution of higher education. The purpose of my study is to explore how the presence of same race mentors influenced the college experience of selected African American male students.

This letter is to request your participation in the study. If you desire to participate, an audiotaped interview will be scheduled with you in my office on Savannah State University campus and will last approximately one hour. Please be assured that your participation is voluntary, that all responses will be confidentially coded and secured in a locked file cabinet in my office for 3 years following the completion of the study, no identifiable features will be associated with the interview process, and at the conclusion of 3 years all audiotapes and documents will be destroyed. I think now it is 5, check Also there is no penalty if you decide not to participate, or if you decide to later withdraw from the study.



It is my hope that information will be obtained that will better inform higher educational institutions about the preference of African American male students regarding same race mentors on campus. Your participation could enlighten universities as to whether having a diverse faculty population influences the college experience of African American male students.

You are invited to ask questions at any time during the interview process. Please be advised that there is no physical risk involved with the study, but you may feel some personal discomfort due to sensitive nature of the topic. If at any time you want to conclude or reschedule the interview, there will be no penalty, and permission will be granted. You are also invited to review the results of the study once it is completed.

If you desire to participate in the study or have any questions regarding the study, please contact me at (912) 604-6932 or my faculty advisor at Georgia Southern University (Dr. Daniel Calhoun at (912) 478-1428). You may also contact the Georgia Southern Office of Research Compliance if you have questions about the rights of research participants or privacy concerns at [IRB@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:IRB@georgiasouthern.edu) or call (912) 478-5465.

Sincerely,

Crystal Locke  
Professor

## APPENDIX C

## Screening Questions

1. Briefly tell me about yourself?
2. Did you have a same race mentor?
3. What year did you graduate from an institution of higher education?
4. Did you attend a predominantly white institution or a historically black college or university?
5. Describe your relationship with your mentor? How did he/she shape your life and college experience?

## APPENDIX D

## Interview Protocol

- 1) Describe how you felt when you first arrived on campus (Ritchey, 2015)?
- 2) Describe how you were treated on campus by faculty and staff (Wiley, 2014).
- 3) Does the media's perception of the black male impact a college campus? Describe specific encounters (Leach, 2011)?
- 4) Were you ever expected to be the voice for black people in your college classes?
  - a) If so, when and describe the situation (Hooks, 1992)?
- 5) What expectations did you have of the university to meet your needs as an African American male student (Chen et al. (2014)?
- 6) Are there any activities on campus that are geared to the African American male student (Brooks et al., 2012)?
- 7) Were you be influenced, mentored, and/or counseled by a same race faculty or staff member at your university (Moschella, 2013)?
  - a) If so, provide specific examples.
  - b) If not, how might you have benefited from such a relationship(s)?
- 8) Describe how the presence of a same race mentor(s) influenced your
  - a) Intellectual development and academic success (Chen et al., 2014)?
  - b) Involvement in campus activities (Payne & Suddler, 2014)?
  - c) Understanding of the college process (McCoy, 2014)?
  - d) Personal development and well-being (Marbley et al. (2013)?
  - e) Retention in and/or completion of college (Chen et al. (2014)?
  - f) Satisfaction with the college experience (Ingeno, 2013)?

- 9) Explain why a same race mentor(s) might be more helpful or influential to you as compared to a mentor(s) of a different race (Brown, 2013)?
- 10) If you could change anything about your experience at your institution what would it be?

## APPENDIX E

### **COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

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### **DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

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#### **INFORMED CONSENT**

Crystal Locke, doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Georgia Southern University, this study is being conducted as part of a class requirement for my academic program.

The purpose of this research is to capture the positive and negative experiences of African American male students attending an institution of higher education. A qualitative study uncovering the personal experiences of the research subjects will attempt to address: (1) how do African American male college students experience higher education? and (2) what assists African American males in persisting to graduation and being academically successful?

Participation in this research will include participating in a planned interview that will last up to an hour. Participants will answer a series of questions about their experiences as a student attending an institution of higher education. Participants' response to the questions will be recorded using audio recording equipment. These responses will be then coded and reported in the research findings.

#### **Potential Risks:**

Given the nature of the study in capturing the lived experiences of individual participants, there may be some temporary discomfort and emotional distress in sharing personal experiences. The researcher will be aware of this and give participants the opportunity to debrief about what has been shared. In addition, if researcher is made aware of this discomfort, then the researcher will encourage the participant to take a moment to gather their thoughts and emotions.

#### **Possible Benefits:**

Implications from this study will attempt to provide information to higher education administrators wishing to increase degree completion for African American males. There are no direct benefits for participants; however, results may lead to policy changes and/or programmatic developments that better support African American males attending institutions of higher education.

#### **Duration/Time required from the participant:**

Participants will participate in a one-hour interview group. After participation in the interview, participants may be contacted individually for additional comments.

#### **Statement of Confidentiality:**

De-identified or coded data from this study may be placed in a publicly available repository for study validation and further research. You will not be identified by name in the data set or any reports using information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain

secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.”

**Right to Ask Questions:**

Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher’s faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-5465.

**Compensation:**

There is no compensation for participating in this research. However, participants will be given refreshments before the interview beginning. In addition, all participants who complete the interview will receive a gift card.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participants are not required to participate in this study; participation is voluntarily; Participants may end their participation at any time by telling the person in charge. Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer.

**Penalty:**

There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study; Participants may decide at any time they don’t want to participate further and may withdraw without penalty or retribution. Withdrawing from the study will, however, cancel your opportunity to be placed in a drawing for a gift card prize.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H18340.

Title of Project: Examining Same Race Mentors for African American Males at Institutions of Higher Education

Principal Investigator: CRYSTAL LOCKE, (912) 314-9373, [cl04194@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:cl04194@georgiasouthern.edu)  
 Research Advisor: Dr. Daniel Calhoun, 912-478-1428, [dwcalthoun@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:dwcalthoun@georgiasouthern.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

## APPENDIX F

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
<b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-478-5465		Veazey Hall 3000
		PO Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

**To:** Locke, Crystal; Calhoun, Daniel

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Approval Date:** 3/27/2018

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H18340** and titled **“Examining the experiences of African American males with same race mentors at institutions of higher education”** it appears that your research involves activities that do not require full approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to federal guidelines. In this research project research data will be collected anonymously.

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):

- B2 Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
- (I) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (II) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Any alteration in the terms or conditions of your involvement may alter this approval. *Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that your research, as submitted, is exempt from IRB approval. You will be asked to notify the IRB upon project completion. If you alter the project, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB and acquire a new determination of exemption.*

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes  
Research Integrity Officer