PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS ON THE
EFFECT OF STUDENT MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON
THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCES OF MINORITY STUDENTS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Naomi Christopher

May 2017

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Acknowledgment

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the students who have ever felt that they were alone and had no one to talk to about their experiences as a minority student on campus. I was in your shoes, and I see your struggle. You are not alone.

It is also dedicated to my loving mother, Sharon Joya Graham, the most consistent person in my life. When I wanted to give up, your inspiration and your prayers are what kept me going. You are a strong woman of color who empowers other women of color to be great. You are the reason I want to be an educator. You are MY reason. To my older brothers, Garry and Nicodemus Christopher, growing up I wanted to be just like you both. I thank you for your dedication and continued support. Thank you for the late-night phone calls and pushing me to be a better me every day. To my dearest baby sister, you are the reason I chose to write on this topic. You are not alone, and you are loved. Regardless of what you are told in the classroom, you ARE somebody.

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Abstract

Background: Disproportionate failure and health issues of African American students enrolled at institutions of higher learning has been the focus of much discourse. Studies converge on multiple themes of students having inadequate support systems while documenting their experiences relating to students, faculty and non-academic staff of other races. **Purpose:** In exploring whether mentorship may have a beneficial effect in reversing the trend on the college success rates of African American students, the perception of full-time African American students on the effect of mentorship on their graduation rate and retention was examined. **Methods:** The participants are all African American college students in varying disciplines to ensure different experiences. First, analyzing the immediate experiences of African American students who have participated in mentorship programs while attending an institution of higher learning, the study developed a framework of mentorship. Second, examining their perception, the study identified several linkages between these students' campus experiences and their perception of mentorship. In this phenomenological study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants. Data was analyzed through a coding mechanism using Carspecken's critical ethnographic framework, while the theoretical development was based on Mezirow's grounded theory approach. **Results:** Results of the study revealed that subjects believed their advisors and peers were unable to relate to their struggles. Those struggles included experiencing greater stress and receiving disproportionately inadequate lack of support from peers and faculty. Subjects overwhelmingly supported mentorship. They felt the trajectory of their academic and

post-college journey would have been significantly better if provided mentoring.

Conclusion: Based on the study results, universities could formulate a long-term plan to introduce formal mentorship, where mentors would be given rigorous training for mentorship programs. Finally, a successful implementation of mentorship programs based on this study will go a long way towards alleviating a vexing problem in the American education system.

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Chapter One: Introduction

There are several proven strategies that can help students achieve success during their higher education career. Understanding students' limitations, their need for guidance, and the unique circumstances of at-risk students are key to ensuring that students thrive in their college journey. Moreover, these strategies prepare them for a successful entry into the workforce. At-risk students, or students at risk of dropping out of college, fail for many reasons. One such reason is lack of mentorship in higher education (Campbell, Smith, Dugan, & Komives, 2012; Davis, 2007; Quaye, Tambascia, & Talesh, 2014). In contemporary terms, Miller (2010) defines a mentor as someone with influencing power in a relationship between someone inexperienced – often younger, and an older experienced individual. This relationship is beneficial to the individuals involved because it creates a connection that includes careful instruction, encouragement, and competence in a variety of fields (Marshall, Lawrence, Lee Williams, & Peugh, 2015). Positive mentoring role models can enhance a student's college experience by providing good examples and offering advice on a college career path.

Having a mentor may greatly improve the likelihood that a student will have positive interactions with people during the collegiate experience and ultimately obtain a college degree (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). These on-campus positive interactions can have significant impact on an undergraduate student in providing the student with incentives and impetus in continuing their studies. Minority students are in vulnerable positions in college, especially on a predominantly white campus. Their vulnerabilities are borne out of their cultural and societal disconnect with the majority population on the

campus, which places these minority students at a heightened risk of dropping out. African Americans are most at risk for not earning a college degree (Brown, Davis, & McClenton, 1999). According to the most recent National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, the 2014 nationwide graduation rate for African American undergraduate students was 38 percent (IPEDS, 2015). This is substantially below the white student graduation rate of 60 percent for the same period (IPEDS, 2015).

Disproportionate graduation rates for African American students compared to their white counterparts prompts us to examine the relationship between mentorship and academic success from the perception of these students. Thus, against the backdrop of lower college retention rates of African American students, it was necessary to review whether mentorship may have a beneficial effect in reversing this trend. One possible reason students stop going to school or dropout is due to the lack of a support system (Crisp & Cruz, 2007). African American students may not feel that they are welcomed in the college community to which they belong (Grives, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2005). In this environment, the positive effects of mentorship and access to mentoring services for African American students become even more critical.

Another common problem that plagues the African American community is tension that turns into health conditions. African American students face several crises on campus that can be a detrimental to their physical health. In a study, it was shown that African American students "have documented alarming occurrences of anxiety, stress, depression and thoughts of suicide, as well as a host of physical ailments like hair loss, diabetes and heart disease." (Camera, 2015). It is important to note that often times these conditions go untreated and can worsen due to a lack of treatment, causing greater issues

in the health science community. It is imperative that these students seek treatment upon noticing a problem.

While a number of studies (Brittian, Ry, & Stokes, 2009; Campbell et al., 2007) and policy reports (Harper, 2012; Schneider & Yin, 2011) strongly suggest that there exists a direct positive relationship between mentorship, college retention, and graduation rates of African American students, none of these studies isolated specific factors connecting mentorship, college retention, and graduation rate. This study was intended to examine in more detail the relationship between mentorship and educational outcomes of African American students and in the process help close the gap in literature by developing a theory of mentorship. By analyzing the immediate experiences of African American students who have participated in mentorship programs while attending an institution of higher learning, this study also explored the immediate personal experiences of African American students who have participated in mentorship programs while attending an institution of higher learning. By doing so, the study may help determine the most effective approaches to mentorship towards increasing African American students' retention and graduation rates.

Statement of Problem

The vast majority of African American students enrolled in an institution of higher learning have a very poor support system or no support system at all (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Harper, 2012). There are factors that can influence an African American student's chance for success while in college. Often, African American students feel they are outnumbered by students of other races. Whether this is only perceived or an actual reality, due to historically low

enrollment among this demographic cohort, it is important to acknowledge that many African American students may feel unwanted and may experience difficulties relating with students, faculty, and non-academic staff of other races on their campus. Such sentiments contribute to a large cultural gap between African American students and students of other races. According to Lynch (2006),

> The uniqueness of African American culture sets it apart from other cultures and consequently is often viewed as negative; African American hairstyles, dress, music, body language, and verbal communication styles can be disconcerting to the American society that is based on conformity; so when defining or identifying behavioral problems among a group of children, it is important to consider the influence of culture on the definition and perception of the behaviors (p. 2).

The lack of proper guidance on education and career aspirations exacerbate an already existing cultural gap for African American students even further. Many African American students attending colleges or universities do not have the proper guidance on how to succeed in college. They do not know what steps are needed to graduate on time or graduate at all, and they do not know how to relate their newly acquired knowledge and competencies to specific professional paths. Furthermore, African American students may have access to the necessary financial resources, but often they may not take advantage of them, as they lack proper guidance on this matter from a knowledgeable and trustworthy individual (Kim, 2012). Conversely, in those instances, when students do not have access to resources, but do have a productive relationship with a mentor, access to mentoring services, or to a support system, African American students may successfully complete their higher education (Kim, 2012). Oftentimes, student dropout rates among

African Americans are high because some institutions of higher learning fail to recognize that the problems exist and the student has become disengaged and isolated (Patton, 2014). As Lynch (2006) pointed out,

> In order to effectively assist African American students, the majority of social services should be placed within the school system. It also would provide valuable resources for African American children and their parents, and provide a support system capable of addressing their problems and creating solutions that have long-term viability (p. 2).

In summary, there are many factors that contribute to African American students' success in college (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012). The relationship with a mentor or participation in a mentorship program can help mitigate negative factors and increase students' odds for success and eventual graduation (Gershenfeld, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was twofold. First, by looking into the immediate experiences of African American students who have participated in mentorship programs while attending an institution of higher learning, the study sought to understand these students' perception of mentorship. Second, by examining their perceptions, this study determined the linkages between these students' campus perception and their experience of mentorship. This is expected to expand our understanding of how mentorship perceptions may influence students' perception of the value of education and how such perceptions may shape those students' retention and graduation rates.

Research Question

African American students' campus experience has been studied to establish its shaping effect on their academic performance. Mentorship is recognized as an academic experience that may have a beneficial impact on these students' academic success as seen through their graduation and retention rates. Therefore, the research question of the study is as follows:

What are the perceptions of full-time African American university students on the impact of mentorship on their graduation rate and retention?

Context for the Study

The study was conducted on the campus of a large, public, nonprofit university with significant proportion of African American students in a major metropolitan southwestern city. Invitations to participate in the study were distributed through social media, relevant websites, and bulletin boards. These invitations specifically targeted African American full-time university students who participate or participated in mentorship programs offered by the university or by other organizations.

The research intent was to encourage interviewee participants to reflect on their university experiences with mentors and mentorship. During the interview process, participants were invited to discuss their personal experiences and perceptions of effectiveness related to mentorship relationship in which they participated through their course of study. Research participants were interviewed to uncover why African American students make certain decisions while in college. The interviews yielded

insight into whether having a mentor during their collegiate career provided a motivating factor to the African American students while pursuing their college degrees.

Several concomitant factors of mentorship were directly probed which provided valuable insight about the general effectiveness of mentorship programs. Such factors include: socioeconomic status, race, religious beliefs and parents' education. These are key factors that impact students during their college career (Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2009; Aliyu, 2016; Byfield, 2008; Henning, Krägeloh, Thompson, Sisley, Doherty, & Hawken, 2015).

Research Methodology for the Proposed Study

This study employed a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research methods are used to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate and triangulate findings within a study, and the data collection is also implemented concurrently (Creswell, 2012, 2013). Furthermore, qualitative research approaches yield more comprehensive data (Creswell, 2012, 2013) and are appropriate for assessing the complex relationships between mentorship and African American students' outcomes in colleges and universities.

The qualitative nature of the study possibly provided the research participants with the opportunity to reflect on their immediate personal experiences with mentoring. This research design also investigated a plausible relationship between mentorship and retention and graduation rates of African American students.

The interviews lasted 30-60 minutes, during which time the researcher collected qualitative data on African American students' direct personal experiences with mentors and on-campus mentoring services, and the influences such relationships had on their educational outcomes. Data was also collected on students' campus experiences and their

interactions with educators. This enabled the study to develop linkages between students' campus experience and their perception of mentorship. Such understanding may yield valuable insight into the power of mentorship, such as, how a mentor may have shaped a student's collegiate experience by transforming the student on an individual level.

Significance of the Problem

African American college students have the highest college dropout and the lowest graduation rates compared to the dropout and graduation rates of other racial and ethnic groups in the United States (U.S.) (IPEDS, 2015). This study contributed to a better understanding of this phenomenon by examining the effects of mentorship on retention and graduation rates of African American university students and their immediate personal experiences with participation in mentorship programs. The significance of the problem is influenced by several factors.

One such factor is the socioeconomic status. Many African American students come from low-income families in which there are few books in the home, and neither parents, nor grandparents went to college (Harper, 2012). For students whose parents or grandparents attended a higher learning institution, they most likely studied at a historically sociocultural college or university (HBCU) (Harper, 2012). Usually, most students at HBCUs are African American. In this context, African American students may experience difficulties adjusting to new, much more diverse, and more academically-demanding environments. Perceptions of the study's participants may shed light on how such adjustment difficulties of the African American students may have been a contributing factor for their low retention and graduation rates.

Another factor is culture. The majority of professors in the institutions of higher education are Caucasian and often cannot easily relate to the growing needs of African American students in their classrooms (Harper, 2013). The presence of African American faculty and non-academic staff on campus helps African American students in identifying individuals like themselves in positions of leadership (McGrady & Reynolds, 2014). Furthermore, it provides a more supportive environment for African American students (Brittian et al., 2009).

In this sociocultural context, there is a high demand for African American-led mentorship programs for college students, especially first-generation undergraduate students. However, a low supply of such programs due to institutional factors mentioned above, may contribute to African American students dropping out of school to find a place where they feel more valued. Although not having a mentor or lack of access to a mentorship program may not be the only reason students drop out of college, lack of mentorship may be a leading reason for African American college students not performing to their full potential. Nonetheless, there are college campuses that have effective support systems for African American students. For example, according to one study (JBHE, 2006):

Colleges and universities with high Black student graduation rates have set in place

orientation and retention programs to help Black students adapt to the culture of predominantly white campuses. Mentoring programs for Black first-year students involving upperclassmen have been successful at many colleges and universities. Other institutions appear to improve graduation rates through strong Black student

organizations that foster a sense of belonging among the African American

student population (p.94).

Thus, many institutional measures have led to reductions in college dropout rates among

African Americans (IPEDS, 2015). By enabling students to be part of an organized

mentoring group or program, it is possible to impart in them a sense of belonging. This

sense of belonging introduces a sense of acceptance among this vulnerable student

population, which in turn enables them to do their best while attending college.

Therefore, mentorship can provide the students with a sense of belonging, which in turn

enhances their chances of continuing with their academic studies without dropping out.

Educational Value of the Study

This study has several implications for higher education. First, results of this

study may potentially identify various techniques that college educators and

administrators can use to appropriately address the lack of or insufficient access to

mentors and mentoring programs for African American students. The educators can use

the results of the study to proactively address problems with African American student

graduation and retention rates. It is also very important to address early on issues that are

related to African American students who appear to be having a difficult time due to their

college surroundings.

Second, the study may better inform our understanding of how mentorship may

influence students' perception of the value of education and how such perceptions may

shape those students' retention and graduation rates. This is especially critical for those

campuses which have a small African American population. It can also stimulate critical

thinking to understand the need for and the effects of mentoring not only for African

Americans, but also for other racial and ethnic minority groups who frequently experience similar problems associated with the lack of mentoring. Thirdly, this study may contribute to the scholarly examination of a growing body of extant research on specific reasons behind the low African American graduation rates.

Finally, the study may raise awareness of college educators and administrators about the importance of access by African American students to on-campus support services and resources. Most importantly, the study may add a much more nuanced understanding of African American students' college campus experiences.

Operational Definitions of Terms

African American.

Any individual having familial origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

Cultural Gap / Divide.

Recognizable differences among people and cultures. These include different customs, behaviors, and values and often cause divisions and barriers to understanding and interaction (Oxford University Press, 2017). Author Prentice (2001) defined this gap or divide as a separation among members of society. The separation can include economic, patterns, habits that are "so different that they have substantially different psychologies" (Prentice, 2001, p. 395).

Dropout.

According to Cambridge University Press (2017) a school dropout is a student that stops attending school before completing the formal course of study. This includes leaving the school before obtaining the official degree.

Mentor.

While there is no universal definition of mentor, for the purpose of this study a mentor is considered an individual who acts in the role of leader, guide, and expert to devote time, knowledge, and guidance to another person. The mentor provides mentoring to a mentee usually in ongoing face-to-face interactions (Donaldson, Ensher, & Grant-Vallone, 2000).

Mentorship programs.

The U.S. Department of Personnel Management (2008) defines mentorship programs as structured programs that provide specific goals that includes regular monitoring and guidance with oversight.

Support System.

A support system is a network of supportive resources that are used to achieve one's particular objective (Seashore, 1980).

Limitations of the Study

The proposed study was conducted in one large Southwestern university campus. African American students' experiences on one campus may not be generalizable to all African American students and thus, it may be considered a limitation of the study. However, the researcher proposed a small case qualitative study based on a single campus for a number of reasons. First, the proposed research was constrained by time commitment coming from data collection, data analysis and inferencing, IRB process and managing research participants. Second, the literature provided a guideline for sample size that can produce a subjective understanding of the perception of participation. For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) suggested having five to twenty-five

participants to develop an adequate understanding of how the target population perceives and interacts. In a similar context, Morse (1994) recommended having at least six participants to have a methodologically robust study. Since there are no specific rules as to what would be an appropriate sample size for qualitative research, the proposed design may be adequate even if the experiment is conducted in one campus setting. In this context, Patton (1990) suggested qualitative sample size may best be determined by the time allotted, resources available, and study objectives. Also, once the diversity of experiences has reached saturation, the amount of participants will be satisfied.

Summary

African American students are highest among population groups at risk for failing or not completing higher education (IPEDS, 2015; Hinrichs, 2014). The most prominent reason for this is that African American students may feel that there is no support system in place to help them progress along the path to success (Baker & Robnett, 2012). These feelings may be attributed to a lack of or insufficient supply of mentorship programs targeting the African American student populations, limited positive role models, and unstable environments. Mentoring programs designed to help African American students should improve educational outcomes among this student population.

Like all students, African Americans require a nurturing environment with their peers and mentors. Within this nurturing environment, they can grow, learn, and adapt in a campus setting. Implementing mentoring programs would improve retention and graduation rates among African American students (Satyanarayana, Li, & Braneky, 2014). The next chapter will present a review of the main studies on the effects of mentorship on African American college students.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The effect of on-campus mentorship programs for African American students has received some scholarly interest in recent years. This literature review explores some of the contemporary themes within this emerging area of scholarship. The purpose of such review is to assess the current state of academic research on this topic, identify the gap in contemporary discourse, and establish a linkage between the proposed study and existing research on the topic.

Current Mentorship Programs

One of the main concepts to analyze when looking at African American college student retention is mentorship programs. It is important to examine the mentoring programs on college and university campuses in order to identify how higher education institutions manage these mentoring programs and appropriately match a student's need with the scope and content of the mentoring programs available. In this regard, Gibson (2014) posits that:

> Participants in mentoring programs tend to be open to new experiences, take
> constructive criticism, and develop critical thinking skills. The goal of a
> mentoring program is to further develop and refine the mentee's skills, abilities,
> and understanding. Thus, mentoring programs could have a real, practical solution
> to increasing graduation rates in this population and could therefore
> simultaneously increase African American male student representation on
> community college campuses (p. 75-76).

While Gibson's work focuses on the positive impact of mentoring for African American males, there are other studies that highlighted the benefits of mentoring for African

American females (Bartman, 2014). In another study, mentoring has been identified as a factor leading to success in education and personal development, while clarifying how mentoring may positively affect the career choices of African American females (Crawford & Smith, 2005).

Mentorship programs introduce new opportunities for college students. These programs include many opportunities such as Greek system, cultural organizations, student government, community service, and race-based organizations. Gibson (2014) described several successful college mentorship programs currently in place that improve retention rates among minority students, assist new students with their transitional needs to the college environment, and provide leadership experience, guidance, and support. These successful mentorship programs also provide minority students academic planning for the following semester (Gibson, 2014).

Mentorship programs vary by campus. The programs on HBCUs campuses may not be formatted in the same as programs on predominantly Caucasian campuses. A difference is that "some programs focus on assessment and assertiveness training, psychological counseling, and multi-cultural training, while others focus on building self-esteem, self-efficacy, and mastery" (Brittian et al., 2009, p.5). The types of programs that focus on building self-esteem among students are very beneficial to student retention. "Many universities have designed programs to improve diversity, promote academic resources, and address students' unique differences in an effort to empower the students even though they are not the majority on the campus" (Brittian et al., 2009, p.7).

It appears that on some campuses, "diversity programs created a sense of community and pride in Afro-centric culture; students benefited from the knowledge of

mentors, and themselves served as mentors to younger African American males; some

such programs increased the GPAs in more than 50 percent of its participants" (Brittian et

al., 2009, p.6). Mentoring positively impacts African American college students'

experience and improves overall outcomes toward graduation and career advancement

(Gibson, 2014; Sullivan, 2015).

Cultural Gaps on College and University Campuses

While seeking a mentor, a prospective minority mentee typically looks for a

faculty or a graduate student belonging to the same race. Due to disproportionately lower

rate of Black faculty members and graduate students, finding a Black mentor often

becomes difficult. This is important to consider as there is a sociocultural gap or cultural

divide that exists between a prospective African American mentee and a potential non-

Black faculty that can act as a mentor to the mentee. These factors may indirectly

contribute to the lack of active mentorship programs in college campuses for

undergraduate African American students. On some college campuses, "Black

enrollments in higher education are at an all-time high. But nationwide the Black student

college graduation rate remains dismally low, at a level of about 45 percent. The Black

student college graduation rate is about 20 percentage points lower than the rate for

whites" (IPEDS, 2015). Limited support system appears to be a strong reason for why

many African Americans drop out, and as a whole African Americans do not feel they

belong on college or university campuses (Dennis et al., 2005).

There are several factors for low retention and graduation rates of African

Americans compared to students of other racial groups. Intolerance to African American

students is one such indicator, which must be viewed through its complexity. First, in the majority society, there already exists a negative stereotype about African American youth (Morones, 2014; Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009; Pratt, 2016). Second, when an African American student steps onto any campus that is not a historically Black college, the student already feels out of place. Therefore, when African American students feel harassed or discriminated against, such harassments and discriminations become magnified and, as a result, the affected students are at risk of dropping out. Another factor is a lack of academic rigor in K-12 education, which leaves African American students inadequately prepared for college level courses (Lynch, 2006). Poor grades can lead to frustrations and contribute to the likelihood that the affected African American students will dropout. Many African American students come from families that have no or limited traditions of higher education. In these instances, there can be a lack of necessary support and understanding for nurturing the African American student's effort to succeed in higher education (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

Another major reason for low African American graduation rates is economics. Many students cannot afford the full cost of tuition, books, room and board (Bok, 2015, p.101-103). Scholarships may supplement large portions of these expenses, but often even this is not enough. According to some studies, almost two-thirds of all African American students drop out due to financial reasons (Schneider; Tinto, 2004; & Yin, 2011). Some students simply do not want to incur large amounts of debt, while others take out an extensive amount of loans. In addition, financial aid is often a recruitment incentive in the first year of school, but may not be offered in subsequent years.

Ultimately, some students believe that it is more practical to drop out of school and place emphasis on immediate survival concerns (Schneider & Yin, 2011).

Some students that have tried to balance work while going to college find both tasks simultaneously too difficult and many of these students will drop out of college (JBHE, 2006, p. 93). There are several high-ranking colleges and universities which enroll only a small percentage of African American college students. Therefore, it is useful to examine where black students do well compared to their white peers. This consideration is important for black students' college journey, as it is vital to know where they stand a good chance of success and where they have little chance of success (JBHE, 2006, p. 92). It is essential to note that top tier colleges only enroll a small number of African American students (Hinrichs, 2012), and this perpetuates the historical gap where higher learning was entirely inaccessible to African Americans.

The Role of Support Systems in African American Communities

There is a tremendous need for support for college students within the African American community. Community support must start early in a student's life, not after the African American students starts college. Ideally, students should knowingly have the support of their loved ones and community members before they embark on their college journey. Support such as this imparts a sense of accountability to self, and to the community that influences them to succeed (Harris, 2013). If the student does not feel support from home, they may try to find it in negative ways while attending an institution of higher learning. It is best to engage African American youth at an early age and teach them how to create effective solutions and address possible concerns (Thomas, 2012, p.57).

Violence amongst the African American community has also proven to have a major effect on students and their success. Some African American children grow up witnessing all sorts of violence and criminal activities in their communities that could deeply affect their future (Shakoor & Chalmers, 1991). This exposure to violence shapes the African American youth in such a way that certain stressors and stimuli may elicit violent behaviors while in college. Mentorship could help the African American student emulate positive behaviors and learn new life skills from the mentor. African American communities need "… programs to truly promote social justice in the area of violence prevention through promoting self-determination and civic engagement" (Thomas, 2012, p. 64). Because violence is a major problem that has plagued the African American community, being involved in mentorship programs may impart in the African American student necessary skills to develop self-determination and civic engagement (Jarjoura, 2013).

It is best to engage African American students in activities that will take their focus off of negative activities and help them focus on building a positive future. According to Thomas, African American students would benefit from learning solutions to avoid violence (2012, p. 64). Mentorship programs can provide such training as well as provide the student with necessary life skills, empowerment, and better decision-making techniques. In this context, mentorship can be seen as a bulwark against indulging in the propensity for violence. Mentorship can also aid them in learning the life skills to make the right choices.

The African American youths' support system in general has few positive male role models compared to other U.S. racial groups. Without a positive male figure, young

African American college students begin to question their abilities. According to Noguera (2003), "most African American children are not enrolled in effective schools that nurture and support them while simultaneously providing high quality instruction; even as pressure is exerted to improve the quality of public education" (p. 451). Thus, when the African American student gains college admission, the lack of positive male role models adversely contributes to high dropout and low graduation rates.

The Statistics of African American Students in Colleges and Universities

There exists a substantial gap in enrollment, retention rates, grades, and participation between African American students and Caucasian students in colleges and universities. Regardless of the importance that is placed on higher education, the graduation rates and retention rates among African American students are relatively poor (Brittian et al., 2009). If an African American student enrolls in an institution of higher education, there is a high probability that this student will not graduate. In 2014, the average U.S. graduation rate in four-year colleges and universities was 38.1 percent for African American and 55.9 percent for Caucasian students (IPEDS, 2015). Overall, there has been a tremendous decrease in college graduates of all races in the U.S. over the past ten years (IPEDS, 2015). This holds a very negative implication not only for the African American community, but for American society as a whole and "it also reflects negatively on universities that want to increase diversity and retention rates" (Brittian et al., 2009, p. 7).

Within the African American community, problems in education appear to be greatest among males. The gender gap in higher educational attainment between male and female African American students is wider compared to other racial groups. In the

U.S. a lower proportion of males obtaining higher education degrees holds serious negative implications for the African American families and communities (Brittian et al., 2009). As previously discussed, this can be for a variety of factors. Males may lose the drive and motivation if they do not have the proper support systems. Moreover, they often pursue careers that do not require a higher educational degree such as sports or entertainment.

The Social Implications of Mentorship Programs for African American College Students

A combination of issues creates the need for mentorship programs for higher education institutions with low African American population. A theory of "acculturative stress" can explain the graduation and retention rates among African American students (Anderson, 1991; Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000). Acculturative stress "is the result of an observed threat to one's cultural beliefs and values that creates a unique vulnerability to psychological distress. It stems from one's belief that a person must assimilate to the majority culture, while abandoning the values and traditions of his or her own culture" (Brittian et al., 2009, p. 3). This could also affect a student's emotions. They may consider themselves less than or not as good as the other students on their campus. This could prove to be very prevalent amongst African Americans due to their underrepresentation on college campuses (Brittian et al., 2009).

Summary

The reviewed literature suggests that there is a critical need for mentorship programs targeting African American students. The goal of such programs is to help African American students gain a sense of self-efficacy. African American students may

feel that they must assimilate to attain success in higher learning. Most often, these students fail to realize that this is not necessary, because there are individuals who can assist them in getting acclimatized in their new academic setting without assimilation.

There are several societal issues associated with African Americans with regard to mentorship programs. There are also several things that can happen within African American communities that cause students not to complete college or university. One of the main issues is the lack of support within their communities. Another issue is the lack of male influences in the family structure. African American males are the most at risk of not completing their college or university education. Examining current on-campus mentorship programs can be very effective in gathering what is currently being done and what needs to be done in the future to produce higher retention and graduation rates among African Americans. Higher retention and graduation rates can reduce cultural gaps on college campuses. Once the cultural gaps have been minimized, the statistics for African Americans successfully completing a college or university degree may improve. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology of the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of the study was twofold. First, the study explored the impact of mentors and mentorship programs on the retention and graduation rates in African American students in one southwestern college campus. Second, the study examined African American students' experiences while participating in mentorship programs at their institutions of higher learning. Analysis of results from this study is expected to aid in designing an effective mentoring framework to enhance African American students' retention and graduation rates. The broader goal of this study was to uncover effective mentoring approaches can be successfully emulated by other colleges and universities as they strive towards improving minority retention and graduation rates. The methodology design is depicted below in Figure 1.
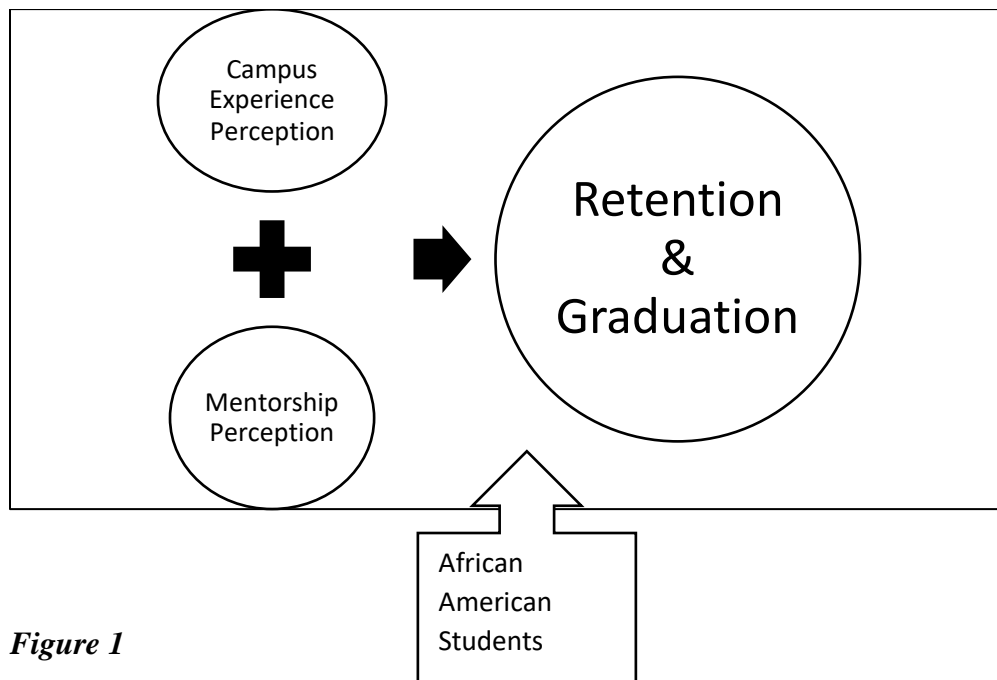
Figure 1

Study Design

The objective of this study was to gain an understanding of how different approaches to mentorship in college campuses may enhance African American students' motivation towards a successful academic journey on campus. From the interactions between students and their mentors, the study identified factors that may motivate and influence young African American men and women to continue their academic journey. This understanding was formed based on aggregating data from a qualitative case study. The premise was that the case study-based iterative process enabled the researcher to develop a nuanced understanding of a framework of effective mentorship by analyzing the aggregated data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. According to Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey (2005), qualitative reporting provides information about the "human" side of an issue. This human side may include contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of the actors involved in the process. The aim of most qualitative research is to understand people's experiences from their own perspectives as opposed to constructing an understanding according to a universalizing framework (Geetz, 1973; Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001). Following the general framework of qualitative research, this interview based research provided a social and psychological reality that is constructed and situated within the actual lived experiences of the study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) that arose during each student's collegiate career. In constructing a theoretical understanding of mentorship's effectiveness, the study assessed how mentorship could shape and impact their future careers.

Students may have a wide spectrum of college experiences depending on the campus location, surrounding environment, and the type of colleges they may attend, and they may come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures. These diverging backgrounds and campus placements give rise to many different behavioral patterns, perceptions of peers and authority figures, family and community support dynamics – all of which can contribute to students' academic learning. To link these many background factors with student learning via quantitative approach may be deficient due to methodological weakness that could arise from quantitative analysis' inability to incorporate many dimensions inherent in those factors. Therefore, by conducting interviews and exploring the wider spectrum of background factors within a qualitative study framework, this research sought to identify effective mentorship approaches for improving the college experience of African American students.

Data collection through interviews, data analysis and inferences was based on Carspecken's Five-stage methods of research (Carspecken, 1996) described later in this section. The conceptual framework of this study was derived from transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). This theory is appropriate because it posits that learners are able to learn things as they process the new learning and create a new frame of reference (Mezirow, 1991). Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define their life world. Frames of reference are guideposts for assumptions that allow us to understand our lived experiences (Mezirow, 2007). Thus, using multiple frames of references by looking at cultural perceptions, feelings, cognitions, and expectations, this

study provided a greater understanding of the problems African American students face with and without mentorship.

Qualitative research design methods are used to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within a study, and the data collection is also implemented concurrently (Creswell, 2012, 2013). Furthermore, when a study's aim is to yield more comprehensive data to benefit the research objective, qualitative research approaches are effective (Creswell, 2012, 2013). Thus, in this context, qualitative approach is appropriate in trying to understand the complex relationships between mentorship and academic success as seen through retention and graduation. The qualitative nature of the study provided the research participants with the opportunity to reflect on their immediate personal experiences with mentoring or narrate their view of mentorship based on their campus experience. The semi-structured interview research design allowed for investigating linkages between mentorship and academic success of African American students.

Implications for Higher Education

This study has several implications for higher education. First, findings of this study may potentially provide various techniques that college educators and administrators can use to appropriately address the lack of or insufficient access to mentors and mentoring programs for African American students. The broader objective of this research is for educators to take the study results and proactively address problems with African American student graduation and retention rates. Study results may also be beneficial in assisting African American students that are finding it hard to academically and socially adjust to college. The findings could help mentors and mentorship programs

impart within at-risk student the ability to cope with potential risk factors that may have historically induced them in making bad decisions. By identifying a set of nuanced responses that are effective bulwarks against the propensity to make bad decisions, the study results can help these at-risk students in many situations besides academic issues.

Second, the study results can also be used to assist students belonging to other racial and ethnic minority groups as they frequently experience similar problems stemming from lack of mentoring. Third, it is expected that this study will contribute to the scholarly examination of a growing body of extant research on the specific reasons behind high dropout and low graduation rates of the African American students. The study can raise awareness of college educators and administrators about the importance of access by African American students to various support services and resources that should be available on campuses for this specific demographic cohort of students.

African American students are at the highest risk for failing or not completing higher education (IPEDS, 2015; Hinrichs, 2014). A crucial reason for failure is that African American students may feel that there is no support system in place to help them progress along the path to success (Baker & Robnett, 2012). These feelings may be attributed to a lack of or insufficient supply of mentorship programs targeting the African American student populations, very few positive role models, and unstable environments.

 Programs to help African American students at-risk should be consistently implemented to improve educational outcomes among this student population. Like all students, African Americans simply require a nurturing environment so that they can grow, learn, and adapt in a campus setting. Implementing nurturing mentoring programs would help enhance retention and graduation rates among this group of students. In the

next chapter, the study will explore a variety of in-depth topics related to mentorship and African American students in higher education.

Research Question(s)

The research question(s) of the study are:

What are the perceptions of full-time African American university students on the effect of mentorship on their graduation rate and retention?

Participants

The study population consisted of African American students that have been exposed to the mentor-mentee relationship within a university setting and have formed opinions regarding mentorship through personal experience. All research participants were enrolled at a four-year college or university and ranged from 18 to 35 years of age. There was no specific academic major which the research participants have to pursue. The research sample was selected based on the number of interviews and the candidate's level of interest in the study.

Data Collection

The initial participants were chosen through solicitation and direct contact with the researcher. The interviews were conducted in the location preferred by the research participant. In all cases, informed consent from each participant was obtained. All portions of the informed consent form were signed before anything was recorded or any question asked.

Location

The primary location of the study was Houston, Texas. The study was not offered to any subject living outside of the greater Houston area.

Sample Size

Because the study collected data on personal feelings and individual beliefs, the sample size was kept relatively small. The process was based on constant comparison between the participants and continued until interviews with participants reveal new ideas and concepts. The interviewing process was terminated once the point of theoretical saturation was reached, and where an additional new participant would neither yield any meaningful new information, nor contribute further to the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon in question. Number of participants interviewed were eight. More than eight participants was not needed to obtain a sufficiently rich data set for the study. The theoretical justification and rationale for this sample size has been further elaborated in the forthcoming section on data collection.

Pre-selection and the Interview Process

From the identification of the subject to the completion of the interview the subject has gone through several steps which are outlined below.

Step 1 – Identification of Potential Study Participants

The participants for the research sample were selected from the identified population. For the research sample, the study looked for those African American students who had the experiences with mentorship programs, especially when it came to access and effectiveness of mentoring services on campus. Upon receiving the consent from the student and due satisfaction of the eligibility criteria, the participant was considered ready to participate. This process of reviewing eligibility criteria is stopped once the researcher obtained a total of twenty-five potential participants that have both consented and satisfied the eligibility for participation.

Step 2 – Selection of Interview Participants

Upon satisfying the eligibility criteria, a selected participant was subjected to a face-to-face interview with the researcher. The face-to-face interview was the primary data collection method. As articulated in the Sample Size section, eight students were selected from the pool of twenty-five eligible participants identified in Step 1 above. The participants were chosen based on who had the most diverse interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and took place on the campus. The interviews were recorded by using a voice recorder device. All participants were informed about the use of voice recorders beforehand to ensure acceptance. The research participants were also informed about complete and unconditional anonymity of their participation in the study. After the interviews, the data transcription process began.

Each interview was transcribed into a set of written narratives. The interviews specifically focused on mentoring as a key factor in the success of African American students throughout their educational career and the decisions they made upon graduation. Subjects were interviewed to uncover why African American students make certain decisions while in college, and if African American students had a specific mentor while pursuing their college degree.

Step 3 – The Interview Process

The combined process of data collection via interview and data analysis probed the various concomitant factors of mentorship to gain valuable insights on the general effectiveness of mentorship programs. Such factors included: socioeconomic status, race, age, religious beliefs, history of parents' education, and family background. These are the key factors that may shape students experience during their college career. The combined

process of data collection and data analysis was based on Carspecken's Five stage process (Carspecken, 1996).

The first stage of this process involved the collection of monological data, where the researcher was a passive observer trying to frame the process in her own mind by collecting objective data. This stage was followed by the second stage of preliminary reconstructive analysis, where based on the data obtained from the first stage the researcher adjusted her themes, relations and settings prior to embarking upon the third stage. The third stage consisted of collection of dialogical data through the interviews with the selected study participants. The term dialogical is used because of interviews that consist of dialogues between at least two people. This stage tried to differentiate between subjective, objective and normative references.

The interview process was thorough. It was guided by uncovering participants' perception of mentorship along many themes. Examples of questions were: (a) As a minority student on a campus, what has your experience been like? (b) What stressors do you face as a minority on a college campus, what is your definition of assimilation? (c) How does assimilation happen? (d) How do you deal with your stress? (e) What are some on campus situations you've had to deal with? (f) How did you handle those situations? (g) Do you think college professors are able to relate/tailor their curriculum to the needs of minority students? (h) What have been your experiences with mentorship programs on your campus? (i) How has the mentorship program shaped your college experience? (j) From your experience, how has access to a mentor formed your view of academics? Each question went into a specific topic domain involving key topics within the study.

The third stage of dialogical data generation lead the way into progressing to the fourth stage of identifying a set of system relations and references to apply to a broader context. These relations and references helped with coding in order for the researcher to see simple patterns of thought and behavior by looking at those relations and references.

The following Table 1 provides a breakdown of types of data collected, the data collection method and the timeline of data collection. It also provides a summary outline of demographic detail of each of the eight interviewees.

Table 1

Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Degree Program	Major
Nigeria	Female	24	African American	Bachelor	Business
Madagascar	Female	28	African American	Masters	Education
Libya	Male	23	African American	Bachelor	Math
Kenya	Male	28	African American	Bachelor	Business
Ghana	Male	25	African American	Bachelor	Psychology
Eritrea	Female	29	African American	Doctorate	Health science
Chad	Female	27	African American	Doctorate	Health science
Congo	Male	31	African American	Masters	Sociology

Data Collection

All participants were interviewed using interview protocols created by the researcher. All interviews were structured in person or via telephone. Each participant

was informed that they will be recorded using an audio tape for transcription. In addition to the audio consent, participants understood that their identities would be concealed in the transcription and in the research paper. This allowed the subjects to be free-flowing and transparent. The interviewer had enough time to make sure everything was transcribed correctly.

Instead of being overly concerned with the ability to generalize their experiences to a larger population, the researcher was focused on an in-depth exploration of an individual's experience. To gain a clear perspective of the participants' story, the researcher utilized intensive interviewing. Intensive interviewing permitted an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience, and is a useful method for interpretive inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). This process was designed to elicit more information than what is available through other data collection methods such as surveys.

From a formalistic framework, the interview consisted of semi-structured, open-ended, and non-judgmental questions constructed in a way to encourage stories around the participant's life experiences. Moreover, the interview process was engaging interviewees in a dialogue which enhanced the understanding of comments. The in-depth nature of an intensive interview was beneficial as it reveals each participant's interpretation of their experience (Charmaz, 2014).

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2005), the use of interviews and observations are commonplace in a qualitative case study research. In order to extrapolate the most detailed data during the interview, the researcher's goal is to make the participant as comfortable and engaging as possible. It is expected that the more relaxed a study participant is the more neutral and quality laden data can be collected, which in turn will

assist in constructing the theoretical paradigm to better understand the dynamics of mentorship in the retention of African American university students.

The main issues the interviews explored, were the societal issues faced while being a minority on campus and the feelings towards mentorship programs. Other issues were: feelings towards peers and instructors on campus, community factors, support systems, and feelings towards the interactions they have had with others on campus. These issues were chosen after reviewing the research questions.

Data Analysis

To interpret the data, the researcher organized and analyzed the information collected (Merriman, 1998). The data gathered via interviews was analyzed utilizing a thematic approach to allow for patterns and themes to emerge from the data. Theories were generated during the research process through a continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The entire process contained preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2013). In this qualitative analysis, data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously (Merriam, 1998).

Two of the interviews were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service with an accompanying confidentiality agreement. The researcher reviewed all transcriptions for accuracy. Interview transcripts were entered into a computer based software package utilized for facilitation and preparation for data analysis. The others interviewees were captured transcribed by researchers' notes during the interview process.

Upon completion of all interviews, the data was read and re-read to code and categorize. Coding is the first step of data analysis, as it helped to move away from particular statements to a more abstract interpretation of the interview data (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding involved examining the data line-by-line, searching for themes, concepts, and patterns of behavior in order to identify, label, categorize, and summarize each part of the data. A line-by-line, open coding of data and comparing themes to each other ensures credibility of research findings. This also minimized distortions of the study participants' experiences that may result from researcher's individual bias. The researcher kept a log to manually list the categories and codes with a detailed explanation of why designated codes were created, what should fit into the code, and what was purposely left out.

Ethical Issues

Each research participant involved in the study was assisted in thoroughly understanding their involvement in the research study. Each interview proceeded after both securing the IRB approval and signed informed consent from the participant. IRB approval prior to the start of the study was obtained to ensure the procedures and interviews were in compliance with all ethical requirements related to research involving human participants. Moreover, the participants were informed that they would be free to withdraw from the study via phone or email anytime they may no longer want to be involved in the study.

Summary

The study relied on the qualitative methodology with the research design utilizing individual interviews as the main method of data collection. In developing such model,

Carspecken's approach to data analysis was be used to develop strategies that could

potentially improve the collegiate experience for African American students on campuses

around the nation. The next chapter will discuss the results and findings of the interviews

and data collection.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of the study was twofold. First, by looking into the immediate experiences of African American students who have participated in mentorship programs while attending an institution of higher learning, the study explored the impact of mentors and mentorship programs available to African American students in institutions of higher education. Second, the study developed a robust theory of mentorship, which may inform our understanding of how mentorship may influence students' perception of the value of education and how such perceptions may shape those students' retention and graduation rates.

The Process

The study consisted of a semi-structured interview process of African American students that have been exposed to the mentor-mentee relationship within a university setting and have formed opinions regarding mentorship through personal experience. These participants were asked several questions in face-to-face and telephone interview sessions at designated campus locations. In regards to the interview protocol, the Carspecken Critical Methodology standard was used for this research. There were a total of eight participants that were involved in the study. Due to the sensitivity in topics, each student was assigned the name of a country in Africa as their identifying pseudonym. These interviews were conducted and initial reports generated after assigning pseudonyms to the interviewee to both protect interviewee's anonymity and eliminate bias from the process.

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

For this study, all research subjects were enrolled at either as an undergraduate or as graduate student at the time of interview. These subjects range in age from 18 to 35 years old.

Of the eight participants, two were interviewed in person and the remaining six were interviewed over the phone. Each subject identified on their consent form if they wanted to be recorded or not. The majority of students declined to be recorded. Only two students agreed to be recorded and have their interview transcribed. The two students that were interviewed in person were given the ten question set questionnaire (Appendix A) to fill out. While conducting interviews with the students that did not wish to be recorded, the researcher took extensive notes and had more interactive discussions with the subjects.

Report on Semi-Structured Interview

The face-to-face and telephone interviews were the only data collection method. Initially, a larger set of students were identified based on their responses to a questionnaire. The responses were elicited specifically to identify (i) whether students were African American, (ii) whether students transferred from a college with a large population of Caucasian students, and (iii) whether students had personal feelings towards mentorship programs in relation to the overall college experience. Students satisfying these initial screening criteria were kept in a pool of potential participants, from which a subject was randomly selected for the interview. Each of interviews lasted for approximately one hour. The primary investigator attempted to accommodate the individual's preferred interview location. Before the interview process started all students

were assured that their identities would only be known by the primary investigator. There were several students that were worried about their identities being known by faculty or various other people from the university, they were assured the study was strictly confidential. The subjects were told to be forthright and to answer each question with specificity. The two face-to-face interviews were conducted on the academic campus. The interviews were recorded by using a standard voice recording device. All subjects were informed about the use of voice recorders prior to initiating the interview. The data transcription process involved transcribing the subject responses into a set of written narratives. Generally, the exchanges between the subject and the researcher focused on identifying linkages between mentoring in college and academic success.

Demographic Breakdown

A total of eight of the participants were interviewed, the basic demographic profile included: age, gender, parent's income, parent's educational background, and participants' educational background. The demographic summary can be found in Appendix B. The interviewees were divided equally by gender. Of the eight participants, four (half) were female and four (half) were male. The majority, four participants (half) were in the 26 – 30 age group, three in the 21-25 age group, and one was in the 31 – 35 age group. These participants were asked about the type of high school they had attended. The overwhelming majority, 7 participants had attended public school. One participant did not respond to this question.

The next set of demographics focused on parent's income while the participant lived at home. In this regard, three of the participants reported that prior to turning eighteen years old, their parent's income was less than $30,000, two reported their

parent's income was between $41,000 - $50,000, one reported their parent's income was between $31,000 - $40,000, one reported their parent's income was between $51,000 - $60,000, and one participant reported their parent's income between $71,000 - $80,000.

Finally, participants were asked about their parent's educational background. Specifically, participants were asked about their mother's education. Three of the participants reported their mother had earned a high school diploma or GED, and three participants reported their mother had attended college, but did not earn a degree. One participant reported that her mother had earned a bachelor's degree, and one participant reported his mother had earned a graduate degree. Participants we also asked about their father's educational background. Three participants reported their father had earned a Bachelor's degree, and two reported their father had earned a high school diploma or GED. One reported his father had attended college, but did not earn a degree, and one reported her mother had earned a graduate degree.

In regards to the participants' own educational backgrounds, four (50%) of the participants were pursuing a Bachelor's degree, two (25%) were pursuing a Master's degree, and two (25%) were a doctorate degree. All interviewee participants were African American.

Interview Questions

This study is focused on comparing interviewees' opinions and experiences on how mentorship may influence students' perception of the value of education and how such perceptions may shape those students' retention and graduation rates. Appendix A provides the detailed list of the ten specific interview questions that were asked, among other discussions. The ten specific interview questions centered on responses and

opinions regarding student student's academic experience as a minority, and the impact that mentorship programs may have had on their student overall learning.

The interview questions can be categorized into two macro or broader themes of the campus experience and mentorship programs. The responses to these interview questions resulted in repeated themes that could be further granulated and categorized. The forthcoming section details the macro and micro themes that were discovered during the interviews.

Themes

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews explored the following research question:

What are the perceptions of full-time African American university students on the effect of mentorship on their graduation rate and retention?

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed details shared by subjects on whether coming in contact with a mentor shaped their career, or helped them in completing their degrees. The findings from the interviews are presented here in accordance with three main themes associated with the research question. Each of the main themes are further granulated into sub-themes. A summary list of the themes, sub-themes, and linkage with interview questions can be found in Appendix C. In the following, each of these themes is discussed in detail, and where the interview questions connected with a theme, a narrative surrounding the overall examination of the various interviewees are presented.

Theme 1: Subject's Minority Status Shaping Campus Experience

This is a broad theme that is represented by questions one, two, three, four, five, and six. The group of questions represented by this theme seeks information about i) how minority status may have shaped subjects campus experience, ii) what are the various stressors that may have caused impediment for their academic success, iii) what coping mechanisms subjects may have utilized to overcome the debilitating effects of stressors, (iv) what has been the role of assimilation in combating stressors and how assimilation may have altered subject's campus experience, (v) has there been situational context(s) that is representative of the totality of the subject's experience on campus, and vi) has there been situational context(s) that is anomalous to the totality of the subject's experience on campus. This particular theme was granulized into four sub-themes as follows.

Theme 1a: Particularized Stress Born Out of Minority Status

This theme emerged from questions two and four. These questions were developed to investigate the possible source of stress that resulted from the subject's minority status and how such stress manifested itself in shaping the subject's world view and what rearguard action subjects may or may not have taken. The specific topics investigated were (i) the type of stress was faced by the subject and (ii) how the subject dealt with such stress.

Theme 1b: Assimilation as a Coping Mechanism

This theme came out of the answers to questions two and three. The main focus of these questions were to understand (i) the subject's perception of assimilation, (ii) interaction between stressors in the subject's life and the process of assimilation, and (iii) assimilation that may have assisted in subject's stress alleviation.

Theme 1c: General Pattern in Minority Campus Experience

This theme is represented by question one. The main focus of this question was to trace a general trajectory of experiences faced by the subject on campus. Here the analysis attempts to capture whether there exists predictable patterns and practices in subject's campus experience.

Theme 1d: Situational Contexts in Subject's Campus Experience

This theme is represented by questions five and six. These questions distinguished itself from the sub-theme 1c in that it seeks to obtain a more nuanced understanding of subject's campus experience as via specific situations. Understanding these situational contexts will allow the researcher to draw meaningful insight into the life of minority students.

Theme 2: Campus Educators' Awareness of Minority Students' Unique Situation

This theme is represented by question seven. The question was developed to inform our understanding about minority perception of their on-campus educators. The open-ended question sought to identify various contingencies, such as (i) whether educators understood the cultural uniqueness of their minority students, (ii) whether educators incorporated themes germane to minorities, and (iii) whether the educators created classroom conditions to allow minority students to thrive. This theme explored

whether there is any linkage between an educator's handling of the classroom, curriculum, and minority's need for mentoring for academic success.

Theme 3: Mentorship On-Campus and Subject's Perception of Mentorship

This theme connects the availability of mentorship on campus, subject's experience with on-campus mentorship and perceived benefit of mentorship. These questions were developed to investigate the role of mentorship on campus and the subject's perception of mentorship programs. To better understand this theme we initiated this investigation by encouraging subjects to reflect on their university experiences with mentors and mentorship. Without focusing on specifics, question eight of the question set sought patterns and trajectories within the many mentor-mentee interactions. By aggregating responses from different subjects as they narrated their personal experiences and perceptions of mentorship effectiveness, question eight assisted in identification of structures with the dynamics of mentorship programs geared toward the African American student body.

Theme 3a: Shaping Effect of Mentorship in Subject's Campus Experience

This theme is represented by question nine. This open-ended question is designed to aggregate wider spectrum of mentorship perceptions to form a better understanding of how mentorship may have shaped their college experience. The open-ended questions sought to identify the outcome of many mentor-mentee relationship and specifically attempted to identify (i) whether mentorship helped subjects overcome cultural impediments to court success on-campus, (ii) whether mentorship contributed to positive campus experience, and (iii) whether mentorship helped develop a healthy attitude

towards the ethnic majority members on-campus, among many other similar themed questions.

Theme 3b: Shaping Effect of Mentorship in Subject's View of Academics

This theme is represented by question 10. This open-ended question encouraged subjects to reflect on their university experiences with mentors and mentorship and comment on their perception of how access to mentorship may have influenced a positive view of academics. The question sought to identify (i) whether mentorship helped subjects overcome fear of academics, (ii) whether mentorship contributed towards inculcating a positive view of academics, and (iii) whether positive attitude towards academics helped subjects in many different ways, including their retention and graduation.

Review of Key Themes

Theme 1: Minority Status vs. Campus Experience

Theme 1 was revealed through several of the questions. This theme provided a nuanced perspective of campus experiences in light of their minority race status. When speaking about campus life as a minority on a predominantly white campus, the results were more negative than positive. Four of the interviewees stated their campus experiences were negative and two stated their experiences were positive. Two of the interviews were indifferent and did not label their experience as either positive or negative. Of the majority of respondents that found their experiences negative, their experiences were quite painful and present in their memory.

For example, subject Chad referred to her campus experience as "very frustrating actually." In referring to administrator's or faculty's assistance of minority students,

Chad responded, "They don't want to help Black people specifically… It's almost as if they don't have the training to help minority students." Similarly, subjects Madagascar and Libya recalled negative campus experiences. Madagascar commented that, "In undergraduate, my experiences as a minority was very isolating." Libya stated, "My experience has been tough. I feel there has always been a stereotype placed on me based on the color of my skin." Subject Nigeria also remarked that her campus experiences included, "... passive, aggressive, covert racism…where I was truly offended and felt out of place."

Alternatively, two of the subjects, Kenya and Ghana recalled positive campus experiences. Ghana stated that his experiences have been, "pleasant and welcoming. I attended one of the most diverse universities in the [name withheld] area, where people came from all around the world." Kenya noted that his, "experience on campus has been a pleasant one thus far. I think it is because the campus is so diverse and…embraces the diversity."

Finally, the two remaining subjects were not specific in identifying their campus experience as negative or positive. However, subject Eritrea did provide remarks that discussed negativity on campus and add value to Theme 1. She stated that, "This is not my first rodeo. I know what is like to be on a major university's campus and be underrepresented…. I won't let the negative aspects of being a minority student on campus over shine my purpose." These remarks by Eritrea segue into the discussion on sub-Theme 1*a,* which sought responses on the negative aspects or stressors which may impede academic success for minority students because of their ethnicity.

Theme 1*a* zeroed in on identification of specific stressors that were the result of the respondent's minority race status. The interview questions two and four investigated the role of stress that resulted from the subject's minority status and how such stress manifested itself in shaping the subject's world view. Of the eight interviewee responses, five subjects had stressors which caused impediments and put a damper on their academic success. Two subjects did not specifically identify any stressors in relation to their ethnicity, and one subject found positivity even in stress related situations.

Let us consider subject Congo's positive reflection about dealing with stress related to his ethnicity. He states, "I still dealt with some of the struggles that an African American male has always dealt with…. Instead of preparing myself for, you know, hey this day is going to be really bad …Still always look for the silver lining in anything, especially when I'm dealing with stress." In a similar tone, subject Kenya did not identify having positive or negative experience due to his ethnicity. While indifferent to his own ethnic related stress experience, he did comment that, "Being a minority in college, I was prepared to be looked down on …"

Contrarily, five of the subjects did identify negative stress related experiences because of their black colored skin. Both subjects, Ghana and Libya referenced stressors faced due to not fitting in or not appearing to be the correct look for a job or profession. Libya stated that, "I feel like there is a stereotype within my profession of who is a professional and what they should look like." Ghana recalled stress because of "not being excepted by peers because of the color of my skin." Eritrea felt compelled to overcompensate in order to overcome the many stresses faced as a "minority student." Because as an ethnic minority "you're stared at, pointed out in class, overlooked,

tokenized, or just plain old under appreciated." The final two subjects, Nigeria and Chad both had extended narratives regarding race induced stressors.

Nigeria mentioned that, "The main stressor I face as a minority on a college campus is learning to pick and choose my battles. Do I become irate and hysterical with the 'friend' I thought I had for saying the 'N' word in a casual way ...calling another Black girl that they are ghetto. It is constantly an internal battle within oneself as a minority whether to take the higher road or to stand up and speak out against such disrespect."

In a similar tone, Chad recalled, "having a white professor" as a major stressor. Because, "I feel half of the time they don't even see me. It's almost as if I'm invisible and that goes back to the whole thing about invisibility. For some reason the professor didn't hear me until a white person raised their hand and said the same exact thing I just said… and it's like what the fuck did I just say? So, that is a major stress for me ... it's very intimidating when you go into a classroom or when you go on campus and all you see around is privileges and you feel like you don't have enough privilege and therefore you don't matter... it has impacted my studying habits definitely as I'm about to become you know a doctor, get my doctorate, but I still sometimes feel like I still have to prove myself." Subject Congo's remarks on feeling the need to prove himself led into the discussion about assimilation.

Assimilation was the focus of interview questions two and three. These questions formed the base of Theme 1*b* and delved into the process of assimilation and whether it alleviated the subject's stressors due to the subject's ethnicity. The findings on the theme of assimilation were categorized into two distinct groups. The first group of five

respondents (62.5%) did not view assimilation in a negative manner, rather these respondents used words such as, "open minded," "understanding," "adapt," and "experience" when talking about the campus assimilation process. However, three of the respondents viewed assimilation negatively and used words such as, "forced," "conform," and "pain" when describing the campus assimilation process. Let us consider the respondents' description of assimilation further.

Subject Congo had a positive perspective of assimilation. He stated that, "it's kind of like, you know, people how they social are intertwined and how they, you know, come together like how they all fit." Kenya stated that assimilation happened when, "an individual has an open mind and is willing to adapt to the cultural environment" and subject Ghana said that, "it happens by adaptation and experience through life and the world." Subject Nigeria further added to the positive remarks about assimilation by commentating that assimilation is "the absorption and acceptant of the beliefs and ideas of a certain group of people."

On the contrary, subjects Madagascar, Eritrea, and Chad viewed assimilation in a negative perspective. Madagascar stated that assimilation was the result of "social pressure to conform to what the mainstream, predominate culture is surrounding you. It is a self-preservation technique ... not being considered 'other'. It's why for years, Black people always tried to straighten their hair to look Caucasian, refrain from using 'Black sounding' names, and work twice as hard just to be viewed as equal to our Caucasian counterpart." Eritrea also remarked that, "It happens the moment you step into an institution of any kind and need to alter the essences of who you are."

Finally, Chad commented that assimilation was a "source of pain." She noted it happened when, "people decided to give up" and it is like "… refusing myself." She further described assimilation as, "… you are forced and you must do this." This discussion about forced assimilation sets the tone for Theme 1*d*, which sought out a more descriptive narrative of specific campus situations they may have impacted the minority student's academic pursuits.

Theme 1*d* was represented by interview questions five and six and provided for respondents to share specific situations that could shed understanding about the campus life for African American students. Six of the respondents (75%) had experienced specific situations that were negative based on being Black. Whereas, two of the respondents (25%) did not provide any situation specific experiences related to their ethnicity. Of those two, Eritrea did not comment on the question at all, and Ghana stated that, "Caucasian students felt there was no issue and Blacks are treated fairly."

Contrarily, the other six respondents had a variety of negative situational experiences on campus. Chad described walking to the campus library at night, and a group of white girls and Asians girls will cross to the other side of the walk to avoid her. She commented this avoidance is because, "It's just this misconception that 'She's Black. She's trouble.'" Subject Madagascar noted that she has been "called a nigger and other racial slurs by Caucasian, rich frat boys…" A similar example was presented by subject Nigeria in which she stated that at one sporting event people began chanting towards her that, "We lynch niggers!" This negative situation carried on into the classroom when subject Libya stated that a "Professor telling me that I wouldn't be able to succeed …

Classmates speaking Ebonics to me because they assume that I can't articulate my words."

In summary, the responses have provided insight into the campus experience, assimilation, and stress experienced by African American students. These thoughtful responses provide firsthand unique experiences of each student. Now, we step away from the individual student experience and turn the focus to campus educators' awareness or lack of awareness about the unique attributes and needs of their African American student body.

Theme 2: Campus Educators' Awareness of Minority Students' Unique Situation

Theme 2 sought to inform our understanding about minority perception by their campus educators. Interview question seven provided the prompt to encourage respondents to discuss whether educators incorporated classroom curriculum germane to minorities, and whether the educators created a classroom environment that allowed African American students the opportunity to thrive. Of the eight respondents, four had experienced educators' effort to incorporate unique African American cultural, history, and unique traits within their teaching, while the other four did not find educators aware or willing to tailor their teaching and curriculum to assist African American students to thrive in the classroom.

Interviewees that reported positive experiences with campus educators included Congo who detailed his experience of having "an African American literature course that was taught by an older white female. She knew the material because she knew the history. She made great recommendations for literature, but did she understand the struggles of being a Black male and/or female African American? No, she, she couldn't."

Here, subject Congo has reported an effort by an educator to promote African literature, but subject Congo questions the professor's ability to fundamentally understand the experiences of a Black male or female. Similarly, Eritrea reported that, "It's difficult to know the needs of every individual underrepresented student… However, if your purpose as a professor is to enlighten then you do that by highlighting the needs, experiences, and perspectives of all that you teach…not just the majority." Subjects Ghana and Nigeria both reported having academic educators that impacted their educational journals. Ghana commented that he "encountered two wonderful professors at my university one teaches history and the other teaches social psychology. They both made it a duty to teach the history of Blacks and also the unfairness we face today." In a similar tone, Nigeria reported that, she "had the pleasure of having great professors who tailored their teaching techniques to be geared to all sorts of students from different backgrounds. I have heard stories from colleagues who were not as fortunate." While Nigeria was pleased to have experienced professors that did tailor their teaching techniques to include a diverse curriculum, she reminds us that many of her colleagues did not have positive experiences.

In this regard, the other four interviewees reported not having positive educator experiences included Kenya. He stated that "...every professor to a certain extent has the option to help or hurt their students no matter what. And yes, there are some professors that abuse their power in such a way directly toward minority students." Madagascar also commented that unless a professor has "specialized training or experience understanding the needs of minority students, then they are unable to relate or tailor their curriculum to the needs of minority students. Many, often do not see an importance in doing so if the population of minority students on campus is low." Here again, subject Chad detailed

that, "… unless that college professor is a Black person, unless that college professor is a person of color that person will never understand what it means to be a person of color, what it means to be a Black person. They can try but they will never understand. There is a misconception that Black people are not as intelligent as white people."

Finally, the misconception Chad reported has resulted in academia not wanting African Americans in academia leadership roles, which further impacted the number of African American educators on campus that could assist in providing a nuanced context in curriculum and teaching because of their own African American roots. This is important to consider, because faculty often act as mentors and leaders on the campus for students.

Theme 3: Mentorship

In the case of African American students, it is vital to have access to faculty and educators that have a similar history and life experience. This issue was developed in Theme 3 and was based on the responses to interview question eight. The responses were overwhelmingly negative as it related to experiences with mentorship programs on campus. Out of the eight respondents, only one (12.5%) reported a positive experience, and the remaining seven (87.5%) reported no experiences or negative experiences with mentorship programs. In the only positive case, subject Kenya detailed that he, "…was only part of one mentorship program the Ambassadors, and it overall was a great one. It allowed me to meet likeminded people and begin my networking process."

Contrarily, seven of the remaining respondents did not have such positive experiences with mentorship programs. Subject Libya was quite adamant that, "There are no mentorship programs on my campus. I have to find these resources off campus."

Subject Ghana was also clear in stating that he has "not much experience" with mentorship programs. Madagascar reported that her "experiences have been very poor because formal mentorship programs do not factor in the needs of minority students." Madagascar did note that she had participated in an undergraduate program that was "tailored to minority students, they assigned to freshmen a mentor of color that was a higher level student." Madagascar mentioned it helped in directing students to resources on-campus, but "it did nothing to support education or career goals." Subject Nigeria stated that, "I can't even attest to this question, because I am not even sure if there was a mentorship program on any campus I attended. Which suffice to say, is so sad that I cannot even tell you if we had a mentorship program." Another interviewee, Eritrea also reported that she did not even know if there was a "mentorship program specific to minority graduate students." Subject Congo also reiterated that, "There weren't very many mentorship programs. We had, you know, like community help writing a paper. We have like the writing center…but mentorship was non-existent." Again, subject Chad also reported that, "I didn't even know there were mentorship groups on campus. I don't know of any. Hell, if my advisor does it. Shit, I call my advisor all the time. She ignores me. I don't get call backs." In this response, Chad sums up the frustration that the respondents experienced due to not knowing of any mentorship programs available for African American students.

Theme 3a: Perceive Impact of Mentorship in Subject's Campus Experience

While many respondents may have not had personal experiences with mentorship programs, they knew others that had and developed opinions about mentorship programs. Interview question nine developed Theme 3*a* which informed our understanding about

whether or not mentorship programs shaped the subject's campus experience, or if they did not have a mentor, do they believe a mentor could have helped them engage more culturally or socially on the campus. Of the responses, six reported positive personal interactions with a mentor or mentorship program, while one reported not having any experience with a mentor, and one reflecting what it would have been like had she been influenced by a mentor. It is interesting to note, that many of the respondents took a broad view of mentors. To them, it could have been a compassionate teacher, leader, or elder in the community. The mentor did not always hold a label as mentor, but rather acted as one through their actions and deeds. The respondents identified with them and the mentor had positively impacted their educational journey.

In one such example, subject Ghana stated that he had not belonged to any specific mentor programs, "but a professor of mine took great interest in me and groomed me into a great student." In a similar experience, subject Congo reported that, "… the closet thing, you know, to a mentor…he probably didn't know that he was mentoring, would have been a professor that was an English teacher and he was an older white gentleman, he was a judge and he was, …very fair but he was firm and…in terms of that shaped my perception…" Another positive example was reported by subject Eritrea. She stated, "I was part of the Louis Stokes Alliance for minority participation. This linked me to many wonderful professors of color that were invested in my holistic development." In a similar tone, Kenya reported that, "By me being part of the Ambassadors and not living on the heart of the campus, those organizations allowed me to be able to meet people outside the classroom in a social setting. By me being part of the organization, I could do a lot of networking that has paid off in my present and future endeavors."

In a different example, subject Chad reported that she had to go to a different campus to find a mentor. She commented that, "I really wanted a mentor so much that I literally have to go to [name withheld] University and find a mentor." Although she had to face the difficulties to go off campus to find a mentor she reported that, "… for one, I mean, …when I sent an email, I get an email back right away. Or, he will email me right back and say, 'You know what let me call you back because this is a conversation you need to have in person….' and to me that's mentorship…"

Finally, two of the respondents, subjects Libya and Madagascar who did not have personal experience with mentorship programs, but did speak to how mentors or mentorship programs could have improved the quality of life. These mentors can even financially improve the student's experience by preventing unnecessary delay in graduation. As detailed by subject Libya, "I believe I would have finished college in four years versus being a six year senior. I had to learn things on my own which ended up costing me more and prolonged me graduating." In a similar tone, subject Madagascar detailed that she would have been better prepared, "… if I had a mentor that specifically understood and addressed issues specific to the minority experience especially in a predominately Caucasian setting."

The findings for the overwhelming majority of the respondents were positive, regardless if they had personal experience or not with a mentor. It was a repeated theme that a mentor, or a mentor-like individual had the ability to positively impact and influence the trajectory of the subject's holistic experiences on campus. For those that did not have direct impact of a mentor, their perception was still positive in expressing how a

mentor could have shaped and improved their experiences on campus and appreciating their own cultural uniqueness.

Theme 3b*: **Shaping Effect of Mentorship in Subject's View of Academics**

The final theme on a mentor's ability to influence and shape the subject's experiences focused on academic experience of subjects. This theme is represented by interview question 10. This question encouraged subjects to reflect on their university experiences with mentors and mentorship and comment on their perception of how access to mentorship may have had a positive view of academics. The responses informed our understanding of whether or not mentorship influenced the subject's positive view of academics and more importantly whether mentorship helped in improving retention and graduation rates.

The final theme and last interview question produced the only unanimous finding that mentorship does have the ability to positively impact and improve the academic experience of African American students. Of the eight respondents, all (100%) had a positive experience or perspective that mentors and mentorship programs do specifically improve academic experience and performance of students. Let us consider each individual response.

Subject Ghana confirmed the positive linkage by stating that,

At first I was extremely anti-academics. They taught what they wanted and left out very valuable and historic points, until I met my psychology professor. She is so great and so in turned to what the world holds and how it treats different cultures. She not only taught me the academic side of things, but gave me wisdom to grow outside of college.(subject Ghana).

Eritrea also showed gratitude toward individuals that acted as mentors. She noted that, "I have undoubtedly been supported by extraordinary Black women who nurtured both my intellectual and personal growth… their presence and unwavering support and honesty I would have pushed through school with much less confidence." Subject Kenya recognized the importance of mentors in "time management." He noted that, "when it came to my school work, the Ambassadors helped me with time management … while taking a full load of classes and working off campus." In a similar response, subject Madagascar noted that "Having a basic mentor did provide access to resources that my Caucasian counterparts have…"

When asked how mentors impacted her experience, subject Chad commented that, "now, I think the whole experience has been positive because I've had a mentor. He understands the struggles of what people of color go through and because he understands that and also mainly because he himself has gone through it…it has helped him understand." In another example, subject Congo pithily stated that having a mentor "I don't think it would have hurt."

Of the final two subjects, Nigeria and Libya both responded about how they perceived their academic experience would have been had they been impacted by a mentor. Libya stated, "I would have valued my academics more. I would have appreciated someone being there for me and guiding me through my college experience." In a similar response, Nigeria reflected that, "I would have felt like the university actually cared about my success and overall well-being as a person, not just a student."

In closing, dissecting the multiple narratives gleaned from the eight subjects as response to the semi-structured interview questions provides a view of African American

student's experiences, perceptions, frustrations, joys, reflections, and rants about unique

experiences on campus pertaining to their unique cultural identities. The ten questions

were open-ended and provided ample opportunity for subjects to narrate their response

and as a result their narratives evolved into many themes. However, the researcher tried

to focus the responses to revolve around specific themes related to the scope, nature and

utility of mentorship in the lives of African American students. The specific ten questions

are presented in Appendix A. In analyzing these responses, the researcher framed them

along specific themes, connected them with variables to illuminate certain relationship

surrounding campus experience, individual stressors and perceptions of mentorship on

campus. These relationships provided ample findings through valuable constructs to

compare and contrast relationships and outcomes to develop a theory of mentorship. The

next chapter will focus on discussion of the findings as well as contribution of the

research work to the field of study.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter centers on the further discussion of findings and provides both an interpretation of such findings and presents the conclusions of this study. The purpose of this project was to explore the perceived impact of mentors and mentorship programs available to African American students in institutions of higher education. Previously, Chapter Four presented the results of semi-structured interview of eight subjects who narrated a range of revealing experiences related to their campus experience, faculty interaction, mentorship experiences and views on mentorship. Chapter Five attempts to develop a theory of mentorship to better inform our understanding of how mentorship may influence students' perception of the value of education and how such perceptions may shape those students' retention and graduation rates.

Following the results reported in the previous section, this section furnishes a theoretical foundation of mentorship looking through the prism of minority African American students. The analysis explores the foundational research question of what is the perception of full-time African American university students on the effect of mentorship on their academic advancement through the system. A set of themes and sub-themes, identified in Chapter Four has aided in a deeper introspection of the foundational question. These themes were developed as part of the knowledge acquisition process from the interviews with the subjects. The goal was to provide a more nuanced understanding of the perception related to mentorship has been developed. From several hours of interviews, data rich with context and narratives was discovered. This provided us with a data-heavy set of themes surrounding subject's perception. Therefore, this section will begin with introducing the main focus of the theme analysis. This will be

followed by the codes introduced to analyze the themes and relationships that connect the variables within a particular theme. The connections and relationships were analyzed to understand how the perception of mentorship developed for a particular person. This will be followed by a discussion of the main themes and relationships followed by the discernible trends, contrasts and significant exceptions.

Primary Construct

African American student's perception of mentorship is informed by their on-campus experience and direct experience with educators. From this phenomenological study, it is evident that the perception of mentorship was formed by the individual experiences on campus and in engaging with educators.

Perception of Mentorship

First, let us consider the phenomenological construction of mentorship. Interpretation of aggregated data reveals, African American students view mentorship as classified in two categories: existential mentorship and enhancing mentorship. In the existential classification, mentorship is viewed as highly important for academic success, positive campus experiences, and post-graduation opportunities. It is considered as a necessary ingredient to carry forward in life. In this existentialist view of mentorship, many of the respondents viewed mentorship as a right to exist on campus, especially for African American students. Fearing almost an existential crisis on campus because of their unique background of dealing with oppression and disenfranchisement, these students seek the refuge in mentorships. Those that viewed mentorship as such a necessary component of academic life, often held negative or bitter views when mentorship was unavailable.

Alternatively, those that that considered mentorship an option or, more of a life enhancer, held the opinion that mentorship adds value by contributing to and encouraging academic success, positive campus experiences, and post-graduation opportunities. Those that considered mentorship as truly illuminating, did not have negative or bitter views when mentorship was unavailable. This group of participants did not perceive mentorship a requirement of the academic journey, but rather a beneficial option that could produce positive outcomes when available. This group of respondents found alternative support systems, instead of lamenting or becoming bitter when no mentor programs were available on campus.

Direct Experience with Educators

Similarly, the data revealed that direct experience with educators impacted students' attitude toward mentorship. Simply put, if participants have positive interaction with educators, then the attitude about mentorship is positive. Whereas, if experiences with educators were negative, the attitude towards mentorship was typically bitter and negative.

Secondary Constructs

A series of secondary constructs have been uncovered. All of which are aggregated towards supporting the main construct. The secondary constructs identified in this study are stress, assimilation, and campus experience. These secondary constructs influenced the perceptions and attitudes about mentorship. The first theme to be discussed is stress.

Theme 1: Stress

Academic pursuits on any campus has innate stressors. From exams, assignments, to group projects, demanding professors, and every increasing financial costs, stress is a very serious component to campus life. Additionally, campus life is also impacted by the diverging social, political, and cultural stress among all the individuals interacting and engaging on campus. These regular stresses are heightened by the minority status of African American students.

Table 2

Identification of Stressors in Campus Experience

Linguistic Constructs Representing Feeling	Variable Codes	Subjects
Tough *Isolating* *Frustrating* *Racism* *Out of place* *Under represented*	Heightened stress (HT)	Chad Madagascar Libya Eritrea
Combating majority privilege	Stress (S)	Congo
Pleasant *Welcoming*	Absence (A) or Reduction of Stress (RT)	Kenya Ghana

According to the participants of this study, African American students face additional stress due the challenges from their minority status, skin color, Afrocentric identity, and lack of representation on the campus. Even in campuses that had a high rate of diversity among the student body and faculty, the minority African American students stress increased because of their feeling isolated, attacked, marginalized, and underrepresented. Some of these feelings are revealed in Table 2. When impacted by this

heightened stress, the student perceives mentorship and campus life in a negative and

bitter perception. In this negative mindset, the minority student overwhelming assimilates

negatively to academic and campus environment as revealed from the interview

responses. Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of the stress and the assimilation

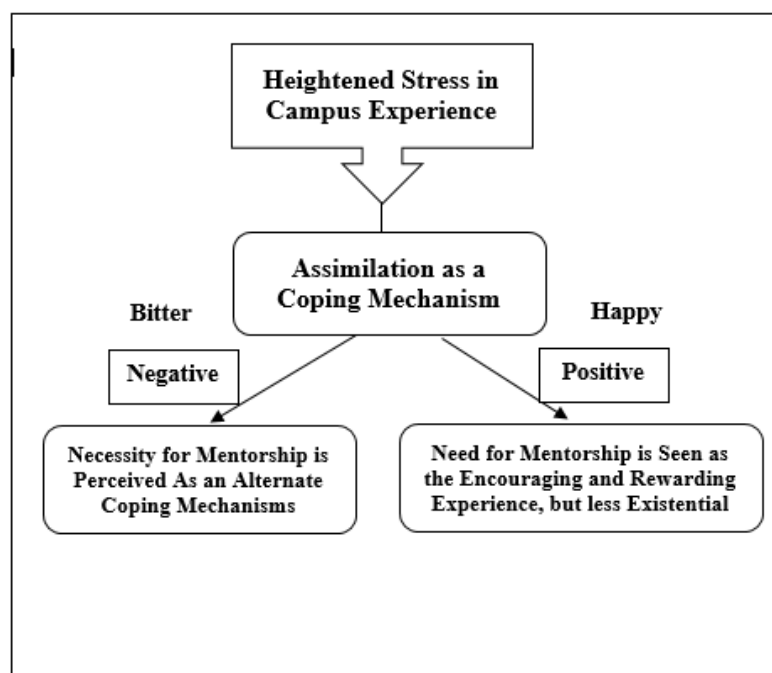problem experienced by many African American students.

Figure 2

Flow chart of campus experience to perception of mentorship negative assimilation.

Negative assimilation revealed itself through a variety of behaviors that the student's

shared with the interviewer. These negative behaviors included excessive drinking,

eating, and fighting. Along with agonizing feeling of isolation and negative self-image.

These negative coping mechanisms were an attempt to deal with the root pain of being a minority African American student on campus that was not receiving the mentorship, guidance, and support needed to successfully maneuver academic and campus life. Table 3 reveals the language constructs that were extracted from the interviews which informed the type of assimilation process the student had participated in.

Table 3

Identification of Types of Assimilation

Linguistic Constructs Representing the Assimilation Process	Variable Codes	Subjects
Black means Trouble	(-) Negative Assimilation	• Chad
Lynch the Nigger	(-) Negative Assimilation	• Nigeria
Would not succeed	(-) Negative Assimilation	• Libya
Social pressure, Self-preservation, Nigger	(-) Negative Assimilation	• Madagascar
Alter essence of who you are	(-) Negative Assimilation	• Eritrea
Source of pain, Refusing oneself	(-) Negative Assimilation	• Chad
Adaptation, Experience	(+) Positive Assimilation	• Ghana
Open minded, Experience, Come together	(+) Positive Assimilation	• Kenya
Absorption, Acceptance	(+) Positive Assimilation	• Nigeria

In the condition of heightened stress, the student's perception of campus life, mentorship, and educators' contribution are tainted negatively and result in less than

optimal experiences for the students during college life. These participants often spoke of mentorship in a bitter tone, and resented that mentorship had not been available for them.

Positive Assimilation

Although the responses were much less, a few interviewees had positive assimilation experiences. Although they faced many of the same negative challenges due to their minority status, these respondents pursued positive coping mechanisms such as prayer, outside support groups, exercise, adaption, and inner self reflection. In these cases, stress was much less or even absent from the campus and academic experience. These participants were able to assimilate positively and had pleasant and welcoming campus experiences. In these cases, these participants spoke of mentorship as valuable and beneficial, but not an absolute necessity for a positive academic experience.

Theme 2: Distortion of Educator's Contribution

Reside within many African American students is a deep-seated anger and frustration from being left out or isolated on campus. This negative view breeds suspicion and distorts their views on faculty members, and as result, they tend to see things with a distorted prism. Such distortion is also the result of the student engaging in negative assimilation. Responses reveal, for students with heightened stress that gravitated towards negative assimilation also held bitter and negatives views on professors' ability to contribute to the success of minority African American students. As outlined in Table 3, many of the respondents had negative attitudes about educators' ability to tailor curriculum to meet the needs of African American students. Also, these respondents felt that special training was needed to teach African American curriculum, and only colored people should teach African American courses. Many of the participants that held this

deep anger and frustration also felt there was an unfair and unequal advantage to white students on campus. These feelings and perception further exacerbated the negative assimilation behavior and the negative and bitter perception about mentorship and is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Identification of Educator Experience

Linguistic Constructs Representing the Experience	Variable Coded as Positive or Negative on Educator Interaction	Subjects
White teacher unable to teach African American literature	(-) Negative Assimilation	Chad
Teacher not open minded	(-) Negative Assimilation	Eritrea
Teaches history of unfairness to Blacks	(+) Positive Assimilation	Ghana
Can tailor to all, know of other's oppression	(+) Positive Assimilation	Nigeria
Abuse their power to minority students	(-) Negative Assimilation	Kenya
Cannot teach without specializing in training on experience of minorities	(-) Negative Assimilation	Madagascar
Cannot teach without being of color	(-) Negative Assimilation	Congo

Theme 3: Campus Experience Educator Interaction Influences Mentorship Perception

The perception and feelings about mentorship are linked with the experiences the student had on campus as well as with professors. This linkage can be represented mathematically as:

Perception of mentorship = function (campus experience, educator

interaction/mentorship relations).

This linkage is a complex interaction between campus experience/educator and student interaction. But, it originates from the student's self-perception as a minority African American that is not valued on campus, nor properly educated by faculty. This perpetual cycle influences the negative assimilation behaviors and bitter and negative feelings of mentorship. Table 5 provides a summary of key linguistic words and phrases that have been identified with the subjects' perception of mentorship.

Table 5

Identification of Mentorship Perception

Linguistic Construct	Variable Coded as Positive, Negative or Neutral on View of Mentorship	Subjects
If all else fails	(+) Positive Assimilation	Kenya
No mentorship	Neutral	Libya
Professor groomed	(+) Positive Assimilation	Ghana
Older White Professor took interest	(+) Positive Assimilation	Congo
Formal program, very pleased	(+) Positive Assimilation	Eritrea
Was part of formal organization	(+) Positive Assimilation	Kenya
Imparted Wisdom	(+) Positive Assimilation	Ghana
Gratitude for helping	(+) Positive Assimilation	Eritrea
Taught time management	(+) Positive Assimilation	Madagascar

As the varied responses indicate, positive assimilation was associated with phrases such as, "imparted wisdom," "professor groomed," and "professor took interests." These responses based on experiences on campus and interaction with educators informed the perception of mentorship. These perceptions about mentorship informed the participants' view of the utility or necessity of mentorship. In essence, the perception of mentorship establishes the perception on whether there is a need for mentorship programs, and also provides the opinion on the quality of mentorship available to students.

Utility of Mentorship

Many respondents held opinions on mentorship, even though they never participated in any mentorship program. Many lamented or held bitter views for not having the opportunity to engage in mentorship programs. Table 6 provides a summary of key feelings about the utility of mentorship. Some feelings included that if mentorship had been available they would have felt valued by the university. Others also felt that mentorship programs would have provided a more equal and fair access to campus and educators, similar to the access afforded to white students.

Table 6

Identification of Utility of Mentorship

Linguistic Construct of 'What If'	Interpretative View of Mentorship	Subjects
If mentorship available, life would have been better	Feels strongly about the need for mentorship	Libya

If mentorship available, then would feel the University cared	Feels university is doing disservice to minorities without formal mentorship	Nigeria
If mentorship available, would have cared more about academics	Feels mentorship is essential for academic success	Libya
If mentorship available, then would have gained similar access like White counterparts	Feels mentorship is essential to equal the playing field	Congo
If mentorship available, would have made everything better and built confidence	Feels mentorship can make campus success better	Chad
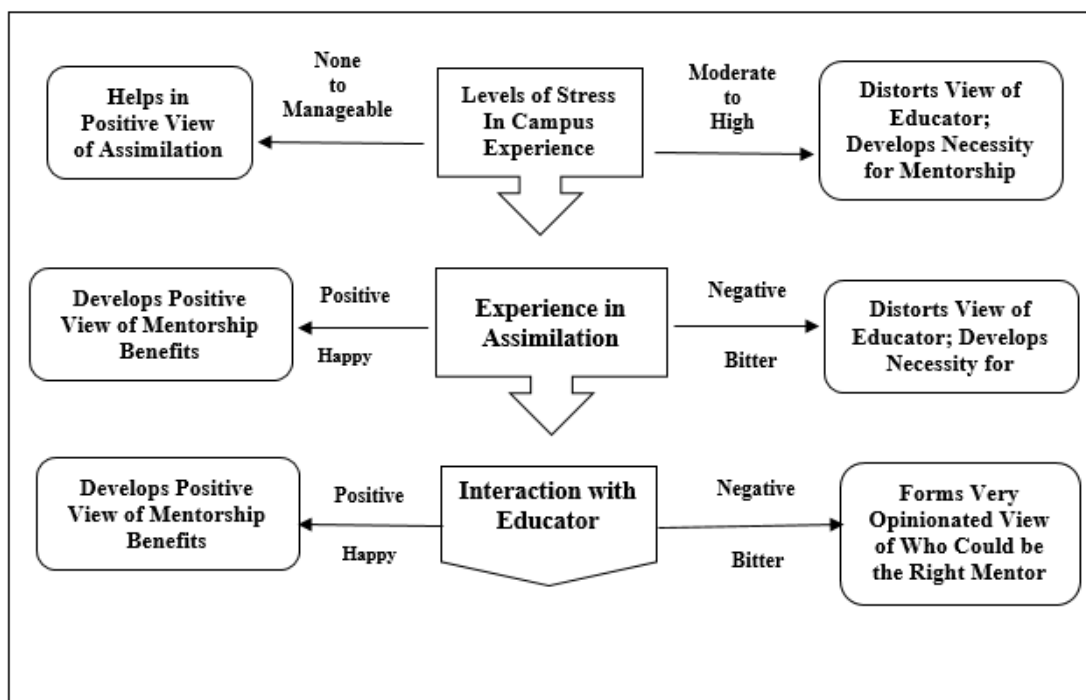
Figure 3

Flow chart depicting campus experience leads to mentorship perception

The flowchart above presents a logical framework of mentorship, as seen through the eyes of African American students. Campus life or student life on campus can be seen as a multiple prism consisting of many vignettes, each of which contribute to forming an opinion about the form, scope and utility of mentorship. As seen above, perception of mentorship develops through a complex and interacting process. What is presented here is a construct where campus experience and educator experience, which taken together developed a view of mentorship. From many linguistic constructs derived from eight narratives from eight subjects, a series of codes were created. These codes represent broader constructs, which develop into a cogent theme on perception of mentorship. Similarly, detailed coding can represent the relationship between the subjects and themes

that have been identified in this study. Let us consider some of the key relationships

represented in code format.

Table 7

Codebook

1.	**HS**	High Stress
2.	**S**	Stress
3.	**AS**	Absence of Stress
4.	**RS**	Reduction of Stress
5.	**NA**	Negative Assimilation
6.	**PA**	Positive Assimilation
7.	**NUA**	Neutral Assimilation
8.	**FA**	Forced Assimilation
9.	**PEE**	Positive Educator Experience
10	**NEE**	Negative Educator Experience
11	**NC**	Neutral Campus Experience
12	**ME**	Existentialist view of Mentorship
13	**MEN**	Enhancing view of Mentorship
14	**MN**	Neutral view of Mentorship

Table 8

Interviewees Perception of Mentorship Through Stress, Campus Experience, and Educators' Contribution (snapshot of Code formation)

1.	Nigeria	S → NA → PEE → MEN
2.	Madagascar	HS → NUA → NEE → MEN
3.	Libya	HS → NA→ NEE → ME
4.	Kenya	RS → NUA → NEE → MEN
5.	Ghana	AS → PA → PEE → MEN
6.	Eritrea	AS → NUA → NC → MEN
7.	Chad	HS → NA → PEE → MEN
8.	Congo	HS → NA → NEE → ME

Table 8 above provides a snapshot of how various themes were extracted from the semi-structured interviews, linguistic constructs were converted into codes and codes were aggregated to develop a cogent theory of mentorship perception. For example, if we look at subject Congo, we see the following: Subject's campus experience was characterized by high stress; experiences amounted to negative assimilation; this when combined with negative educator experience resulted in existentialist view of mentorship. The chain of relationship with variables and coded constructs provide the expression as

represented by HS $\rightarrow$ NA $\rightarrow$ NEE $\rightarrow$ ME. This was done for each of the participants as revealed in Table 8.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Disproportionate graduation rate for African American students compared to their white counterparts prompted us to examine the relationship between mentorship and academic success from the perception of these students. In exploring whether mentorship may have a beneficial effect in reversing the trend on the college retention rates of African American students, we examined the perception of full-time African American university students on the effect of mentorship on their graduation rate and retention. The study provided two major highlights.

First, by looking into the immediate experiences of African American students who have participated in mentorship programs while attending an institution of higher learning, the study developed a framework of mentorship. Second, examining their perception, the study identified several linkages between these students' campus experience and their perception of mentorship. These findings certainly illuminated our understanding of how mentorship may influence students' perception of the value of education and how such perceptions may shape those students' retention and graduation rates.

Dissecting the multiple narratives gleaned from study participants, the research developed an in-depth view of African American student's experiences, perceptions and reflections about myriad campus experiences that can help formulate academic policies for at-risk students and frame guidelines for formalized mentorship programs. While the

subjects' narratives evolved into many themes, there were some discernible trajectories. Based on these trends, this study recommends the following.

First, at-risk campus that are seeing falling graduation rate and decreasing retention rate among its African American students must formulate a long-term plan to introduce formal mentorship. Mentors should be given rigorous training and must be developed in-house from senior graduate students, faculty and administration. Seeing how certain relationships surrounding campus experience, individual stressors and perceptions of mentorship unfolded in the study, it is important that mentorship program becomes very specific and not one size fits all.

Second, academic success is heavily influenced by a student's ability to deal with various stressors that can come the student's way. It is imperative that mentorship program is tailored to fit in as part of the coping mechanism for the affected students. Finally, this study was directed towards addressing a vexing problem in American academia. A successful implementation of mentorship programs based on this study will go a long way towards alleviating this problem.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions:

1. As a minority student on a campus, what has your experience been like thus far?

2. What stressors do you face as a minority on a college campus, what is your definition of assimilation?

3. How does assimilation happen?

4. How do you deal with your stress?

5. What are some on campus situations you've had to deal with?

6. How did you handle those situations?

7. Do you think college professors are able to relate/tailor their curriculum to the needs of minority students?

8. What has been your experiences with mentorship program on your campus?

9. How have mentorship programs shaped your college experience?

10. From your experience, how has the access to a mentor formed your view of academics?

Appendix B

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?

21-25	
26-30	
31-35	
36 -40	

2. What is the highest level of school your **Mother** has completed?

Less than high school degree	
High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)	
Some College but no degree	
Associate degree	
Bachelor degree	
Graduate Degree	
Post Graduate Degree or above	

3. What is the highest level of school your **Father** has completed?

Less than high school degree	
High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)	
Some College but no degree	
Associate degree	
Bachelor degree	
Graduate Degree	
Post Graduate Degree or above	

4. If you were raised by someone other than Father or Mother, what is the highest level of education of the guardian?

Less than high school degree	
High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)	
Some College but no degree	
Associate degree	
Bachelor degree	
Graduate Degree	
Post Graduate Degree or above	

5. Before you turned 18 years of age, what was your **parent's / guardian's** annual income?

Less than $30,000	
$31,000 to $40000	
$41,000 to $50,000	
$51,00 to $60,000	
$61,000 to 70,000	
$71, 000 to 80,000	
$81,00 or higher	

6. What type of school did you attend?

Public high school	
Private high school	

Appendix C

Table 9 **Theme and Sub-Themes**

Theme and Sub-Theme		Revealed in Interview Question	Key Concept
1	1	1 2 3 4 5 6	Subject's Minority Status Shaping Campus Experience
	1*a*	2 4	Particularized Stress Borne Out of Minority Status
	1*b*	2 3	Assimilation as a Coping Mechanism for Minority
	1*c*	5 6	Situational Contexts and Ramification in Subject's Campus Experience
2	2	7	Campus Educators' Awareness of Minority Students' Unique Situation
3	3	8 9 10	Mentorship On-Campus and Subject's Perception of Mentorship
	3*a*	9	Shaping Effect of Mentorship in Subject's Campus Experience
	3*b*	10	Shaping Effect of Mentorship in Subject's View of Academics

Appendix D

Title of research study: Perceptions of African American College Students on The Effect of Student Mentorship Programs

Investigator: Naomi Christopher. The project is part of a thesis being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mimi Lee.

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?

We invite you to take part in a research study because you are a minority student that has had direct involvement with mentorship programs on a college campus.

What should I know about a research study?

Someone will explain this research study to you.
Whether or not you take part is up to you.
You can choose not to take part.
You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
Your decision will not be held against you.
You can ask all the questions you want before you decide, and can ask questions at any time during the study.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of the study is twofold. Firstly, the study will explore the effects of mentors and mentorship programs available to African American students in institutions of higher education, especially how such mentorship affects those students' retention and graduation rates. Secondly, by analyzing the immediate experiences of African American students who have participated in mentorship programs while attending an institution of higher learning, the study will determine the most effective approaches to mentorship towards increasing African American students' retention and graduation rates.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for exactly 60 minutes in a single visit throughout the duration of the one month study.

How many people will be studied?

We expect to enroll about 8 people in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

You will be one of eight subjects invited to take part in this project. Each interview will take place in a public space and/or medium as determined/chosen by the participant. However, the preferred location would be at MD Anderson Library.

This project seeks to examine the perception of mentorships programs on African American students. In doing so, it seeks to find ways to create programs would help African American college students feel more secure on campuses that may predominately have a population outside of their race. The following specifics describe the research in details:

- All participants will be interviewed at least once in person, by telephone, by skype, or by email, if needed.
- For participants who wish not to be audio-taped, they will be provided with a questionnaire.
- The interviews will take place according to the subject's convenience: including time of interview and form of interview.
- Each interview will be approximately 60 minutes.
- Each interview will be audio recorded or typed. Each participant's identity will be kept confidential and each participant will be given an identifying number.
- An example of an interview questions will be: "As a minority student on a campus, what has your experience been like thus far?"

This research study includes the following component(s) where we plan to audio record you as the research subject:

Digital voice recorder

- ☐ <u>I agree</u> to be audio recorded during the research study.
    - ☐ I agree that the audio recording can be used in publication/presentations.
    - ☐ I do not agree that the audio recording can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ <u>I do not agree</u> to be audio recorded during the research study.

Due to the nature of the study, if you do not wish to be audio-taped, you will be provided with a questionnaire which will allow you to answer the same questions as other subjects in the study.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can choose not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you are a student, a decision to take part or not, or to withdraw from the research will have no effect on your grades or standing with the University of Houston.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time it will not be held against you.

If you decide to leave the research, contact the investigator so that the ***investigator can*** properly withdraw you from the study by properly disposing of all data collected during your interview.

All data collected to the point of withdrawal will be destroyed. Students will not be asked to explain the extent of their withdrawal. Students will not be asked to collect data through interaction but will be asked to collect data through interaction. Each subject will be given a private identifiable name throughout their time in the study. If the student chooses to withdraw the data will not be used for analysis and will be removed from the record. If you stop being in the research, already collected data will be removed from the study record.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

There are no foreseeable risks related to the procedures conducted as part of this study. If you choose to take part and undergo a negative event you feel is related to the study, please inform your study team.

Taking part in this research study may lead to added costs to you. Subjects may incur the cost of parking for public spaces which may need paid parking.

Will I get anything for being in this study?

There is no compensation or payment for participation in this study.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

There are no known benefits to you from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include your participation may help in developing future programs which would aid in retention of African American students.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number, which will appear on all written study materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from these materials. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization, as well as collaborating institutions and federal agencies that oversee human subjects research

We may publish the results of this research. However, unless otherwise detailed in this document, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?

The person in charge of the research study can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include:

- If you cannot keep appointments or answer the questionnaire due to a personal or professional situation;
- if the principal investigator determines that staying in the project is not in your best interest

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should talk to the research team at:

Naomi Christopher (nchristopher@uh.edu) or Dr. Sarah McNeil, faculty sponsor, at 713 743-4975.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
  You cannot reach the research team.
  You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
  You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
  You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

_____	_____
Signature of subject	Date

_____
Printed name of subject

_____	_____
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date

_____
Printed name of person obtaining consent

In the future, our research team may be interested in contacting you for other research studies we undertake, or to conduct a follow-up study to this one. ***There is never any obligation to take part in additional research.*** Do we have permission to contact you to provide additional information?

☐ Yes
☐ No