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Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix: A Culturally Relevant Framework for the Meaningful Mentoring of Black Male Students

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COLLEGIATE EQUITY MENTORING MATRIX: A CULTURALLY RELEVANT FRAMEWORK FOR THE MEANINGFUL MENTORING OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS

A Dissertation Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Higher Education at the University of Mississippi

By
NORRIS ALLEN EDNEY III
MAY 2019
ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports on a qualitative analysis of the mentoring experiences of 22 successful Black males at the University of Mississippi. Several theories were used to frame the analysis. Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) mentoring conceptualization helps to exact an operational definition for mentoring for the analysis. Theories describing competition between the political interests which shape educational environments (Labaree, 1997) and student motivations to persist to graduation (Tinto, 2016) help to contextualize the barriers to success students encounter in college. Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) college mentoring theory helps consider the potential for mentoring to support student success in college. Finally, Cross’ (1995) Nigrescence theory, Robinson and Howard-Hamilton’s (1994) Afrocentric Resistance model, and Bandura’s theory on self-efficacy (1994) scaffold the analysis of how identity affects Black males’ mentoring relationships and experiences.

Respondents perceived mentoring as directly contributive to their success. Mentors were individuals respondents perceived as genuine, intentional, and trustworthy. Mentors also provided support respondents perceived as relevant to their success. These traits, and not formal titles or assignments, were the measures by which participants determined whether someone was a mentor. Formal programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics catalyzed mentoring relationships, but could not ensure that a mentoring relationship developed. Identity dynamics like race, gender, and their intersections affected how respondents perceived their mentoring
relationships. Peers, family members, teachers and professors, community members, and program staff were all amongst the individuals with whom respondents formed mentoring relationships. Mentoring relationships supported both college aspirations and college persistence by attending to students’ experiences with impediments to success like pressure to acculturate, stereotype threat, lack of representation, and discrimination.

This dissertation offers recommendations for practice and research based on the findings from the study. Themes related to participants’ perceptions of the relevance, nature, formation, and mechanisms of their mentoring relationships inform the recommendations. Analysis of the data also revealed opportunities to enhance the theoretical framework. Thusly, the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix is presented as a culturally relevant framework for the meaningful mentoring of Black male students.
DEDICATION

My family is the source of, and reason for, everything I do. Norris, Nora, and Adrienne Edney, there is no room or way for me to record how much of you is in all of the pages that follow. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Nora, I love you so much. You were just four years old when I wrote this, yet somehow you still took on the huge responsibility of waiting up for me every night I stayed late in the office to write. Mom may have never understood your motives, but I hope that our many late-night brownie-eating sessions made up for that. They meant so much to me. I am glad you knew that and persisted through my feeble attempts to put you to back to sleep. I’ll always cherish carrying you to your room once you finally gave in to the chocolate rush.

Norris, you are my world. From the time you were born you have been teaching me how to be better. Watching you watch me grow up has made me stay grown up. You give the best hugs, and you know just what to say. You were only seven when I finished this, but you were still one of the wisest people I know. I want to be just like you when I grow up! I’m proud to be your dad, and I want you proud to be my son.

Adrienne, you are my heart. You know more than anyone how much went into this, but I cannot take all of the credit. I would not have cultivated the relationships, skills, or experiences which made this process happen without you and your support. You deserve more than thanks for what you have done. I am so grateful for you. I won’t say how old you were when I finished this. I don’t need a doctorate to know that wouldn’t be a good idea. At any age, it is important to me
that you know how much you mean to me. I appreciate the space and chance to prove it to you, Norris, and Nora more than anyone could ever know.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My committee deserves my sincerest thanks for their guidance and support. Dr. Amy Wells Dolan, thank you for seeing a budding scholar in me. You have helped shape who I am as a scholar/practitioner. Dr. Phyllis George, your assignments challenged me to think critically about problems, and your lived example freed me to think creatively about solutions. I am grateful for you. Dr. Katrina Caldwell, our conversations made all of this make sense and helped me to stay focused on its worth. You helped make my goals more tangible. Thank you for the opportunities to learn from and with you. Dr. Donald Cole, you are my role model. You once told me thanks is future directed, but for everything your example has meant to me up until this point, thank you. Dr. George McClellan, you asked the right questions at the right times for the right reasons in the right ways; and you were always right there - without exception - to answer mine. Thank you.

I could not have asked for a more supportive work environment than that which the faculty, staff, and students of the Luckyday Success Program and the Luckyday Residential College afforded me. Dr. Perry, the most important thing I can tell you is to always close your sunroof. If you don’t, it could rain inside your car. If it rains with your sunroof down, you could short out your horn. And if you short out your horn because you left your sunroof down in the rain, you could risk your former employee choosing to talk about your faulty horn in his/her dissertation acknowledgments in lieu of talking about how much s/he appreciates you. Mrs. Senora Miller-Logan, thank you for all of the promise you saw and cultivated in me long before I even thought about writing this dissertation. The positive influence you have had in my life is
incalculable. Dr. Ethel Scurlock, before I even met you, I knew that no one teaches like you. I heard the ways students talked about you and knew I wanted to inspire the same reactions one day. I am thankful that our work together afforded me the opportunity to watch how you build relationships with students - to be your student in another sense. Mrs. Barbra Williams, thank you so much for what you do for students. I am grateful for you, and it is clear that they are as well. I am so happy to have had the chance to work with you as you started out your career in higher education. Joshua Tucker, you taught me the true value of reciprocity in mentoring. Mentoring you gave me a second look at some of the challenges I had experienced during the years which have afforded me more experience than you. I’m thankful that the lessons I sought to impart to you always seemed timely for me as well. I have you to thank for that.

Mrs. Constance, Mr. Bernard, and Ms. Bianca Cowan, thank you so much for your welcoming me into your family. I appreciate all of the times you cooked, kept the kids, or simply gave me and Adrienne space to just be. Those times to decompress with you, or because of you, mean the world to me. I don’t take them for granted.

Bruce and Rhondalynne Ware, thank you for investing in me. Your confidence in me helped me to see the bigger picture. Thank you for making the calls, and teaching me how to make my own; for sending ahead endorsements; and helping make sure my experience could back up what you said. I am forever grateful for you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUSCRIPT 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSITIONALITY</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARNEGIE PROJECT on the EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY OF MANUSCRIPT 1</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUSCRIPT 1 LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUSCRIPT 2</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATA PRESENTATION</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL PROFILES</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH QUESTION 1</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH QUESTION 2</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH QUESTION 3</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH QUESTION 4</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY OF MANUSCRIPT 2</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUSCRIPT 2 LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUSCRIPT 3</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINDINGS</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLEGIATE EQUITY MENTORING MATRIX</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY OF MANUSCRIPT 3</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUSCRIPT 3 LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWISHOWE</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MANUSCRIPT 1
INTRODUCTION

College degree attainment helps assure opportunity for Americans (Behrman & Stacey, 1997). Students choose to pursue higher education to gain or secure access to democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility (Labaree, 1997). Generally, people commit less crime, earn more money, and experience better health outcomes, as a function of their level of educational attainment (Behrman & Stacey, 1997). Many scholars, researchers and philosophers agree with Horace Mann’s (1848) description of education as “the wellspring of freedom and a ladder of opportunity” (Mann, para. 1) and with his proclamation that, “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (Mann, para. 5).

Mann made these assertions in his twelfth and final annual report to the Massachusetts Board of Education in 1848. The Mississippi Legislature founded the University of Mississippi the same year (Mitchell, 2001). Its racially exclusive enrollment practices perpetuated the economic and educational inequities already prevalent in the state (Mitchell, 2001). While institutions founded for the express purpose of educating Black people had existed since the founding of Cheyney University in Pennsylvania in 1837, its founding trailed the founding of the first Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the state, the University of Pennsylvania, by over 100 years (Brown & Davis, 2001; Cowan & Maguire, 1995). The University of Mississippi’s founding predated the founding of the state’s first Historically Black College or University
(HBCU), Alcorn State University, by 23 years (Posey, 1994). It would take the University of Mississippi 114 years after its founding to admit its first Black student under order from the Supreme Court, pressure from the administration of President John Kennedy, and protection of United States Marshals (Eagles, 2009).

America has slowly broadened the definitions of the “we”, “our” and “all” that its founding documents reference to include wider swaths of the population (U.S. Declaration of Independence, Paragraph 2, 1776). However, time has not adequately remedied the impact of delayed access to equal educational opportunities (Gafford Muhammad, 2009). Black males are one socio-demographic group that continues to suffer from the inequities and social injustice of perpetually widening wealth and achievement disparities between college graduates and non-graduates (Arum & Roksa, 2011, 2014).

As Table 1 demonstrates, disaggregation of national graduation data reveal differences in completion rates that track with race and gender (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017, Table 326.10). Several studies (Strayhorn, 2010; Harper, 2006, 2012) show that the retention and graduation rates of Black males have decreased over the last two decades while the rates for many other demographic groups have increased. Low enrollment further compounds the low retention and graduation numbers for Black males (Farmer & Hope, 2015). At roughly 3.5% of the total enrollment of the more than 15 million students in America’s institutions of higher learning, the rate of Black male enrollment was about the same in 2015 as it was in 1976 (Farmer & Hope, 2015, p. 4).
Scholars have identified several factors that affect the retention of Black students. Institutional racism presents many barriers to college going and college completion for Black students (Rowley, 2001). For students of color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, America’s still segregated educational systems may preempt the types of pre-college socialization through which students accrue the types of cultural capital needed to succeed in college (Arum & Roksa, 2011; 2014). Black students are less academically prepared for college than White students (Arum & Roksa, 2011; 2014), which may contribute to low expectations for the academic success of Black students (Brooks, Jones, Burt, 2013). Societal low expectations for academic performance exacerbate the effects of Black students’ relative underpreparedness for college (Steel & Aronson, 1995). In addition to low expectations for academic performance,
society also perceives students of color, and especially male students of color, as unmotivated and unengaged (Brooks, Jones, Burt, 2013). Many Black students view *stereotype threat* (Steel & Aronson, 1995), or the anxiety associated with efforts to avoid confirming stereotypes like laziness, expected academic underperformance, and disengagement, as a major barrier to their academic success (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Steel, 2000). In addition to the anxiety associated with stereotype threat, the cultural exclusion that some students of color can feel while navigating college can negatively affect persistence, especially at PWIs (Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008).

**Barriers to success at the University of Mississippi.** Black students at the University of Mississippi experience many of the barriers above described. Black respondents to the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Diverse Learning Environments Survey (DLE) administered in 2013 at the University of Mississippi were more likely than their White peers to report: they had to work harder to be seen as good students; the University had a lot of racial tension; dissatisfaction with the University’s administrative response to discrimination; they did not have a member of the faculty or staff to talk to about instances of discrimination or about the existence of racism in general; and disagreement with the notion that the University had a long standing commitment to diversity (Edney & Marion, 2013).

**Supporting Black Male Success Through Mentoring**

It is common for universities to support interventions that attempt to account for the barriers affecting Black student retention (Brooks et al., 2013). Mentorship is a key component of many programs that focus on the retention and graduation of Black students (Brooks et al., 2013; Cuyjet, 2006). Some of the benefits associated with mentorship directly address the
challenges Black males can face while in college (Cuyjet, 2006). By serving as positive role
models, mentors can influence the scholastic and professional aspirations of students (Crisp &
Cruz, 2009; Cuyjet, 2006). Mentors can also model and teach coping mechanisms that help
Black male students build resilience to overcome the challenges they will face while in college
(Mason, 2014). Mentors provide pathways to opportunity and help students attend to their
psycho-social needs (Hinsdale, 2015). Mentors can help students locate and utilize the resources
available to them, engage more effectively with faculty and staff, and develop strong
relationships with their peers (Mason, 2014). For many Black males in college, the peer mentors
serve as a source of practical advice about navigating the college landscape (Mason, 2014).
Programs designed specifically for Black males can improve educational outcomes by creating
opportunities for them to discuss the unique issues they face in college, providing career and
academic guidance, and facilitating interactions with faculty, staff, and peers who can serve as
mentors (Brooks et al., 2013).

**Student Success Programs at the University of Mississippi**

The Luckyday Success Program (Luckyday), Foundations for Academic Success Track
(FASTrack), and The FedEx Student-Athlete Support Center (henceforth: Athletics) have had
significant success in retaining and graduating students at higher rates than the University
aggregate (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). The retention and
graduation rates for Black males who participate in at least one of the aforementioned programs
are also significantly better than the aggregated rates for all students (See Appendix A)
(Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). All three programs incorporate formal
mentoring structures as part of their student support strategies (The Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.).

Table 2 compares the six-year graduation rates for all students, all males, all Black students, and Black males who attended public 4-year degree granting institutions. The table also compares the national graduation rate to that of the University of Mississippi for each demographic group.

Table 2

*Comparison of National Six-year Graduation Rate for public 4-year degree granting institutions (Nat.) to Institutional rates (UM) by selected demographics*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All AA Students</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA Males</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. AA = Black. Overall = rate for all graduates. Rates reported as (%).*

*Data not available

The graduation rates for Black males trail the rates for the other demographic groups nationally and at the University of Mississippi (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017, Table 326.10; Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). The 2009 cohort of Black males at the University of Mississippi outperformed the national average for Black males and all Black students. A host of factors could explain the success of the University of Mississippi’s 2009 cohort of Black male students. The existing data make determining a cause
for this cohort’s relative success difficult However, the percentage of Black male involvement in
one or more of three of the University’s established retention initiatives: Luckyday, FASTrack,
and Athletics, correlates with the relative success of the cohort (Institutional Research
Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). Table 3 compares graduation rates and the percentage of
Black males who participated in one or more of the abovementioned initiatives during the 2009,
2010, and 2011 cohorts.

Table 3

Percent involvement in Luckyday, FASTrack, or Athletics and six-year graduation rates for
Black males at the University of Mississippi by selected cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Percent Involvement</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A common focus of Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics is intentional development of
meaningful relationships between students and between students and faculty or staff (The
Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). Each program has peer
mentoring structures which group younger students with older students who have often
participated in the programs themselves (The Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss
FedEx Center, n.d.). Professional program staff also meet with program participants to assess
students’ needs and connect them with the resources that will support their success (The
Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). The programs also
include living learning communities which provide opportunities for students to build networks
with students who may be experiencing similar challenges (The Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.).

All of the programs utilize various forms of mentoring to support their students (The Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). The data suggest (See Appendix A) that the support these programs provide is beneficial to Black male success at the University of Mississippi (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). However, this research project is not a review of the efficacy of Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics, or any of the numerous support services that they provide. Rather, this study seeks to explore how successful Black male students perceive mentoring as contributive to their success at the University of Mississippi. In pursuit of that aim, Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics provide a likely pool of successful Black males who have been exposed to formal mentoring initiatives during their college tenures.

**Luckyday.** The Luckyday Success Program (Luckyday) is a four-year scholarship and student success program housed within the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Mississippi (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Each year, the Luckyday Staff of one Program Coordinator, one Assistant Director and one Director select 80 scholarship recipients to participate in Luckyday (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). The staff selects Luckyday Scholars from a pool of Mississippi high school graduates who have earned at least a 3.2 GPA in high school and a 20 on the ACT (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Luckyday Scholars also demonstrate remaining financial need after applying their other scholarships and grants (The Luckyday Program, n.d.).
Luckyday’s student support programming begins with a mandatory, weeklong retreat prior to the start of the freshman year (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). The retreat helps Luckyday Scholars develop a sense of community, learn about campus resources, and explore new priority management and academic strategies before the semester begins (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Luckyday freshmen complete 8 hours of proctored study hall per week, and have several Personal Leadership and Navigation Sessions (PLAN Sessions) with program staff throughout the academic year (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Freshmen Luckyday Scholars also take EDHE 105 (The Freshman Year Experience) as a cohort (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Sophomore Luckyday Scholars complete the Sophomore Year Experience (SYE) program (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Luckyday’s SYE program includes EDHE 333: The Luckyday Professionalism and Emotionally Intelligent Leadership Class, Sophomore Professional Review and Interest Navigation Training Sessions (SPRINT Sessions), and several professional development programs (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Luckyday juniors complete a service-learning project designed to help them assess and address a problem in their home communities (The Luckyday Program, n.d.).

Luckyday utilizes a Peer Leadership program “to foster a sense of academic responsibility among the participants in the Luckyday Program” (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Luckyday Peer Leaders seek to model success inside and outside of the classroom (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Peer leaders maintain contact with their four to six member peer groups throughout freshman year by conducting group meetings and serving as proctors for study hall (The Luckyday Program, n.d.).
Luckyday Scholars agree to live in the Luckyday Residential College (LRC) for their freshman and sophomore years (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). In addition to the freshman and sophomore Luckyday Scholars, the LRC houses many Luckyday Associates (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Luckyday Associates are students who live in the LRC but are not on the Luckyday Scholarship (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). The LRC staff consists of one Coordinator and one Faculty Fellow, who reports to the Provost (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). The LRC staff works closely with Luckyday Program Staff to provide Luckyday Associates with some of the same services Luckyday Scholars receive (The Luckyday Program, n.d.).

Foundations for Academic Success Track (FASTrack). FASTrack is another retention program at the University that has experienced success in retaining and graduating students, including Black male students, better than the university aggregate (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). According to the program website:

FASTrack is a first-year living learning community that helps students transition from high school to college. FASTrack students benefit from smaller and enhanced classes, individualized advising and mentoring, and a community of supportive peers. The early connections students make in FASTrack facilitate academic success, encourage campus involvement, and provide opportunities for leadership development. (FASTrack, n.d.)

FASTrack scholars complete the freshman year as a cohort in smaller, enhanced classes including EDHE 105 (The Freshman Year Experience), Writing 101 (First Year Writing), and either Psychology 201 (General Psychology) or Sociology 101 (Introductory Sociology I) in the fall and WRIT 102 (First-Year Writing II) and either BISC 102 (Inquiry Into Life Human Biology) or Math 121 (College Algebra) in the spring of freshman year (FASTrack, n.d.).
FASTrack scholars take these classes in 20 student cohorts which are each assigned a peer mentor (FASTrack, n.d.). Peer mentors attend the EDHE 105 classes every week to help the instructors develop assignments and administer the course (FASTrack, n.d.). FASTrack’s staff of one director, two assistant directors, three academic mentors and one operations coordinator serve as the primary academic advisors for their scholars (FASTrack, n.d.).

While there are certainly similarities between Luckday and FASTrack, there are important differences as well. Similar to Luckyday, FASTrack is a selective program (FASTrack, n.d.). However, the total number of participants and selection criteria are not publicized (FASTrack, n.d.). Luckyday Scholars receive scholarships ranging from $8,000 – 20,000 distributed across all four years (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). In contrast, FASTrack participants are assessed a one-time $440 fee which is waved for Pell eligible students (FASTrack, n.d.). Additionally, FASTrack scholars are not required to live together, even though there is an entire residence hall on campus that is exclusively reserved for FASTrack scholars (FASTrack, n.d.). FASTrack Scholars are encouraged to live there, but are not required in order to participate in the program like the two-year live-in requirement associated with the Luckyday Scholarship (FASTrack, n.d.; The Luckyday Program, n.d.).

**The FedEx Student Athlete Success Center (Athletics).** The University of Mississippi Athletic Department utilizes the FedEx Student Athlete Success Center to support scholar-athletes at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). The center’s staff is organized into Administrative (one Senior Associate Athletic Director of Student-Athlete Development, one Administrative Secretary, one Graduate Assistant, and two Academic Interns), Student-Athlete Enhancement (one Assistant Athletic Director of Student-Athlete Development
and one Coordinator of Student-Athlete Enhancement), Academic Counseling (one Assistant Athletics Director for Academic Support, two Assistant Directors of Student-Athlete Academic Counseling, four Senior Academic Counselors, and one Academic Counselor), and Academic enrichment (one Associate Director for Academic Enrichment, one Assistant Director of Academic Enrichment, and four Learning Specialists) areas (Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). These staff members work to provide several academic support services to student-athletes from recruitment through graduation (Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.).

The FedEx Student-Athlete Success Center supports student-athletes through providing scholar-athletes at the University of Mississippi with academic consultation, access to a computer lab and laptops for travel athletes, class checks, tutoring, frequent progress reports, and working with professors and instructors of athletes who are traveling due to their athletic obligations (Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). Additionally, staff members help facilitate student-athletes’ interactions with their professors and other departments when appropriate (Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.).

Like Luckyday and FASTrack, The FedEx student-Athlete Success Center also incorporates the peer voice (Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). A council of successful student athletes called the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee serves as a liaison between student-athletes and athletics administration; promoting the exchange of ideas between sports and providing the opportunity for members to grow professionally while serving as leaders to their peers (Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.).
POSITIONALITY

The problem of Black male retention in American institutions of higher education is personally relevant to me. This section describes the ways in which my pre-college, matriculation, and professional experiences inform how I view the problem of practice.

Family Background and Pre-College Socialization

My mother, La’Verne Edney, and father, Norris Edney II, both graduated from Alcorn State University, a small public HBCU in Lorman, Mississippi. My mother’s parents, Theodore and Essie Mae Ford, were sharecroppers who began working before having the chance to attend college. However, my mother, the baby of 14 children, was able to watch several of her siblings navigate post-secondary education and graduate level study before she attended college. My mother attended Alcorn State and Mississippi College School of Law where she earned a Bachelor of Arts and Juris Doctorate respectively. My paternal grandfather, Norris Allen Edney I, Ph. D, served in upper level administration at Alcorn for many years; ultimately serving two separate stints as Interim President and Acting President of the institution. My paternal grandmother, Lillian Clarke Edney, holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Tougaloo College, a small private HBCU in Jackson, Mississippi at which she met Norris I. My father and both of his brothers, Albert and Alvin, attended Alcorn State and earned Bachelor of Science degrees in STEM fields. My Grandmother and all three of her sons went on to obtain Master of Science degrees after undergraduate study.
My proximity to college educated people made college seem familiar to me. Before I ever knew about the term *concerted cultivation* (Bourdieu, 1986), I knew that my parents and extended family held strong convictions about the relationship between their levels of educational attainment and their financial security and social status. My family’s appreciation for the capacity of education to facilitate social mobility (Labaree, 1997) influenced the ways they talked about college around me and created opportunities for me to observe educational persistence in action. I spent countless days between the ages of four and seven watching my mother pour over her notes, create outlines, and participate in class discussions while in law school. I saw my dad study professional development materials for his frequent recertifications in radiation protection throughout my elementary and middle school years. I reached out to aunts and cousins who were pursuing degrees in the medical field whenever I had trouble with my Advanced Placement STEM courses in high school. I did not know how much of an impact my family’s educational beliefs and experiences had on me until I made steps to enroll in college.

**Choosing a College**

When it was time for me to prepare to attend college, I had a network of familial support that helped guide me through my transition. My college selection process was not devoid of challenges, however. My choice to attend the University of Mississippi was met with quite a bit of reservation from my family because the University of Mississippi’s segregated past had personally affected them.

The state’s practices of racial exclusion prevented my grandfather from being able to earn his terminal degree in Mississippi. Reflecting the practices of the era, the University of Mississippi followed the example of many of their peer institutions between 1921 and 1948.
During this time, many southern states developed grant programs designed to enforce segregation within their higher education institutions (Eatman, 1993). The grants enforced segregation by sending academically successful minorities seeking graduate degrees to out-of-state institutions (Eatman, 1993). Norris Allen Edney I completed his Doctor of Philosophy in conservation at Michigan State University in 1970 (Eatman, 1993). The state of Mississippi was so committed to the segregation of institutions of postsecondary education when my grandfather was searching for opportunities for graduate study during the middle to late 1960s, that they sent him to Michigan State University free of charge, complete with a stipend for his lodging (Eatman, 1993). While he later acknowledged that the education he received in Michigan was likely superior to what he could have received if he had the opportunity to study in Mississippi, the move presented a major disruption to his life that was based completely on racial discrimination and educational inequity (Eatman, 1993).

The violent integration of the University of Mississippi just a few years before my grandfather left for Michigan served to sharpen the focus of the negative lens through which my family viewed the University. My parents and other family members were much more familiar with the history of the University of Mississippi than I was when I made the choice to enroll. They were convinced that an institutional history as steeped in racial exclusion as that of the University of Mississippi inherently evidenced an environment not conducive to the success of Black students.

Mentoring Helped

I did not really understand my family’s concerns until I started classes at the University of Mississippi in the fall of 2007. I felt constant pressure to acculturate long before I knew that
Tinto (1987) saw integration into established campus cultures as integral to collegiate success. I kept questions to myself for fear of confirming to my teachers that I was not smart enough to be at UM years before I understood the concept of stereotype threat (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). I felt out of place in spaces that seemed comfortable for most other people: The Grove, fraternity row, and my classes, well before I knew that racial identity can influence student perceptions of campus climate (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Rowley, 2001). I had trouble staying focused on my goals because I was constantly trying to validate my presence at the University of Mississippi to my family, fellow students, teachers, and administrators. I did not quit, but I considered it often.

I found reprieve in the offices of my mentors, in the residence halls and apartments of older students who served as my peer mentors, and on the other end of phone conversations with my cousins, aunts, uncles, and other family members who I knew I could ask for help with my toughest courses without fear of confirming stereotypes about my aptitude. My mentors assisted me in practical and psychosocial ways; from selecting a major, finding jobs, and taking full advantage of the opportunities available to me, to dealing with stress and anxiety, stereotype threat, and burn out.

**Why Success Programs**

I maintained relationships with numerous mentors while in college. I met some of my mentors before even enrolling in college through Mississippi Outreach to Scholastic Talent (MOST). MOST is an annual conference that aims to introduce Black students who may be considering attending the University of Mississippi to upperclassmen, faculty, and staff who offer a wealth of practical support and candid advice about navigating the University of Mississippi (Center for Inclusion and Cross-cultural Engagement, n.d.). The Ole Miss Women’s
Council Scholarship (OMWC), which I earned to pay for my tuition, includes a mentorship component as well (Ole Miss Women’s Council for Philanthropy, n.d.). The OMWC staff paired scholars with life and career mentors who provided social, academic, and career support (Ole Miss Women’s Council for Philanthropy, n.d.). The Louis Stokes Mississippi Alliance for Minority Participation Increasing Minority Access to Graduate Education Program (LSMAMP - IMAGE) also included a mentorship component to support its aim of helping more racial/ethnic minority students persist to graduate study in STEM fields (The Louis Stokes Mississippi Alliance for Minority Participation, n.d.). The mentorship I received in IMAGE provided the academic support I needed to succeed in some of my tougher STEM courses.

The technical guidance and academic support I received from MOST, OMWC, IMAGE, and other student support programs was paramount to my success at the University of Mississippi. However, it was the abeyance from the expectation to assimilate that I found in my interactions with the students and staff members of these programs that sustained me when I was forced to confront my otherness. Mentorship provided a break from the pervasive sense of difference that tinged all my experiences at the University of Mississippi. It proved so invaluable to my success as an undergraduate that I decided to make it central my life's work and academic inquiry.

**Mentoring as Life’s Work**

My first post-master’s job in higher education was at the University of Mississippi as Coordinator of Fraternity and Sorority Life for the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), the council that governs the nine historically Black sororities and fraternities (Schuh, Triponey, Heim, & Nishimura, 1992). I served several years as NPHC President as an undergraduate, so
this role was very important to me. Serving as the primary advisor to the NPHC afforded me the opportunity to facilitate the kind of mentorship that I received from my fraternal affiliation for the undergraduate members of the NPHC and students who aspired to join. I completed the bulk of this research while serving as Project Coordinator for the Luckyday Success Program. Luckyday is a scholarship and student success program that helps ensure the retention and graduation of its scholars through mentorship (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). My role as Luckyday’s Project Coordinator allows me the autonomy to assess specific student needs and tailor strategies to help individual students persist. I defended this research as Assistant Director of the Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement at the University of Mississippi. This research informs my work; and my work presents the questions I seek to answer through my research.

**Assumptions**

I began this qualitative study with four main assumptions about the problem of Black male retention and graduation at the University of Mississippi. First, I assumed that student participants would perceive mentorship as integral to their academic success. I believed that students would recognize the services that they received from Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics as mentorship, and that they would credit at least some of their success to that mentorship. Secondly, I presumed that student participants in my study would identify several forms of mentorship as important to their success. I suspected that the students would benefit from mentoring relationships with faculty, staff, other students, and community members. I expected that students’ lived experiences would inform which mentorship relationships they valued as important to their academic persistence. Thirdly, I anticipated students describing the
mentorship that they receive from those who shared perceived racial and/or gender identity as
shelter from the stereotype threat, pressure to acculturate, and other manifestations of
institutional racism that can make campus climates chilly for Black males. I assumed that
students would also have mentoring relationships with individuals with whom they do not share
racial and/or gender identity; and that they would identify differences between those mentoring
relationships and those with perceived mentor/protégé racial and/or gender similarity. Finally, I
surmised that my study would inform ways to improve initiatives dedicated to Black male
persistence at the University of Mississippi. I sought to use what the study reveals to enhance the
offerings of programs designed to support Black male retention and graduation at the University
of Mississippi.

Intellectual inquiry into this problem of practice has deepened, enriched, and
sophisticated my thinking about retaining Black males at the University of Mississippi. While
my own experience as a student and professional here over the past twelve years provided me an
intimate understanding of the potential barriers to success that Black males face at the University
of Mississippi, this research has made me more aware of the breadth and scope of the problem of
Black male retention and graduation locally and nationally. It has given name and teeth to the
myriad manifestations of exclusion and inadequacy I perceived as contentious to my success an
undergraduate student, which has helped me more effectively identify and address the potential
for stereotype threat and racially turbulent campus climates to impede the success of Black
Males at the University of Mississippi.
CARNEGIE PROJECT ON THE EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE

The Doctor of Education program in Higher Education at the University of Mississippi is affiliated with the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED). The CPED webpage (2014) explains that “The professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession.” CPED programs ask practitioners to approach complex problems of practice which advance equity, social justice, and ethics (Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate, 2014).

Increasing the graduation rate for Black males at the University of Mississippi fits squarely within the CPED principles of social justice, equity, and ethics (Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate, 2014). Black students have not had equal access to education in America throughout its history (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The vestiges of being denied access to equal educational opportunities is still evident in educational outcomes today (Torraco, 2018). While scholars have warned that the American post-secondary education system has succumbed in many ways to American consumerism - tending to dedicate increasing resources to enhancing student social experience over ensuring that sufficient learning occurs while in college (Arum & Roksa, 2011; 2014) - a college education is still associated with improved social and economic outcomes (Behrman & Stacey, 1997). College graduates live longer, earn more money, and stand
a better chance improving their social and economic status than people who are not college graduates (Behrman & Stacey, 1997).

Efforts to support successful college completion for Black males and other demographic groups which experience lower-than-average graduation rates are efforts to create a more socially just society, because they attend to disparities in opportunities to experience the benefits of college completion. This goal is not in contention with efforts to ensure a living wage, secure freedom, and guarantee humanity to all people for whom it is denied. However, just as those efforts require analysis and reconfiguration of structures and systems which create disparities, addressing low graduation rates of Black males and other populations that continue to deal with the negative vestiges of oppression may require approaches that go beyond equality. Student support approaches that focus solely on providing equal support to all students may lack attention to, and interventions for, challenges like stereotype threat, disparate pre-college socialization and academic preparation, socioeconomic challenges, and underrepresentation. In contrast, approaches that focus on the pursuit of equity might start with assessing the unique needs of the target population and building interventions and support services from there. This dissertation uses analysis of data related to the relevance, nature, formation, and mechanisms of mentoring relationships to present recommendations for enhancing efforts that contend with the specific barriers to success that Black males at the University of Mississippi face.

Results from the 2013 Higher Education Research Institute's Diverse Learning environments survey show that Black students at the University of Mississippi perceive various forms of exclusion from the broader campus culture including difficulty connecting with professors, dissatisfaction with institutional commitment to diversity, and pressure to outwork
White classmates (Edney & Marion, 2013). Mentorship can help Black students develop the resilience they need to navigate challenges they face while pursuing degrees (Mason, 2014). As such, fostering mentorship is one way that universities might demonstrate a commitment to redressing the systemic racism that impedes the success of Black males.

In addition to equity and social justice, CPED programs also ask scholar-practitioners to consider the ethics of their work, research, and practice. My roles as Program Coordinator for Luckyday Programs, Assistant Director of the Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement, and advisor to several student organizations at the University of Mississippi grant me influence over a diverse group of student leaders. I took great care to manage the extent to which those relationships might have affected data collection during the design and implementation of this project. All participants signed consent forms which included a detailed description their rights to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, initial transcripts were presented to an outside reviewer to check for evidence of biased responses and/or leading questions. All participants also reviewed the transcripts from their interviews and approved their contents for use. Finally, the data presented in this document is dissociated from individual participants. Each participant is assigned a pseudonym. This additional step was taken because of the relatively low numbers of Black male participants in the programs that formed this study’s pool of participants.
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Several theories frame this exploration into the role of mentoring in supporting Black male success at the University of Mississippi. It would be difficult to assess the role of mentoring in supporting the success of Black males without differentiating mentoring from other forms of support. Thusly, the theoretical framework first contends with the ambiguity of mentoring as a concept using Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) analysis of the mentoring literature to operationalize a definition for this study. Secondly, the framework uses Labaree’s (2007) theory on the competing political frames of education and Tinto’s (2016) student persistence theory to contextualize the barriers to success Black males can experience in college. Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) college mentoring theory provides a basis to consider how mentoring can support students as they navigate barriers in college. And finally, Cross’ (1995) Nigrescence theory, Robinson and Howard-Hamilton’s (1994) Afrocentric Resistance model, and Bandura’s (1994) Social Learning theory on developing self-efficacy serve as a theoretical scaffolding to consider the mechanism(s) by which mentoring might support Black male success in college.

Defining Mentorship

In Homer’s “The Odyssey”, Mentor, a wise man with a wealth of knowledge and experience, teaches life lessons to Telemachus, the comparatively less wise and experienced son of Odysseus (Ismail, Zaidey, Ab Ghani & Omar, 2017). The story of Mentor and Telemachus established a key pillar of the concept of mentoring conceptualizations: the transmission of
knowledge from a more experienced individual to a less experienced individual (Ismail, Zaidey, Ab Ghani & Omar, 2017). Aside from this key pillar, however, there is a great deal of ambiguity about what mentoring is; or perhaps more importantly, what mentoring is not (Bozeman and Feeney, 2007).

A number of scholars have bemoaned the lack of a universally accepted definition for mentorship (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Jacobi, 1991). Bozeman and Feeney (2007) argued that the depth and breadth of the mentorship concept has resulted in opaque and unfocused research that is often not grounded in theory. Consequently, research on mentorship leans more toward describing mentorship as an instrument to achieve personal and organizational goals for specific populations rather than exploring how and why mentorship works more broadly (Burke and McKeen, 1997; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Research on mentoring often focuses on mentorship outcomes at the expense of exploration of conceptual and analytical problems (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007).

Many scholars have surveyed the mentorship literature to try to operationalize its definition and develop new theories and conceptual frameworks for further study in specific contexts (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Jacobi, 1991). While scholars disagree about the origination of mentorship theory (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), results from literature reviews suggest that the problems with defining mentorship begin at the origin of its conceptual theorization (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Bozeman and Feeney (2007), for instance, acknowledge the difficulty in selecting a single work that marks the beginning of mentorship research while making a strong argument that Kathy Kram’s (1980, 1983, 1985) work anchors the contemporary study of the subject. Specifically, Bozeman and Feeney (2007)
reference Kram’s (1983) article in the *Academy of Management Journal* as the “most frequently cited journal article on the topic of mentoring” (p. 721). While Kram’s (1983) theory of mentorship is helpful in understanding the phases and key components of mentoring, it stops short of clearly and concisely defining the concept (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). As a result, subsequent research has expanded on Kram’s (1983) conceptualization of mentorship without exacting its definition (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Bozeman and Feeney (2007) provided several examples of how scholars have expanded the conceptualization of mentorship without refining its definition stating:

> Early mentoring concepts seem to be the only glue holding together highly diverse research. Still, there have been some extensions and departures in conceptualization. For example, researchers now address the possible negative outcomes of mentoring, where barriers prevent mentors from providing guidance to protégés (Eby & Allen, 2002; Eby, McManus, Simon, & Russell, 2000; Hunt & Michael, 1983; Ragins & Cotton, 1996; Scandura, 1998). Eby and colleagues (2000) define negative mentoring “as specific incidents that occur between mentors and protégés, mentors’ characteristic manner of interacting with protégés, or mentors’ characteristics that limit their ability to effectively provide guidance to protégés” (p. 3). Some researchers have extended their mentoring definitions to include alternative forms of mentoring such as peer mentoring (Bozionelos, 2004), formal and informal mentoring (Chao et al., 1992), and diversified mentoring, relationships where individuals of different racial, ethnic, or gender groups engage in mentoring (Ragins, 1997a, 1997b). Although one can perhaps argue that the core meaning for mentoring remains in wide use, it is certainly the case that multiple meanings have

Kram’s (1983) theory of mentoring is the bedrock of most mentorship research despite scholarly critiques regarding its imprecise definition (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Many scholars (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Bozeman and Feeney, 2007; Jacobi 1991) agree that research based on early mentoring theories produces stipulative definitions for mentoring which are either too rigid or too opaque to apply to new areas of research. In recognition of the difficulty of exacting a definition for mentorship that has the plasticity for theoretical application across various disciplines, Bozeman and Feeney (2007) offered this definition for mentorship:

Mentoring: a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé). (p. 731)

Bozeman and Feeney (2007) developed this definition after thorough scrutiny of the mentorship literature in numerous disciplines. Their analysis of the literature revealed that many previous conceptualizations for mentoring ambiguously the concept, resulting in multiple operational definitions for mentoring that complicate further study (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007).
Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) definition for mentoring does not represent a profound shift from previous conceptualizations, however two of its main implications are relevant to this study.

First, Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) definition disrupts the hierarchical stipulation of many mentoring conceptualizations. Because Kram’s (1983) work is situated squarely within the business realm, several mentoring definitions stipulate that the mentor have a hierarchical rank higher than protégé’s (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Such conceptualizations could preempt this study from exploring the effects of peer mentorship on the success of Black males at the University of Mississippi. Bozeman and Feeney (2007) argued that a mentor need only possess more knowledge than a protégé or mentee within a specific domain of knowledge. This also allows for a person A, who serves as a mentor in one domain of knowledge, to receive mentorship from person B, so long as person B possesses more knowledge than person A in a different knowledge domain. This stipulation will allow this study to explore reciprocal mentoring relationships between study participants and between study participants and their peer mentors who do not participate in the study.

Secondly, Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) definition specifies that mentoring is inherently informal social exchange. Bozeman and Feeney (2007) described the concept of “formal mentoring” as oxymoronic, but are careful to note that this implication does not preempt the many formal mentoring programs established by organizations - or programs at institutions of higher education in the case of the current study - from catalyzing mentoring relationships. Rather, Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) implication is that mentorship is not an automatic nor inherent result of participation in formal mentorship programs. In justification of this stipulation, Bozeman and Feeney (2007) cited the work of Eby and Allen (2002) which shows that formal
mentoring programs sometimes result in poor dyadic fit. When mentors and mentees perceive themselves as fundamentally different from their dyadic partners they experience dissatisfaction with the mentoring relationship which can contribute to higher rates of turnover and stress (Eby and Allen, 2002). This stipulation is important to the current study because it challenges the assumption that study participants will perceive that they have received mentorship through their participation in formal mentorship programs.

**Labaree’s Competing Political Goals of Education**

Understanding the context under which Black males found pathways to academic success at the University of Mississippi was also paramount to this study. Labaree’s (1997) theory on the competing political goals of education elucidates the broader context of the structural barriers students face as a result of the tensions between the goals. Tinto’s (2016) theory on student persistence in college considers how those challenges affect student motivation to persist. This subsection briefly outlines the theories and describes how they were used to analyze structural and personal barriers to persistence as described by the respondents.

The conceptual framework uses David Labaree’s (1997) competing political goals of education to analyze the dynamics that create barriers to Black males’ success in college. Labaree (1997) posited that the three competing goals have sweeping implications regarding how educational stakeholders approach policy administration, resource allocation, and curriculum development in America. Labaree’s theory (1997) describes the turbulence caused by competition between three main political frames of education: democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. While all students are subject to the tensions the dissonance between the three political frames creates, Black males may experience a unique set of
challenges related to each frame which have the potential to threaten their persistence to graduation.

**Democratic equality.** Labaree’s (1997) democratic equality is the idea that the primary goal of education is to prepare students for citizenship in the commonwealth. This political goal takes three operational forms: citizenship training, equal treatment, and equal access. From the citizenship training perspective, education is a public good that should instill a sense of community membership to counter the greed and selfishness that the capitalist American economic system fosters (Labaree, 1997). Labaree (1997) argued that adequately educated citizens are the lifeblood of democracy because they can operate in market driven systems without losing their sense of community.

**Equal treatment and democratic equality.** Stakeholders committed to promoting the political goal of training citizens recognize the potential for social inequity, which is related to capitalism, to undermine political equality (Labaree, 1997). Thusly, the democratic equality political goal of education also concerns itself with equal treatment within, and equal access to, educational opportunities for all citizens (Labaree, 1997). Desegregation of public schools, the establishment of a common school curriculum including comprehensive high school, the proliferation of non-academic curricula offerings, the removal of divisive religious practices from public schools, and the incorporation of more multicultural perspectives into curricula are all examples of changes to the education system made in pursuit of equal treatment (Labaree, 1997). The political goal to ensure equal access to education for all Americans regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, or access to privilege across all levels of education has also had a profound impact on the American higher education system (Labaree, 1997). Free public primary
and secondary education and the current push for free college education are both reflective of
ttempts to ensure equal access to education within the democratic equality political goal of
education (Labaree, 1997). Addressing concerns regarding equal access requires “an enormous
and ever-increasing outpouring of public funds” (Labaree, 1997, p. 46), which creates conflict
over resources between educational stakeholders committed most firmly to democratic equality
and those in pursuit of other competing interests.

**Democratic equality through the years.** America’s collective commitment to achieving
democratic equality changes with the needs of the nation (Labaree, 1997). During the mid-19th
century, trends in education mirrored a commitment to achieving democratic equality (Labaree,
1997). Educational stakeholders were committed to using education to combat the individualism
and selfishness that they felt accompanied capitalism (Labaree, 1997). The early 20th century
brought a shift toward social mobility and social efficiency (Labaree, 1997). This shift occurred
because the earlier focus on achieving democratic equality resulted in a large workforce with a
broad and undifferentiated skillset (Labaree, 1997). The civil rights movement sparked a political
shift back to democratic equality as the nation’s educational system became more socially
inclusive (Labaree, 1997). The late 20th century brought on a political shift back to social
efficiency and social mobility as political pressure for common educational standards effectively
stratified the educational system (Labaree, 1997). The application of these standards has had
disparate impact on Black communities which were systematically denied equal access to
education throughout most of America’s history (Labaree, 1997).

**The inequity of democratic equality.** Black people were systematically excluded from
the University of Mississippi, for instance, until James Meredith enrolled into the University
under guard of federal marshals in 1962. Many Black males in college still face social (Rowley, 2001) and cultural (Cuyjet, 2006) exclusion from campus life. Pervasive and persistent political, cultural, and economic inequality causes many American males to stop out, drop out, or lose interest in school (Cuyjet, 2006). Black males internalize societal perceptions of their marginalization on campuses which leads to self-doubt and unwillingness to immerse themselves in campus life (Cuyjet, 2006). Stereotype threat leaves many Black males feeling uncomfortable in their classes, apprehensive about approaching professors, and anxious about developing relationships with their peers (Cuyjet, 2006). Cuyjet (2006) argued that campuses are affected by the exclusion of Black males because their isolation prevents cross-racial interactions with students, faculty and staff which are necessary to challenge stereotypes and give new perspectives about Black men. Additionally, Black males dedicate energy they might otherwise apply to their studies on efforts to assert their manhood in a society that routinely denies them access to traditional indicators thereof (Cuyjet, 2006).

**Social efficiency.** Social efficiency is the idea that the primary goal of education is to prepare workers to fulfill market roles (Labaree, 1997). It is the belief that society operates best when there are enough adequately trained workers to fill all societal roles dictated by the economy (Labaree, 1997). From the social efficiency perspective, education is a public good that responds to the practical needs of a market driven economy (Labaree, 1997). While democratic equality considers education from the perspective of the citizen, social efficiency considers the perspective of the taxpayer (Labaree, 1997). Those who hold social efficiency as the primary political goal of education take a pragmatic approach to education; effectively incurvating educational experiences to fulfill the needs of the economy and society.(Labaree, 1997).
Social efficiency and vocationalism. Social efficiency is operationalized within education through vocationalism and educational stratification (Labaree, 1997). Vocationalism concerns itself with what Labaree (1997) called a “simple reality: students leave school and enter the workforce, regardless of their level of preparedness to do so” (p. 3). Citing the major difference between social efficiency and democratic equality Labaree (1997) stated:

Nothing could be more impractical, from this perspective, than the kind of general education promoted by democratic equality, in which graduates would emerge as an undifferentiated group with a common set of broad competencies that are not easily adapted to the sharply differentiated skill-demands of a complex job structure (p. 47).

According to Labaree (1997) beginning in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, groups of business and educational leaders attempted to make education more practical by shifting educational curricula from focus on traditional liberal arts toward job specific skills and knowledge. This shift resulted in the creation of purely vocational programs which are still part of many secondary education and community college curricula (Labaree, 1997). However, the implications for a shift toward more practical education are broader sweeping than the increase in vocational offerings at high schools and community colleges (Labaree, 1997).

Vocationalism has also shifted the way stakeholders evaluate the cost effectiveness of education (Labaree, 1997). From the vocationalist perspective, schooling should be a prudent pursuit that secures society’s economic future by producing skilled workers to fill existing roles (Labaree, 1997). At any given time, most American taxpayers do not have children who are attending public schools or colleges (Labaree, 1997). For this majority, the proposed benefits of
democratic equality can feel remote and idealistic compared to the more tangible potential for vocationalism to affect their bottom lines (Labaree, 1997).

**Social efficiency and stratification.** Capitalism necessitates competition; and competition depends on advantage (Labaree, 1997). Because social efficiency attempts to respond to the needs of capitalism, it inherently forestalls efforts to achieve the equal treatment and equal access components of democratic equality (Labaree, 1997). Rather than focusing on the equal treatment and access, social efficiency has produced a schooling system that is stratified similarly to the job market (Labaree, 1997).

The influence of social efficiency on educational stratification is evident in three main ways. First, education is organized into ascending levels (Labaree, 1997). Students move horizontally from their level of highest or most relevant educational achievement to a complimentary echelon within the job market (Labaree, 1997). Secondly, the social value of educational institutions is stratified based on qualitative differences (Labaree, 1997). Labaree (1997) explained, “A degree from an Ivy League college is worth considerably more in the job market than one from a regional state university, since employers assume that a graduate from the former is smarter and better educated, which then makes that graduate a potentially more productive employee” (Labaree, 1997, p. 49). Lastly, the experiences of students within schools are stratified based on perceived and tested academic ability (Labaree, 1997). Students within the same schools who have completed the same number of units can receive very different educational experiences and outcomes (Labaree, 1997). The economic value of these different experiences is also stratified (Labaree, 1997). From the social efficiency perspective, this educational stratification is a fair way of ensuring that employees are adequately trained for the
positions the market provides (Labaree, 1997). Those who persist to higher levels of educational attainment are presumed to have acquired more human capital; and are thusly considered more prepared to be productive in roles that require more human capital than those with less education (Labaree, 1997).

**Social efficiency through the years.** In the 1970s, the federal and state governments began shifting subsidization of education from the institution to the individual in order to create “freer play of market forces” (Arum & Roksa, 2011, p. 15). This shift resulted in greater choice in higher education options for consumers (Arum & Roksa, 2011). The shift of government support from the institution to the individual created a void in funding that institutions filled with rising tuition costs (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Between 1978 to 2008 private four-year college tuition rose from $9,903 to $25,143 and public four-year tuition rose from $2,303 to $6,585 in “constant 2008 dollars” (Arum & Roksa, 2011, p. 15). Consumers utilized loans to compensate for the rising cost of tuition (Arum & Roksa, 2011). From 2000 to 2007 average student loan debt increased 18% per borrower (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

Increased access to poorly understood loans to subsidize college increased access and consumerism simultaneously (Arum & Roksa, 2014). Increased access to higher education gave consumers feelings of entitlement to obtain a college education (Arum & Roksa, 2011). As a result, some individuals who would normally go straight into the workforce after high school now attended college (Arum & Roksa, 2014).

“College for all” policies perpetuate lack of learning in American higher education because they make underprepared students feel entitled to college education at all levels without creating systems that compensate for their under preparedness (Arum & Roksa, 2011, p. 15).
Administrators and faculty, concerned about attrition decrease academic expectations in order to retain underprepared students (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Underprepared students also enroll in largely ineffective remediation courses for no credit (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). These courses rarely prepare students for collegiate level rigor despite costing the same as academic coursework for credit (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Boatman & Long, 2010). When considering that college currently costs nearly half of an average family’s median income, students and their families have a principle interest in the extent to which their investment in college will produce meaningful returns (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

**Social efficiency and learning.** If earning a credential is the goal of American students who pursue higher education, and the goal of earning that credential is securing employment and a place as a valuable contributor to society, then higher education fails when it provides the means to attain a credential without prioritizing learning (Arum & Roksa, 2014). As cited by Arum and Roksa, David Labaree argued “we have credentialism to thank for aversion to learning that, to a great extent, lies at the heart of our educational system” (Arum & Roksa, 2011, p. 16).

Arum and Roksa (2011) found inequities in learning outcomes across socio-demographic groups. The gaps between the learning and earning outcomes of White and Black students proved most dramatic (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Black students entered college already one full standard deviation below White students on the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), which measures improvements in critical thinking and writing skills, during four years of college (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Furthermore, Black students also showed less evidence of improvement over time than their White peers (Arum & Roksa, 2011). While the White students who participated in Arum & Roksa’s (2011, 2014) studies gained 41 percentile points on the CLA,
Black students improved by only seven. This widening gap of critical thinking, analytical skill, and written communication proficiency perpetuates the cycle of inequitable educational outcomes for Black students (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Students whose parents did not attend college also show patterns of inequity (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Less than 50% of students with parents who lacked formal education were ready for college (Arum & Roksa, 2011). These students showed ambition, but often lacked an understanding of what it would take to reach their goals (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

**Social mobility.** Social mobility is the idea that education is a commodity that should prepare individuals to compete to maintain or better their social position (Labaree, 1997). Both social efficiency and social mobility accept that market societies are inherently inequitable (Labaree, 1997). Both perspectives also hold that education should meet the needs of society (Labaree, 1997). The key difference between the two perspectives is that while the efficiency goal focuses on the entire social system’s needs, the mobility goal focuses on education from the perspective of the individual consumer’s needs (Labaree, 1997). According to Labaree (1997), “The result is an emphasis on individual status attainment rather than the production of human capital (p. 51).”

**Social mobility: education as a private good.** The social efficiency goal is similar to the democratic equality goal in that both view education as a public good from which the whole community benefits (Labaree, 1997). Democratic equality provides public education to everyone despite their ability to pay (Labaree, 1997). Educating these individuals is within the best interests of democracy (Labaree, 1997). Social efficiency produces workers for pre-established and necessary roles within society (Labaree, 1997). Even those who pay for private education
benefit from an educational system that helps to fill market-demanded roles (Labaree, 1997). Social mobility differs from both in that it views education as a private good which benefits the individual (Labaree, 1997). Whereas public goods potentially benefit all members of the community regardless of whether they provided the capital to fund all of the services available, private goods work in service of the individual (Labaree, 1997).

**Social mobility and stratification.** The individual focus of social mobility results in demands for selective and differential educational outcomes that give individual students advantages to compete for social positions (Labaree, 1997). Similar to the need to fill specific market-demanded roles within the social efficiency goal, the need for differentiation within the social mobility frame necessitates a stratified educational system (Labaree, 1997). The logic follows that for such a system to work, students cannot receive an equal education; they must receive some benefits that differentiate them from other students (Labaree, 1997).

The need for competitive social advantage within the social mobility frame has influenced educational stratification in the same three ways as social efficiency (Labaree, 1997). First, educational levels and institutional types are organized into graded hierarchies through which students ascend in search of social capital that will prepare them for competition for social roles (Labaree, 1997). The educational consumer’s desire to become more prepared for competition constructs a pyramid-shaped educational structure in which each ascending level represents a greater competitive advantage over the preceding level (Labaree, 1997). The pursuit of competitive advantage has driven an upward expansion of education (Labaree, 1997). As access to education approaches universality at any given level, the demand for educational
distinction shifts enrollments to the next level (Labaree, 1997). This shift perpetuates inequalities in educational attainment that exists between American social classes (Labaree, 1997).

Secondly, the social mobility frame influences qualitative differences between institutions at each level (Labaree, 1997). Institutions are stratified by their reputation, and an institution’s prestige is often commensurate with its endowment and tuition (Labaree, 1997). Upper-class communities vigorously defend social mobility by resisting efforts that would serve to reduce racial and economic disparities between school districts (Labaree, 1997). Students seek admission to the most highly regarded institutions for which they are qualified, even if it requires considerable financial sacrifice (Labaree, 1997). Those with greater financial capital have more access to communities with successful schools and highly esteemed institutions of higher education (Labaree, 1997). Colleges respond to the need to affirm institutional prestige by keeping tuition comparable with other schools with which they consistently compete for students (Labaree, 1997).

Thirdly, social mobility stratifies opportunities within educational environments (Labaree, 1997). Stratified opportunities are necessary to distinguish each individual student and increase their opportunities for success (Labaree, 1997). This results in parallel course offerings which engage the same material at different levels, programs for both relatively high and low academic performers, quantitative (letter) grade distinctions, comprehensive standardized tests, and differential diplomas for different high school tracks (Labaree, 1997).

**Social mobility and inequity.** The social position of the consumer has a pronounced effect on education outcomes (Labaree, 1997). The need for differentiation fuels conflict between consumers of different social statuses (Labaree, 1997). Those with higher social status are
thoroughly committed to using education to maintain their means (Labaree, 1997). Those with lower social status are eager to use education to gain social capital to compete for higher social positions (Labaree, 1997). From the social mobility perspective, education is not seen in terms of its usefulness within society (Labaree, 1997). Instead, the social mobility perspective holds that the usefulness of one’s education is based on its exchangeability for the tangible (Labaree, 1997). Educational consumers understand that employers use educational credentials to assess candidates’ qualifications (Labaree, 1997). Supply and demand determine the need for individuals with specific credentials (Labaree, 1997).

Social mobility, segregation, and learning. Social efficiency and social mobility have both influenced the American educational system through structural and social stratification (Labaree, 1997). Schooling structures bend to meet the constraints of the market (Labaree, 1997). America’s history of segregation compounds with the structural stratification of its education system resulting in perpetually inequitable educational outcomes for Black students (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

Most Black students attend segregated schools in America (Arum & Roksa, 2011). About 40% of the Black, Hispanic, and Asian students who participated in Arum and Roksa’s (2011) research study on college learning attended high schools in which at least 70% of the student body were non-White. Black students are more likely attend schools that lack funding, course offerings, and quality of instructors comparable to the schools their White peers attended (Arum & Roksa, 2011). As a result, these students score more poorly on college entry tests like the ACT and SAT and are less likely represented in the top of the GPA distribution for a given year’s college freshmen cohort (Arum & Roksa, 2011).
Academic preparedness accounts for one third of the gap between the Collegiate Learning Assessment scores of Black students and White students (Arum & Roksa, 2011, p. 50). However, Arum and Roksa found that Black students were 33% less likely to enroll in courses that required at least 20 pages of writing and at least 40 pages of reading per week (Arum & Roksa, 2011, p. 71). Students who took these courses experienced the greatest increases in CLA scores (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Black students’ avoidance of more difficult and demanding coursework may indicate relatively low self-efficacy.

Arum and Roksa (2011) also identified disparities in graduation rates and CLA performance that tracked with socio-demographics. When students have the opportunity to learn with higher performing students, all students perform better (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Students at highly selective institutions performed better on the CLA and were more likely to view their college environment as one that held academics in high regard (Arum & Roksa, 2014). Even after controlling for factors like college preparedness, the researchers found that highly selective institutions produced graduation cohorts that exhibited the lowest gaps across student socio-demographics. Arum and Roksa also found, however, that 66% of Black students attend less selective schools (Arum & Roksa, 2011). This is partially due to the link between poverty and racial segregation (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Black students cannot afford to attend highly selective institutions at the same rate as White students (Arum & Roksa, 2011). They also do not make the scores on college admission tests or earn the grade point averages needed to gain admission into highly selective institutions at rates commensurate with their percentage in the population (Arum & Roksa, 2011).
Students from more advantaged backgrounds are exposed to coursework during high school that better prepares them for college than the courses students from disadvantaged backgrounds take (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Students who enter college without the cultural capital to acculturate or assimilate successfully do not benefit equally from collegiate study (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Colleges and universities which do not problematize cultural norms which requisite assimilation perpetuate inequity.

**Social mobility and credentialism.** The pursuit of social mobility can lead consumers to equate earning a credential with learning (Labaree, 1997). The value of knowledge acquisition is negligible if one lacks the credentials employers seek (Labaree, 1997). This shifts students’ focus acquiring knowledge to acquiring credentials (Labaree, 1997). Students learn to earn as many markers of formal education with as little effort as possible, and the educational market packages and markets the markers for consumers (Labaree, 1997).

**Social mobility, meritocracy, and competition.** Social mobility encourages competition, which influences citizens to adopt meritocratic attitudes about educational outcomes (Labaree, 1997). Educational consumers see each other as competition in a zero-sum game (Labaree, 1997). They understand that each opportunity they are afforded is no longer available to someone else (Labaree, 1997). Individuals from upper-class backgrounds possess more financial capital to support educational opportunities than those from lower socio-economic statuses (Labaree, 1997). Meritocratic attitudes, however, might preempt critical consideration of the value of that luxury (Labaree, 1997).
Tinto’s Three Major Motivations to Persist and Graduate

Vincent Tinto (2016) asserted that students are most likely to persist to graduation when they benefit from three major experiences. First, student must feel a sense of belonging on campus (2016). When students do not feel like valuable members of the campus community, they are less likely to persist (Tinto, 2016). Secondly, students must perceive sufficient value in the curriculum to invest adequate time and effort in their studies to be successful (Tinto, 2016). When students engage in coursework that seems tangential to their interests, they need intentional academic challenge and support to help them relate what they are learning to real life experiences (Tinto, 2016). Finally, students persist when they believe that they can (Tinto, 2016). Tinto posited that self-efficacy is paramount to student persistence (Tinto, 2016). Challenging and supporting students properly and exposing them to examples of successful people who share cultural characteristics builds their self-efficacy and increases the likelihood that they persist and graduate (Tinto, 2016)

Sense of belonging. Vincent Tinto (2016) identified sense of belonging as one of three major experiences that shape student motivation to stay in college and graduate. In order for students to succeed in college, they must perceive that they are valued members of the campus community (Tinto, 2016). This sense of value binds an individual to the community and fosters a sense of commitment to persist - even in the midst of challenges (Tinto, 2016). Student perceptions of their interactions with faculty, staff, and other students are shaped by the broader campus climate (Tinto, 2016). For Black men at Predominantly White Institutions, these perceptions can leave students feeling out of place (Cuyjet, 2006). Feelings of not belonging can
cause students to withdraw from social contact, which exacerbates feelings of isolation and erodes motivation to persist (Tinto, 2016).

**Supporting sense of belonging on campus.** Tinto (2016) argued that institutions should help students develop a sense of belonging through programming and academics. Socially, institutions must develop a culture of inclusion through promoting activities that cultivate social interaction across diverse groups (Tinto, 2016). Institutions should work to support social organizations that allow for students to find a niche on campus (Tinto, 2016). Academically, institutions should encourage pedagogies that facilitate group problem solving and equal partnership within groups (Tinto, 2016).

**Critical analysis of promoting a sense of belonging.** Critics of Tinto’s (1987) theories on student persistence and attrition argue that the focus on social and academic integration into a campus community are remnant of the acculturation/assimilation perspectives of social scientists who studied integration in the 1960s (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2011). The prevailing belief was that racial/ethnic minority groups actively participate in perpetual cycles of poverty and deprivation that they could end if they wanted through intentional assimilation and acculturation (Rendon et al., 2011). Assimilation and acculturation requires one to separate from a community and its customs, beliefs, traditions, and philosophies to join another (Rendon et al., 2011). The acculturalist/assimilative perspective presents two main problems for researching persistence for non-white populations. First, it establishes mainstream norms as the standard for which minorities should strive in order to be successful in college (Rendon et al., 2011). Secondly, it implies that the values, beliefs, and cultural norms of racial/ethnic minority groups are destructive or undesirable (Rendon et al, 2011). Assimilative/acculturative perspectives on
student retention ignore the roles of structural racism, oppression, and inequity that cause feelings of exclusion and isolation (Rendon et al., 2011). This error in problem definition warrants approaches to studying student retention that do not disparage students’ unique cultural and social attributes and consider the roles of historical oppression and structural racism in shaping campus climates (Rendon et al., 2011). Tinto’s (2016) essay addresses these criticisms, emphasizing the need for institutions to be intentional about diversity, equity, and inclusion and encouraging institutions to introduce students to a variety of social organizations as early as orientation.

**Perceived value of curriculum.** Students are more motivated to persist when they perceive that the curriculum is valuable to them (Tinto, 2016). The way students perceive the quality and relevance of the curriculum affects the time and effort they will put into academics (Tinto, 2016). When students do not view the material as valuable, they are not likely to develop the habits that lead to learning (Tinto, 2016). Students who cannot find sufficient value in the curriculum material are less motivated to persist (Tinto, 2016).

**Supporting perceived value in the curriculum.** Institutions should ensure that students enroll in coursework that aligns with their interests and offer academic support that makes mastering challenging courses more attainable (Tinto, 2016). Institutions should take special care to make sure that their humanities curricula are inclusive of the experiences of the students who enroll in those courses (Tinto, 2016). Faculty often fail to connect the curriculum to real-life experiences (Tinto, 2016). They should be explicit in helping students connect class material to real-life situations that have relevance to their students (Tinto, 2016). Institutions can also help students contextualize what they learn by using problem-based pedagogies that require students
to use the materials they learn in class to complete complex projects (Tinto, 2016). Institutions can also use learning communities to cohort students into thematically linked courses that promote multidisciplinary, group problem solving (Tinto, 2016). By using problem-based pedagogies and supporting learning communities, institutions promote meaningful learning while helping students persist (Tinto, 2016).

**Critical analysis of promoting perceived value.** Tinto’s (2016) essay on student motivations to persist stresses the institution’s responsibility to help students perceive value in their courses and find belonging. Institutional stakeholders must listen to all of their students across all sociodemographic groups and consider diverse perspectives as they develop curricula and administer policy (Tinto, 2016). According to Rendon et al. (2011), however, earlier models on student retention, including Tinto’s (1987) model, place too much emphasis on an individual’s cultural separation and subsequent assimilation to facilitate their student engagement and involvement within the learning community. This model, and models like it, produce structures which require students to perceive enough value in an institution’s offerings to shed aspects of their cultural identity (Rendon et al., 2011). When practitioners internalize this focus on cultural separation they can make the mistake of creating programs designed to help retain students without doing outreach to the students most likely drop out (Rendon et al, 2011). The low engagement that results can lead practitioners to view Black students as disengaged, reluctant learners (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Rendon et al (2011) argued:

*If practitioners accept the cultural separation assumption without understanding its inherent trauma for nontraditional students, then practitioners will tend to see*
involvement as a relatively easy task since they will also assume that all students, regardless of background, are ready, willing, and able to get involved.

Mentors of Black students in college must empathize with them and attempt to understand the challenges they experience as they navigate college (Rendon et al, 2011). Intentional outreach is a necessary component of attempts to support the students who are most at risk of departure from college (Tinto, 2016; Rendon et al. 2011). Curricula which affirm intersecting identities can in turn support sense of value in the curriculum (Tinto, 2016).

**Perceived value of the curriculum and career.** One of the most sought-after outcomes for college degree completion is job security (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010). Black college graduates have significantly higher incomes than those who do not complete college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Providing career counseling to Black men requires practitioners to develop a relationship with them that establishes empathy for their unique needs (Heaven, 2015). Practitioners who are armed with an understanding of multiple student development theories are better equipped to help Black students make the connections between their academic coursework and desired employment outcomes (Heaven, 2015).

**Self-Efficacy.** Self-efficacy is a person’s belief in their own ability to succeed in a specific context (Tinto, 2016). Self-efficacy is domain-specific, meaning that an individual can lack self-efficacy regarding some tasks and be confident regarding others (Tinto, 2016). Students learn self-efficacy through their past experiences and environments (Tinto, 2016). While students, parents, and schools can certainly work to improve self-efficacy for students before they enter college, it is important for higher education practitioners to acknowledge the continued malleability of self-efficacy in college (Tinto, 2016).
**Threats to self-efficacy.** Transitioning from high school to college can present challenges that can affect students’ self-efficacy (Tinto, 2016). A strong sense of self-efficacy helps students achieve goals and improves their willingness to persist through challenges (Tinto, 2016). Contrarily, students with low self-efficacy tend to withdraw from challenge (Tinto, 2016). Stereotype threats and past experiences can cause some groups of students to question their ability to succeed in college more than others (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Practitioners should work to help students develop self-efficacy, particularly during the first year, when transitional challenges abound (Tinto, 2016). A student’s successes and failures during the first year of college can affect their sense of self-efficacy throughout college (Tinto, 2016). The perceptions of others’ expectations can also affect self-efficacy (Tinto, 2016). It is paramount that institutions disrupt systems that label students as less capable of success than others (Tinto, 2016). It is also important that students who experience challenge have access to timely support (Tinto, 2016). Institutions should provide support for students before academic and transitional challenges undermine their self-efficacy severely (Tinto, 2016). Early intervention is key to supporting the self-efficacy of students who experience challenge early in their college journeys (Tinto, 2016).

**Cool pose and self-efficacy.** Black males adopt cool pose to counter cultural and social assaults that they can experience in everyday life (Billson & Majors, 1992). Cool pose is about visibility (Billson & Majors, 1992). In a world that consistently denies Black men access to traditional indicators of manhood, cool pose serves to render the Black man visible and powerful (Billson & Majors, 1992). It is characterized by culturally relevant language, clothing, and actions that are deeply ingrained within the psyche of Black men (Billson & Majors, 1992). Majors and Billson (1992) argued that cool pose joins Black masking or taking on personas that
comply with the roles that White people expect for Black men to play in society, shucking or a way of moving and speaking that create a facade intended to make White people feel more comfortable, playing the dozens or highly stylized mocking and bragging, and other masculinity rituals that can be destructive to comprise an entire persona called the *cool cat lifestyle*.

The problem with the cool cat lifestyle is not its mere existence (Billson & Majors, 1992). The problem is that individuals from the dominant culture often associate the calm, aloof, and nonchalant nature of men who exhibit cool pose and other masculinity rituals as deliberate disinterest in mainstream institutions; and not as defense mechanisms designed to increase visibility and cultural relevance within a racist society (Billson & Majors, 1992). Black men internalize society’s reaction to cool pose (Cuyjet, 2006). Black men in college can feel that society expects less of them academically, which can in turn make them feel less capable to succeed (Cuyjet, 2006). Support services for Black males should place a strong emphasis on supporting self-efficacy.

**Crisp and Cruz’s Model for College Mentoring**

Mentoring takes on many forms, so it can be difficult to ascertain how it manifests in specific contexts (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) theory on mentoring in college identifies four key domains of college mentoring: psychological and emotional support, support for setting goals and choosing a career path, academic subject knowledge and support, and the existence of a role model. Mentors need not provide support in all four domains, rather a mentor’s experiences and the needs of the mentee will determine the domains in which mentoring relationships operate (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).
Psychological and Emotional Support. Conceptualizations for mentoring college students - and supporting the success of Black males specifically - often include developmental aspects aimed to help students establish a sense of belonging within a community (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Cuyjet, 2006). Crisp and Cruz (2009) identified psychological and emotional support as one of four domains of mentoring college students. Psychological and emotional support is related to helping students develop a sense of belonging within a campus community (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). A strong sense of belonging can support student motivations to persist and graduate (Tinto, 2016). According to Crisp and Cruz (2009), “In sum, psychological and emotional support involves a sense of listening, providing moral support, identifying problems and providing encouragement, and establishing a supportive relationship in which there is mutual understanding and linking between the student and the mentor” (p. 539). Mentors discuss their mentees’ fears and doubts in order to better understand how to help them improve their self-confidence (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Mentors must be good listeners who can identify problems, offer moral support, and give encouragement to their mentees as they navigate challenges (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Mentors must show a genuine understanding of their mentees’ feelings in order to forge strong mentoring relationships (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Support for Setting Goals and Choosing a Career Path. Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) second college mentoring relationship domain, support for setting goals and choosing a career path, begins with assessing the student’s strengths and weaknesses then challenging and supporting the student as they set and reach academic and career goals (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Six perspectives shape the scope of this latent construct of mentoring: 1) mentors thoroughly review the strengths, weaknesses, interests, and abilities of their protégés; 2) mentors stimulate critical
thinking and professional preparation for future goals; 3) mentors reflect on their own lived experience and offer advice about what they have learned; 4) mentors request information from their protégés then make specific suggestions intended to support personal and professional goals; 5) mentors offer respectful challenges to their mentees’ decisions, which are relevant to their development as adult learners; and 6) mentors act as facilitators that help mentees reach their dreams (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

**Academic Subject Knowledge Support.** Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) third mentoring domain, academic subject knowledge support, described how mentors support their protégés’ academic success both inside and outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom, mentors use evaluation and tutorial support to help students acquire knowledge and skills that are relevant to their chosen field (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Mentors challenge and support their protégés as they acquire subject specific knowledge (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Outside of the classroom, mentors nominate mentees for opportunities, take credit and blame, and intervene on their mentees’ behalves when necessary (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Mentors also shield protégés from negative attention and discuss their successes with others (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Additionally, mentors serve as sponsors for their mentees as they work to reach their dreams (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Both the goal setting and academic subject knowledge support domains of college mentoring relate to helping students perceive value in the curriculum (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). As mentors help students set and reach professional goals and excel in the classroom, they help mentees understand how the acquisition of academic knowledge, technical skills, and student leadership experiences have prepared them for future opportunities (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).
Mentors also enhance the protégé’s sense of belonging within the community as they connect the protégés to others who can support their progress (Cuyjet, 2006).

**The Existence of a Role Model.** The final domain of Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) model of mentoring college students is the existence of a role model. This college mentoring domain focused on how mentees learn from the past and present actions of their mentors (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Mentors share deeply; disclosing life experiences and lessons that have proven important in their personal and professional lives (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). This enriches the relationship between the mentor and mentee, deepening their connection and strengthening the potential impact of the mentoring relationship (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). The mentor serves as an example and a guide in a stratified social world (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). The protégé learns from watching the mentor interact with other professionals and members of the community while juggling personal and professional roles and responsibilities (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

**Where are the Mentors?** Black males in college can benefit from the support described within each of Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) domains of college mentoring. They face significant cultural assaults that cause psychological stress (Cuyjet, 2006; Howard-Hamilton, 1997), experience disparate academic and career outcomes (Arum & Roksa, 2011, 2014), and find it more difficult than other demographic groups to establish relationships with faculty, administrators, and staff who could serve as role models (Heaven, 2015; Arum and Roksa, 2011, 2014; Cuyjet, 2006). One challenge for Black males seeking mentoring relationships is the lack of representation of Black faculty, staff, and administrators on PWI campuses (Gallagher & Trower, 2009).
Higher education institutions find attracting faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds perpetually difficult (Gallagher & Trower, 2009). These individuals do not want to come to institutions that are not diverse (Gallagher & Trower, 2009). Less than 5% of America’s faculty is Black (Nettles, 1997). To address this issue, many institutions have implemented aggressive recruiting efforts for Black faculty and staff (Gallagher & Trower, 2009). Though increasing the recruitment of diverse individuals will have some positive effects on increasing the level of diversity among faculty and staff, it cannot be regarded as the sole fix for low Black representation among faculty and staff (Gallagher & Trower, 2009). Institutions must also work to retain the diverse faculty and staff that they recruit (Gallagher & Trower, 2009).

Professors and student affairs staff from diverse backgrounds tend to prefer relocation over acclimation (Gallagher & Trower, 2009). Low retention numbers may suggest a similar sentiment for Black male students at PWIs (Cuyjet, 2006). Some universities have chosen to increase formal mentorship programs for racial/ethnic minority faculty and staff to take a more active role in making institutions more comfortable for diverse faculty and administrators (Gallagher & Trower, 2009). Formal mentoring programs do not ensure that mentoring relationships develop, however they can help to ensure that the pairing of newly recruited, diverse faculty and staff with quality mentors is not left to chance (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Gallagher & Trower, 2009).

**Role modeling and double consciousness.** Mentors can help Black male students find balance between adhering to the cultural identity that arises from their pre-college socialization and remaining aware of cultural characteristics that can potentially hinder their performance in college (Komives & Woodard, 2003). For Black males, the cultural capital that is relevant within
their pre-college cultural context can be different from the cultural capital needed to be successful in college (Cuyjet, 2006). W. E. B. DuBois (1903) described “double consciousness” as the tension that results from maintaining connection with both the “Negro” and American selves (Dubois, 1903). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argued that successfully balancing these selves can prove difficult for Black men who demonstrate a predilection for learning and academic success in college, as they can face alienation from other Black people and discrimination from non-Black people. College campuses can lack a critical mass of Black men to serve as examples that counter the narrative of contention between academic success and social acceptance (Gallagher & Trower, 2009). Institutions should seek a critical mass of Black mentors to provide Black male students the opportunity to learn from those more practiced in the reality of Dubois’ (1903) “double consciousness” (Gallagher & Trower, 2009).

Visual Depiction of Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 is a visual conceptualization of the theoretical framework with which I began this study. It depicts the relationships between Labaree’s (1997) competing political interests of higher education, Tinto’s (2016) motivation to stay in college and graduate, and Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) four domains of college mentoring. As previously discussed, attempts to achieve democratic equality and social mobility lead to undifferentiated curricula (Labaree, 1997). When students cannot readily assess the value of the curriculum, they are less likely to persist to graduation (Tinto, 2016). Attempts to achieve social efficiency and social mobility have stratified the educational system (Labaree, 1997). There is less Black representation at each ascending level of the stratified system (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Arum & Roksa, 2011; Cuyjet, 2006). The pursuit of social mobility leads to credentialism (Labaree, 1997).
The reciprocal arrows between Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) four latent constructs and between the constructs and the three experiences that motivate students to persist are meant to represent the interconnectedness of the college mentoring domains. Mentoring supports the whole person, so no single construct of mentoring operates in a vacuum. For Black males who can feel disconnected from campus and oppressed by society, all of the components of mentoring are most effective when students feel psychologically understood and supported (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). This model lists psychological and emotional support, the first of Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) four latent variables for mentoring in college, as the first mentoring construct because students are in a better position to perform well academically and gain knowledge that seems relevant to them, set and reach goals, and learn from a role-model when they feel safe from the cultural assaults they will experience in a racist society (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Reciprocally, when students acquire knowledge they perceive as relevant to them, achieve academic goals and professional aspirations, and find examples they can follow, they feel a sense of belonging within a community, have a positive perception of the curriculum, and develop an enhanced sense of self-efficacy that can help them to persist (Tinto, 2016; Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

Three additional theories scaffold this study. William Cross’ (1995) Nigrescence theory, Tracy Robinson and Mary Howard-Hamilton’s (1994) Afrocentric resistance paradigm, and Albert Bandura’s (1997) social learning model are depicted as the foundation of the figure. These theories, which are described in the following section, focus in on the specific types of support that mentoring relationships might provide for Black males in college. Placing these theories at the bottom of the figure narrows the focus of the theoretical framework from the purpose of
education more broadly to the specific needs of a population that experiences unique challenges in college.
Figure 1. Theoretical framework for mentoring Black males in college. This figure illustrates the relationships between several theories relevant to the current study.

**Theoretical Scaffolding**

One could argue that the goal of mentoring college students is student development. Traditional theories of student development are based on western beliefs and customs and were developed from studies that often included mostly White participants (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). William Cross’ (1995) Nigrescence theory, Tracy Robinson and Mary Howard-Hamilton’s (1994) Afrocentric resistance paradigm, and Albert Bandura’s (1997) social learning model are examples of student development theories that can be applied successfully to Black males in
college. The purpose of this section is to describe how each of these models can support Black males’ student development in college.

**Nigrescence.** Nigrescence theory outlines the process of Black identity development. Mentors can serve an important role in facilitating nigrescence (Cross, 1995). Cross’ (1995) nigrescence theory consists of five stages. The first phase of Cross’ (1995) nigrescence model is the pre-encounter phase. Individuals within the pre-encounter phase harbor anti-Black attitudes, instead embracing a Eurocentric cultural worldview (Cross, 1995). They may also lack sense of place within the community, exhibiting more of a self-centered world-view (Cross, 1995). Mentors should be careful to create structured and supportive learning environments for mentees who are in this stage of Nigrescence (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Mentors can encourage mentees to attend culture-specific programming, which can be a source of challenge and support for Black men who are in the pre-encounter stage (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). The mentor should also avoid moralizing the protégé’s behaviors or engaging in discussions about significant cultural differences within the dyad during this phase (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

The second phase of nigrescence is encounter (Cross, 1995). During this phase, individuals go through an emotional experience that challenges their previous anti-Black attitudes and catalyzes a change in personality (Cross, 1995). As Black men attempt to acculturate into new campus environments, they can experience encounters that initiate this phase (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Mentors should facilitate cross-cultural interactions which can help mentees learn what is good about their own and other cultures (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Mentors should also make sure that they challenge misconceptions about other racial and ethnic groups during this phase (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).
Cross’ (1995) third stage is immersion. During immersion, individuals begin to develop and embrace a more Afrocentric cultural appreciation (Cross, 1995). Individuals who are transitioning through the immersion phase begin to reject their Eurocentric worldview (Cross, 1995). Mentors of protégés who are experiencing immersion should counter anti-White attitudes that the protégé can develop during this stage. Individuals can develop feelings of resentment and frustration during this phase, so mentors should encourage interactions which provide their mentees opportunities to express their feelings (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Additionally, mentors should identify culturally sensitive individuals with whom they can connect the protégé (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). These cross-racial interactions challenge the one-sided way of thinking of individuals experiencing immersion (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

The fourth phase of Cross’ (1995) nigrescence model is internalization. During the internalization phase, an individual embraces an Afrocentric worldview that helps insulate them from the psychological insults they experience while navigating a racist society (Cross, 1995). Individuals also develop a sense of belonging that is anchored in their identity, which undergirds a solid foundation upon which they can build relationships and interact across racial and ethnic lines (Cross, 1995). Mentors of mentees who are going through internalization promote continued interaction with individuals from other cultural backgrounds (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

The final stage of Cross’ (1995) nigrescence model is internalization-commitment. During this stage, individuals develop a plan of action that is based on how they personally experience their Blackness (Cross, 1995). Mentors of protégés who are experiencing internalization-commitment should help the protégés establish networks of supportive
individuals who share similar beliefs (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). This stage is also marked by the individual beginning to help others move through the phases of nigrescence (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

Cross’ (1995) nigrescence model is an example of a developmental theory that describes the unique needs of Black males. Mentors of Black males in college can aid in healthy transitions through the phases (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). When mentees transition through the phases of nigrescence in a healthy way, they emerge with the skill to interact with other students, professors, administrators, and others across cultural barriers (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). This in turn helps them to develop a sense of belonging in the community, which can motivate them to persist (Tinto, 2016).

**Afrocentric Resistance.** Providing support for Black males as they work to achieve goals and strive for academic success in college requires special attention to the ways in which negative and demeaning characterizations of the Black race affect their sense of belonging on campus and perception of value in the curriculum (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Robinson and Howard-Hamilton’s (1994) Afrocentric resistance paradigm is one example of a developmental framework through which practitioners can support the unique needs of Black males as they work to find meaning for their lives (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Robinson and Howard-Hamilton (1994) developed the Afrocentric Resistance Paradigm as a framework to help mental health counselors interact with Black people more effectively.

**Afrocentric Resistance, the Nguzo Saba, and persistence.** The Afrocentric Resistance Paradigm uses the seven Nguzo Saba principles of Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujaama (cooperative economics),
Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith), which Maulana Karenga (1980) originally developed as part of the Kawaida theory. Robinson and Howard-Hamilton (1994) presented each of the Nguzo Saba principles as liberations/empowerments that counter conditions Black people survive in a racist society. Rather than focus on oppressive resistance, which focuses on survival, Afrocentric resistance is intended to be empowering and liberating (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994).

Though originally intended to provide guidance for mental health professionals working with Black clients, the Afrocentric Resistance model is potentially applicable to supporting Black male success in college. Umoja, or “unity with African people that transcends age, socioeconomic status, geographic origin, and sexual orientation” combats the isolation and disconnectedness from the larger community Black students can experience in college (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994, p. 329). Kujichagulia, or “self-determination through confrontation and repudiation of oppressive attempts to demean self” combats internalized negative and disparaging depictions of African cultures in education and the media (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994, p. 329). The third principle of Ujima, a sense of responsibility in which the “self is seen in connection with the larger body of African people, sharing a common destiny” combats “excessive individualism” (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994, p. 329). Ujaama, or “cooperative economics advocating a sharing of resources through the convergence of the ‘I’ and the ‘we’”, combats the selfishness and individualism that proponents of democratic equality feared inherent in capitalistic societies (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994, p. 329; Labaree, 1997). Nia, or a sense of “purpose in life that benefits the self and the collective” helps students understand delayed gratification, which helps them to resist “quick fixes” and distractions that
promise immediate gratification (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994, p. 329). Kuumba, or “using creative dialogue with other resisters to build new paradigms for the community”, disrupts the replication of irrelevant models for supporting Black success in college (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994, p. 329). Finally, Imani, or “faith through an intergenerational perspective where knowledge of the history of Africa and other resisters and care for future generations gives meaning to struggle and continued resistance” combats the myopic vision that can result from focus on the here and now without proper contextualization of the past (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994, p. 329).

Supporting the Nguzo Saba. Practitioners can help students reach the seven Nguzo Saba principles in several ways (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Programs that pair upperclassmen with freshmen support Ujima, Imani, and Ujaama (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Reading groups that focus on Afrocentric texts and contexts support Kujichagulia, Nia, and Kuumba (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Group counseling for Black students can help support Ujima (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Community service projects within the Black community and student leadership retreats can both help to support Umoja (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). A living learning community for Black students within a residence hall can offer opportunities to support all seven Nguzo Saba principles (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Friends and family weekends in which family and community members meet with the student in the college context can also support all seven principles (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Faculty-student workshops for Black students can help students develop relationships with their professors, which can support persistence and success (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).
Efforts to support Black males in college must begin with providing psychological reprieve from cultural assaults that can affect persistence (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). The ultimate goal of the model is to instill positive sense of self that is rooted in an appreciation for one’s African ancestry and culture (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). This positive sense of self bolsters self-esteem and self-confidence in one’s ability to succeed academically and professionally (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). The psychological support and community building within the Afrocentric Resistance model helps students develop a sense of belonging on campus, which Tinto (2016) identified as one of three experiences that motivate students to persist (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). The model may also inform methods by which mentors could help their mentees set and achieve goals, helping to coordinate the process by which mentees seek meaningful ways to apply the college curriculum to their individual lives. This in turn can increase the perceived value in the curriculum and self-efficacy for Black males in college, which both serve as sources of motivation to persist and graduate (Tinto, 2016).

**Social Learning.** Albert Bandura’s (1994) Social Learning theory on developing self-efficacy is directly applicable to Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) role modeling, goal setting, emotional, and academic domains of college mentoring (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Mentoring relationships help protégés develop skills that build self-efficacy (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Black males need mentors and role models to challenge and support them, which helps them build resilience and self-efficacy (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Having a successful mentor allows a mentee to imagine themselves succeeding in a similar situation (Bandura, 1994).

**Four methods for developing self-efficacy.** People build self-efficacy in four main ways (Bandura, 1994). First, individuals develop increased self-efficacy as they complete performance
accomplishments (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Mentors help their mentees accomplish difficult
tasks or navigate tough experiences (Bandura, 1994). Mentors can provide challenging stimuli to
their protégés, encourage them to participate in difficult tasks, and discuss positive and negative
outcomes and results in real time (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Mentors assess their protégés’ needs
to assess the level of support they should provide as the mentee works to conquer challenges
(Crisp and Cruz, 2009). Over time the mentor intentionally tapers the level of support they offer
for specific types of tasks to help the mentee gain confidence to approach similar tasks in the
future on their own (Levinson, D., Darrow, Klein, Levinson, M., & McKee, 1978).

Second, people develop self-efficacy through vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1994). Protégés benefit from watching their mentors navigate “high risk” experiences (Howard-
Hamilton, 1997, p. 27). Mentees get to observe what works and what does not (Howard-
Hamilton, 1997). They eventually begin to reason that if their mentor can accomplish the tasks,
they can too (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). For Black males in college, the impact of the vicarious
experience is strongest when the mentor being observed is from a “significantly diverse
background” (Howard-Hamilton, 1997, p. 27).

Third, individuals can gain self-efficacy through verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1994). Verbal persuasion is not as powerful as the other forms of performance accomplishments and
vicarious experiences because it is not as firmly tied to individual accomplishment (Howard-
Hamilton, 1997). Positive affirmations and encouragement work best to improve self-efficacy
when they are paired with personal accomplishment (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Mentors can use
verbal persuasion to help Black males overcome trepidation regarding a task (Howard-Hamilton,
However the boost to self-efficacy really comes when the individual succeeds at the task that the verbal persuasion encouraged them to do (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

Finally, emotional arousal can stimulate self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). The psychological state of individuals who are presented with stressful situations affects their perception of their ability to cope (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). When a person is presented with a psychologically or emotionally taxing situation and they perceive their environment to be non-supportive, they can become fearful or doubtful about their ability to succeed (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Welcoming and less threatening environments help ease people’s fears (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Individuals in welcoming environments engage more readily and thoroughly with challenges and develop better coping skills as a result (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Mentors can provide an environment that is insulated from chilly campus climates which might otherwise feel unwelcoming (Cuyjet, 2006).
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation seeks to explore successful Black male perceptions of the role of mentoring relationships in supporting college persistence. Several academic success programs at the University of Mississippi use mentorship to support their student participants. Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics boast relatively high Black male retention and graduation rates and also incorporate various forms of mentorship in their programming (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017; The Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). The success of these programs in supporting Black success sparked my curiosity regarding the potential for mentoring to support Black male success in college. The following research questions guided my efforts to understand successful Black males’ perceptions about if and/or how their mentoring relationships contributed to their success in college:

1. Do successful Black males perceive mentorship as important to their persistence at the University of Mississippi?
2. If so, what is the nature of the mentorship relationship?
3. How do mentoring relationships develop for successful Black males in college?
4. If mentorship plays a role in the success of Black males at the University of Mississippi, how does it help?
METHODOLOGY

Black males can face impediments to their success in college including stereotype threat, trouble adjusting to campus cultures, and difficulty or trepidation in forming relationships with professors (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Steel, 2000). Quantitative analysis of Black male retention helps to assess the pervasiveness of Black male attrition and elucidate the factors correlated with attrition and success. However, the historical hyper focus on quantitative factors that influence Black male success in college can sometimes lead to reactive policies that do little to redress the inequitable access to resources that affect Black males and other marginalized student populations (Harper, 2006). Additionally, quantitative research methods can provide a wealth of significant information about a population without any consideration to why that information is true (Duke & Malette, 2011). Qualitative research can help to interrogate the why and how questions that quantitative data analysis can leave unanswered (Duke & Malette, 2011).

Choosing Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research provides meaning to the descriptions and phenomena specifically selected individuals experience (Duke & Malette, 2011). It is most suited to answering non-numerical research questions that apply to small populations in specific contexts (Duke & Malette, 2011; Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, & Collins, 2009). The specificity of context and population that qualitative research requires can preempt the type of generalizations quantitative research designs make possible (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, & Collins, 2009). However, “Under
optimal conditions (e.g., data saturation, theoretical saturation, informational redundancy), [the researcher] can achieve verstehen, or understanding” (Duke & Malette, 2011, p. 302).

The Office of Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning (IREP) at the University of Mississippi constantly analyzes and reports the factors associated with student success quantitatively (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017), however the need to better understanding how programs that successfully retain Black males work remains. The Black male population at the University of Mississippi is small enough and uniquely contexted enough to rely on qualitative analysis to add depth to the numerical phenomena IREP presents (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). This dissertation is a qualitative study which seeks to glean recommendations for improving Black male retention and graduation rates from analysis of successful Black males’ perceptions of the relevance, nature, formation, and mechanisms of their mentoring relationships.

Data Collection and Validity

The study used semi-structured interviews to identify themes related to the research questions and focus groups to corroborate the themes identified from the interviews. Interviews were conducted until the point of data saturation, at which new interviews produced repetitive themes. Focus groups produced similar data to the interviews, which increased confidence in data saturation and helped to inform data analysis.

Focus groups and interviews work best when all participants are comfortable and feel that they can present their true opinions without fear of judgement (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Because of my status as a mentor and advisor on campus and the relatively low number of Black males who fit the parameters of my sample, I personally knew most of the 22 participants. While this
produced deep and rich interview and focus group data, it required that I account for the potential for my expectations or perceived expectations to affect how participants responded to my questions. As such, I used Interviewee Transcript Review (ITR) (Mero-Jaffe, 2011) to ensure accuracy of the data and to provide participants the opportunity to edit, clarify, or withdraw any information they shared during the personal interview. Additionally, I presented interview questions, focus group protocols, and transcripts to a peer debriefer. Creswell and Miller (2000) describe peer debriefing as “the review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research or the phenomenon being explored” (p. 129). Seeking the feedback of a peer debriefer “add[s] credibility to a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). The peer debriefers did not challenge any questions nor detect my influence in the framing of exploratory questions or students’ responses.

**Participant Selection**

Participants were selected based on several criteria. Sampling for interview participants began with submitting a recruitment email to all Black males who had: 1) participated in Luckyday, FASTrack, and/or Athletics; 2) completed an application for graduation; and 3) maintained a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or better in the spring of 2018. A total of 10 students who fit these criteria participated in semi-structured interviews; analysis of which yielded repetitive themes which evidenced data saturation.

Sampling for focus group participants began with asking interview participants, student leaders, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members for recommendations of Black male students they considered successful. Nominated candidates were sent a recruitment email soliciting their participation. The 12 focus group participants also maintained at least a 2.5 GPA,
but ranged in classification and organizational/departmental affiliation. All 22 participants were student leaders who were involved in student organizations and clubs.

After agreeing to participate in the study, participants signed an Adult Consent Form for Non-Treatment Studies that explained the scope of participation, permission to audio record interviews, confidentiality, risks, benefits, right to withdraw, and Institutional Review Board Approval for the study. The subjects then selected interview times from a list of options.

**Defining success.** While some studies which focus on the experiences of successful or high achieving Black males focus on individuals with 3.0 GPAs or better (Harper, 2010; Allen, 2015), I have chosen to use a 2.5 GPA minimum for two main reasons. First, reducing the GPA benchmark to 2.5 allowed me to gain more perspectives on how mentors helped the participants respond to academic challenges which affected their GPAs. Secondly, Mississippi students are notoriously underprepared for college – experiencing amongst the lowest high school graduation rates of all 50 states (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), and ranking 48th in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math scores, and 50th in NAEP reading scores (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013).

While FASTrack and Athletics will both have participants who are not from Mississippi high schools (FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.), Luckyday awards scholarships to Mississippi residents exclusively (The Luckyday Program, n.d.). Additionally, all of the quoted participants of this study are from the state of Mississippi. My hope is that reducing the GPA benchmark for academic success allowed me to gain more insight into the various ways that mentoring helps students achieve and persist despite academic underpreparedness for college and academic challenge during college. The choice to lower the GPA yielded access to the
experiences of both the student who excelled academically throughout his tenure and the student who struggled academically, but managed to right the course and progress toward graduation through the help of a mentor.

**Data Saturation**

Unless noted as an exception, each of the themes presented within this dissertation were evident in at least four of the interview transcripts. The number four is significant to considering saturation of the interview data because four of the 10 interview participants identified as LGBTQ. All four of the LGBTQ respondents experienced challenges which were not present in the other respondents’ accounts. For example, LGBTQ respondents reported experiencing discrimination from other Black students. Respondents who were not LGBTQ or who did not disclose their sexualities did not report this kind of discrimination. However, all respondents, regardless of their sexuality or gender expression, experienced stereotype threat in certain settings.

The consistency of the themes in the data, including the multiple examples of the unique experiences of the LGBTQ respondents and the more broadly shared experiences of the entire group of interviewees, suggests data saturation. Opinions which broke from the general consensus were reported as such where applicable.
SUMMARY OF MANUSCRIPT 1

Black males are not graduating from college at the same rate as other demographic groups (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Programs which excel at retaining Black males at the University of Mississippi incorporate mentoring into their student support approaches (The Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). This dissertation analyzes the mentoring experiences of successful Black males at the University of Mississippi and presents findings related to the relevance, nature, formation, and mechanisms of mentoring relationships. This first manuscript delineated the local and national contexts of the problem of low Black male graduation rates. It also described my professional positionality and assumptions regarding the problem. Manuscript 1 also contains the conceptual framework, which connects several theories to provide a theoretical basis for analysis of data related to four research questions. Manuscript 1 concludes with the research questions, the methodology of the study, and this synopsis. Manuscript 2 contains a brief recapitulation of the contents of Manuscript 1 and the presentation of the data. Manuscript 2 presents the data organized by research questions and expounds connections with theory when possible. Manuscript 3 will present findings and recommendations for research and practice related to mentoring and its relationship with student success in college.
MANUSCRIPT 1 REFERENCES


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MANUSCRIPT 1 APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Graduation and Retention Rates of Black males in Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics Compared to Aggregate

Graduated in four years by cohort year and program participation

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Program Status</th>
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<th>10-11</th>
<th>11-12</th>
<th>12-13</th>
<th>13-14</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>157</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>133</td>
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<tr>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
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<td>196</td>
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<td>160</td>
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<tr>
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<td>123</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>746</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>18%</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
## Graduated in five years by cohort year and program participation

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<tr>
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<th>11-12</th>
<th>12-13</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total %</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a Program</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>32%</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
Graduated in six years by cohort year and program participation

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<th>Total %</th>
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<td>71</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>37%</td>
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</table>

In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
Graduated in seven years by cohort year and program participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Status</th>
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<th>10-11</th>
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<th>Total %</th>
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<td>In a Program</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
Graduated in eight years by cohort year and program participation

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<td>45</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
### Retained to second year by cohort year and program participation

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<td>49</td>
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<tbody>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
### Retained to third year by cohort year and program participation

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<th>13-14</th>
<th>14-15</th>
<th>15-16</th>
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<th>Total %</th>
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<td>157</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>196</td>
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<td>148</td>
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<td>87</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<td>92</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
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<th>12-13</th>
<th>13-14</th>
<th>14-15</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total %</th>
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<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>32%</td>
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<td>86</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>196</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>148</td>
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<td>107</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics
Total % = Percentage of individuals
Retained to fifth year by cohort year and program participation

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<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>133</td>
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<td>64%</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>36%</td>
</tr>
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<td>164</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
Retained to sixth year by cohort year and program participation

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<td>No</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>106</td>
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<td>111</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>17%</td>
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<td>All Students</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
### Retained to seventh year by cohort year and program participation

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<td>125</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
## Retained to eighth year by cohort year and program participation

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<td>95%</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>140</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
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In a program = Participated in at least one of the following: Luckyday, FASTrack, Athletics

Total % = Percentage of individuals
MANUSCRIPT 2
DATA PRESENTATION

The data presented in this manuscript reflect the depth and dimension of 22 successful Black males’ perceptions of the role of mentoring in supporting their persistence in college. The 10 individual interviews with graduating students who participated in Luckyday, FASTrack, and/or Athletics are the sole source of the direct quotes and paraphrased examples presented in this manuscript. While not purposeful in the sampling methods, these 10 quoted individuals were all from the state of Mississippi.

The interview data were analyzed, organized, and presented to two focus groups as themes. The 12 focus group participants were not all Mississippi residents. They were broadly selected across all undergraduate classifications from amongst leadership programs and student organizations. Focus group data served to inform commentary and analysis; and also contributed to confidence in data saturation.

Personal Profiles

The interview and focus group protocols included questions which revealed demographic data about the respondents including their home towns, family backgrounds, levels of involvement, and programmatic affiliations. However, because of the relatively small number of Black males who fit the criteria for the study, descriptors which could potentially harm anonymity are not included in the reported data. Additionally, each participant is assigned a pseudonym to protect anonymity. This subsection introduces the quoted participants with brief
narratives about their college experiences. These brief participant profiles are not presented as an exhaustive data presentation; as subsequent sections will expound the data, findings, and recommendations.

**James.** James is an accounting major from a rural Mississippi town with a population under 3,000 residents. He began thinking about college in seventh grade after attending a grant-funded summer camp designed to introduce students to the process of selecting, enrolling, and succeeding in college. This bright, confident young man maintained an impeccable academic record in both high school and college, but he struggled against allowing doubtful commentary from family and community members to undermine his self-efficacy.

James was very complimentary of his academic experiences in college, but his social experiences were tainted by numerous rejections based on how others perceived his gender performance. These rejections inflamed deeply seated emotions which affected his ability to focus on academic success. James’s mentors were instrumental in helping him to build self-efficacy and cope these rejection experiences. He credited his mentors with helping him maintain balance and stay focused on what mattered to his success the most.

**Demarcus.** Demarcus hailed from a rural city with a population just under 8,000 residents. As a communicative sciences and disorders major, Demarcus has aspirations to become an audiologist. Demarcus never imagined a post-high school life that did not include college. Several of his immediate family members, including two of his three brothers, his mother, and grandmother had all earned multiple degrees. This deeply influenced how Demarcus viewed college and his potential to be successful therein.
Demarcus relied on his mentors for guidance and support as he navigated challenges and sought opportunities. As a competitive athlete with a very busy schedule, mentors helped Demarcus balance multiple responsibilities and develop priority management skills. They also helped him cope with tough situations, and expand his professional and social networks.

Corey. Corey was from a suburban town with a population of roughly 11,500. Corey felt that he was not as academically prepared as his classmates from other states. The palpability of that feeling shaped how, and from whom, he sought and accepted support.

Corey’s decision to come out to his parents – and his father’s caustic reaction thereto – marked significant moments in deep and lasting rifts in his family. As a result, Corey spent most of his pre-college experience feeling a pervasive sense of not belonging. Corey’s mentoring relationships started with individuals who made him feel like he could be himself. It was very important for Corey to find mentors who accepted and embraced him as a whole person.

Trevon. Men grow up, get trades, and go to work in Trevon’s home town of just over 2,000 residents. Trevon expected the same from himself, but his parents, teachers, and community members, encouraged him to pursue other things. Trevon knew too many accomplished tradesmen to look down on their work, or think himself better than taking up a trade. However, he was encouraged that others thought him capable of – and destined for – broader horizons. Still, this encouragement was not enough to provide Trevon with the examples he needed to be confident in his pursuits.

Trevon dreamed of becoming a doctor. Because he didn’t know many, he turned to the internet for inspiration and connections. These examples gave him an image to pursue; a model against which he could square his desire to be a doctor in the absence of examples in his
immediate proximity. Trevon’s mentors also helped to support his aspirations. Though he ultimately decided on a different career path, the mentoring relationships Trevon built as he pursued his goal of becoming a doctor proved valuable to his success and future prospects.

Tracy. Tracy grew up in a suburban town of just over 15,500 residents. Tracy was always well behaved. His mother would not accept anything less. Tracy attributed his early desires to attend college to her guidance and correction. Tracy remembered preparing for college as early as seventh grade. Once he entered college, however, he encountered a host of academic challenges. These challenges were exacerbated by Tracy’s financial responsibilities.

Tracy had to work so much as an undergraduate that he did not feel that he got the full college experience. His work schedule affected his social experience and his academic success. Because of this unique set of needs, Tracy associated the concept of mentoring with those individuals who could be prescriptive in their advising approaches. Tracy appreciated helpful people who talked to him about how he was feeling, but he did not always consider them mentors.

D’andre. Having grown up in a city of just over 10,500, D’andre had aspirations to study at a much larger, more prestigious institution than the University of Mississippi. His parents had always supported his desires, and this was no different. However, D’andre soon learned that he and his parents lacked some critical knowledge about selecting, effectively completing, and funding college. When he arrived on campus, the University of Mississippi felt big for D’andre. D’andre relied on various sources of mentoring to provide encouragement and address any gaps in technical knowledge he lacked as he pursued his degree in exercise science.
While all of the respondents talked about the importance of identity dynamics in mentoring relationships, D’andre placed a special emphasis on it. His concept of mentoring required shared experience, and he questioned if a White person could share his experiences such that they could mentor him. D’andre sought and got support from helpful people with whom he did not share racial identity, however he associated mentoring with support that helps one conceptualize themselves being successful. It was a challenge for D’andre to square that conceptualization with the support he received from helpful people who were not Black. They could provide guidance, but they could not relate to what it felt like to be Black.

Trey. Trey grew up in a Mississippi city with a population of over 160,000. He always knew he wanted to attend the University of Mississippi. His private high school education gave him the confidence that he would be able to handle the rigor of the University of Mississippi easily. And while he found the challenge of his coursework manageable, he did not handle the new responsibilities of college well. He found himself on academic probation after his first semester. He was ashamed of his performance, and he doubted if he would be able to be successful.

Trey’s mentors were instrumental in helping him to challenge those thoughts and feelings. Their styles were different, but all of them mattered. His dad was tough; and that made him take a step back and look at what he needed to do differently. His peers were affirming, and that helped him deal with the shame and find community. Mentoring, in all of its various forms and presentations, was integral to supporting Trey’s success in college.

Kyle. Kyle was a forensic chemistry major with a minor in music. He picked up a saxophone when he was younger and never put it down. Having been accustomed to excelling
academically and musically, Kyle described himself as someone who did not enjoy asking for help from others. Kyle was from a city with a population just over 160,000, and while he perceived many schools in his home district were struggling, his school curriculum was rigorous and effective. He entered college confident that he would be successful.

Kyle’s mentors helped to affirm that confidence. They encouraged him to take on tough challenges and they provided support and guidance as needed. He credited his peers, teachers, professors and family members who served as mentors with supporting his success throughout his college years.

**Lorenz.** Having graduated from a small high school in a town with a population of just under 2,000 residents, Lorenz was happy to graduate high school. He had not considered going to college until he became an accomplished athlete and caught the attention of college coaches. Lorenz’s college career began in community college, where he spent the first two years of his undergraduate experience. While his hope was to complete an associate’s degree and be finished with school, his guidance counselors had not effectively helped him to plan out his academic path for him to complete the associates in the time he expected. At the same time, his coaches were confident that he could be successful on the college level, even if he left community college before earning the associates.

Lorenz’s mentors were there for him during the tough process of learning that he would not graduate from his community college with his associate’s degree. His mentors helped him cope with the deep emotions he experienced and helped make sure he was on a good path to graduation once he entered the University of Mississippi.
Terrell. Terrell graduated from a selective high school into which he was accepted his 10th grade year of high school. It was tough for him to leave his family and friends from his small home town of less than 500 residents, but he knew that the county school he attended was not preparing him for college.

Having been beloved in his home community and at his new high school, Terrell was not prepared for the social challenges he would experience in college. He had trouble making connections with groups; describing himself as too white for the black spaces and too black for the LGBTQ spaces. His undergraduate experience was defined by finding mentors who affirmed the intersections of his identities and made him feel accepted as a whole person. Terrell stressed the importance of identity in mentoring relationships and how shared, intersecting identities support deep understanding about navigating challenges.

Research Question 1: Do successful Black males perceive mentorship as important to their persistence at the University of Mississippi?

The data revealed that successful Black males at the University of Mississippi perceive mentoring as one of many sources of support which contributed to their success in college. All of the respondents reported having multiple mentors who supported their success in various ways. Coaches, advisors, parents and families, peers, teachers, community members, religious leaders, and university faculty and staff members were amongst the individuals that participants identified as mentors. For example, James, Trevon, Kyle, and Lorenz all identified high school teachers as mentors who helped to instill good study habits and family mentors who helped to improve their self-efficacy. D'andre, Demarcus, Lee, and Terrell found mentors in both their
peers and staff members who they met through support programs like Luckyday FASTrack, and Athletics. And Corey, Tracy, Terrell, and Trey all discussed the value of their bosses as mentors.

Mentors provided academic support, career advice, challenge and support, encouragement, technical guidance, connections, safe spaces, and various other forms of support which the participants deemed important to their college success. However, respondents did not perceive every helpful individual as a mentor, nor every helpful act or instance of support as mentoring. For instance, while Trey found the academic support he received from a group of high school friends helpful, he did not identify any of those friends as mentors. D’ andre noted that his involvement in a living learning community which focused on supporting students in STEM majors, helped him to find a sense of community when he felt overwhelmed; but he did not call the support the program staff provided mentoring. And Corey found the academic support from his tutor very helpful, but he did not consider his tutor a mentor.

The respondents in this study reserved the designations of mentor and mentoring for the people and support they perceived as particularly contributive to their collegiate success and concerned with their wellbeing. James, Trevon, and Corey, for instance, all spoke of their mentors' genuineness and intentionality as what made the difference between their mentors and other people who were helpful, but not mentors to them. Trustworthiness and perceived similarity were also characteristics which differentiated mentors from others. D’ andre, Trevon, Demarcus, Terrell, and Kyle all spoke of how perceived similarity between a mentors’ and mentees’ lived experiences can strengthen the mentoring relationship, affect the domains of the mentoring relationship, and make it easier for mentees to trust their mentors. All of the respondents agreed that mentors must be more knowledgeable than a protégé in one or more
domains of knowledge or experience. All but one respondent, Kyle, described mentoring as inherently informal and not defined by title, status or assignment.

The respondents described mentoring as an informal process - not bound by structure, title, or hierarchy. Mentoring provided respondents with much needed psychosocial and emotional support and developed knowledge, self-efficacy, and social capital which they perceived as relevant to their success in college.

Respondents held that mentoring is inherently differentiable from other forms of support that helped them to succeed in college. Themes related to the nature of mentoring relationships, the formation and maintenance of mentoring relationships, and the mechanisms by which mentoring supports success were evident upon analysis of the data.

**Research Question 2: What is the nature of mentoring relationships?**

A number of themes emerged related to the nature of the mentoring relationships of the participants, and those themes are described in this section. The themes dealt with the respondents' conceptualizations of mentoring as a construct, how they describe their mentoring relationships, how they differentiate mentors from other sources of support, and how multiple identities can affect the mentoring relationship. Respondents discussed the genuineness, intentionality, and trustworthiness of their mentors, the domains of mentoring relationships, the span of mentoring relationships, the reciprocal nature of mentoring, and how race, gender, and age can affect mentoring relationships.

**Mentors are genuine, intentional, and trustworthy.** Genuineness and intentionality were persistent themes in the respondents' perceptions of mentoring. Mentors were described as reliable sources of support with whom respondents felt comfortable confiding their challenges.
The respondents also viewed genuineness and intentionality as qualities that distinguished between mentors and other helpful individuals. In offering his views on the importance of genuineness to mentoring James advised, “That's the only way you're going to be effective, because you can't positively mentor someone if you aren't genuine about your intention, about caring about them, or if you're not sharing real experiences.” James maintained that, “The only way mentorship is going to be effective is if you get real because people are going through real situations.” Mentoring is not effective nor long lasting if mentors are not, “being honest and genuine with them, and telling them things that really worked for you.”

Respondents agreed that titles alone cannot ensure that mentoring occurs. Genuineness and intentionality helped respondents distinguish between helpful people and their mentors. For example, Corey appreciated the relationships he built with two of his professors: Dr. H and Dr. C. However, Corey bemoaned the disconnectedness he sometimes felt from Dr. H and noted its stark contrast from the connectedness he felt with Dr. C. “With Dr. H, it's more so hit or miss,” Corey recalled. “But with Dr. C, it's mostly if you go to him and you talk to him, he'll put everything aside and sit there and listen to you,” Corey compared. Corey's perception of Dr. H as less attentive than Dr. C led him to view Dr. C as a mentor, but not Dr. H. While he shared that he could go to both for advice and support, Dr. H's perceived disengagement and lack of attentiveness caused Corey to put her in a different category from Dr. C. Corey did not perceive Dr. C as a mentor simply because he was a professor. Corey considered Dr. C a mentor because he perceived that Dr. C genuinely cared about his goals, needs, and experiences. Another example of this theme is in Tracy's description of his relationship with April. April served as Tracy's Peer Leader through the Luckyday Success Program, but he did not consider her a
mentor. When asked to describe his relationship with April, Tracy answered, “It felt as though ... Not necessarily that she didn't want to be there, but like she was going through the motions.”

Corey's, Tracy's, and Demarcus' examples demonstrate how respondents viewed intentionality, which was closely connected to their perceptions of mentors as dependable people, as a requisite component of mentoring. For instance, in response to questions that asked if a program determines if someone is a mentor or not Demarcus replied, “I don't think a program or a title gives you that mentor distinction ... because there's plenty of people who are ‘mentors’ who aren't feeding the people that they're supposed to be mentoring.” Genuineness and intentionality - not title, program affiliation, helpfulness, or status - determine who is and who is not a mentor. Mentors care, and being intentional about finding ways to demonstrate care was a consistent theme in the data. This sense of intentionality and genuine care for individuals was key to establishing trust and confidence in the mentor's ability to help.

Themes of genuineness and intentionality also arose from respondents' descriptions of how they approach opportunities to mentor others. Several respondents posited that a mentor's genuineness and intentionality help others recognize them as trustworthy and consistent sources of support. For example, Terrell’s appreciation for intentionality influenced how he approached mentoring others. Terrell was a FASTrack participant as a freshman, and he continued his involvement with the program as a Peer Mentor throughout the rest of his tenure. Terrell was one of many Peer Mentors who also lived with underclassmen FASTrack scholars in a residence hall on campus. The students who lived in the residence hall with Terrell recognized that they could approach him for a broad spectrum of support and guidance. However, he perceived that it was not the guidance that he gave nor his position that made him a mentor to these students; it was
the intentionality with which he approached cultivating relationships with them. Acts of intimacy like remembering names, asking about family, checking on academic success, helping identify and pursue opportunities, hanging out, and attending social events were all examples of actions Terrell associated with his role as a mentor. “It's a beautiful thing, but I think a lot of people just get caught up in the label of mentor or mentorship, when honestly it's just a relationship,” Terrell resolved.

Demarcus and Kyle insisted that mentors should be intentional about building relationships that support one's assuredness that they can approach a mentor for advice, support, and guidance. In other words, mentors should be dependable sources of support. “A mentor is somebody that you know you can reach out to in a time of need,” Demarcus contended. Demarcus, like several other respondents, also stressed the importance of a mentor’s trustworthiness. Mentors were non-judgmental advisors who respondents could trust with their problems and secrets. “They're not going to tell anybody else what's going on with you, but they’re going to talk to you, give you real-life advice, whether you’re right or whether you’re wrong,” Demarcus resolved.

The emergence of the themes of genuineness, intentionality, and trustworthiness as requisite components of mentoring relates to Bozeman and Feeney's (2007) definition for mentoring in important ways. First, this theme offers insight in what may influence which types of support students view as sufficiently valuable to count as mentoring. It supports the notion that what is and what is not mentoring is up to the perception of the mentee. When a source of support is perceived to be genuine, intentional, and trustworthy, those who they support are more likely to perceive the support as mentoring. Secondly, this theme continues to challenge the
hierarchical nature of mentoring as traditionally described in the literature: an aspect Bozeman and Feeney (2007) were careful to consider in their offered definition. The perceived value of an individual's support lie in that individual's level of genuineness, intentionality, trustworthiness—not their titles, program affiliations, or seniority.

**Mentoring relationships have domains.** The data revealed that mentees relied on different mentors for specific types of support. Every mentor did not support every mentee in the same ways, and each mentoring relationship had unique characteristics. For example, James posited, “Someone who can help you emotionally may not help you academically because maybe that's just not their field of study, maybe that's not their ministry.” Similarly, Demarcus explained, “You've got your mentor who you can just run to, talk to real quick. Then you've got your mentor who is just that versatile person who gives you all-around life advice.”

Respondents also indicated that a mentor's position can influence the domains in which the mentoring relationships operate. Kyle, for instance, acknowledged, “If it is concerning college, I go to my FASTrack advisor, Mrs. Williams. I also talk to my IMAGE advisor, Mrs. Patterson. But, if it's not about classes, I don't generally ask about anything else.” Regarding who he talked to about his feelings and emotions, Kyle shared, “If I need to talk to someone about my feelings, I know that I can go to some of my friends about that, but I'm not the type of person to talk about his feelings.” Finally, Corey remarked that a mentor's experiences can also influence the domains in which the relationship operates. Tonya, Corey's boss and mentor, did not go to college. Corey felt that this limited Tonya’s perspective on certain topics. Corey remembered:

I was applying for a job last week and I told Tonya, "Hey, I'm applying for this job. Do you think it's a good idea?" She was like, "Yeah, why not?" That was the
end of the conversation. So sometimes, just that "Yeah, why not" is not ... Sometimes you look for people to just … So then I called Brandon later that day and I was like, "I'm applying for this job. This is it." He wanted me to send him a description and all this other stuff. He was asking me do I think I could do it and stuff like that. Does that make sense? It's just that different spectrum.

James, Demarcus, Kyle, Terrell and Corey describe mentoring as a process in which a mentor's title, position, or experience can influence the domains of their interactions with their mentees. That mentoring relationships operate within specific domains is a consistent theme of the literature on mentoring. Bozeman and Feeney (2007), for instance, were careful to acknowledge that their definition for mentoring did not preclude individuals who served as mentors in one domain from receiving mentorship from their mentees in other domains.

**Mentoring relationships are reciprocal.** Several respondents spoke of the reciprocal nature of mentoring. They described it as a mutually beneficial relationship in which both mentor and mentee perceived value in the relationship. For example, James asserted that mentoring is a “mutually beneficial relationship between the mentor and the mentee” which helps both mentor and mentee see things from different vantage points. Terrell also conceived mentoring as requiring reciprocity. He explained, “I think in order to be a mentor, you have to know how to be a mentee.” For mentors, this two-way relationship he described as an “investment” and opportunity to learn. Just as leaders benefit from “know[ing] how to follow,” Terrell asserted that mentors benefited from “know[ing] how to be a mentee.”

Despite its reciprocally beneficial nature, respondents conceded that the mentee bore most of the onus to maintain the mentoring relationship and to determining when and if a
mentoring relationship exists. Respondents admired the eagerness and persistence of the younger students they mentored; so they tried to exhibit those characteristics to their own mentors. For example, Trevon looked up to his mentee Malcolm. Malcolm’s eagerness and persistence differentiated him from the other mentees that were assigned to Trevon through Men of Excellence. Trevon credited the enhanced value of their mentoring relationship to Malcolm's willingness to come to him for help. “He wasn't afraid to tell me that he was struggling with something or that he needed something, whereas I feel like the other guys were a little bit shy,” Trevon admired.

Respondents described mentoring as a reciprocal relationship where a mentor, who knows more than a mentee in at least one domain, is positioned to provide advice and support for a mentee. While the participants agreed that mentors can work to make a mentee comfortable approaching them, they also agreed that it is mainly a mentee's responsibility to maintain contact. According to these respondents, mentees who take initiative to approach mentors for guidance and support saw more benefits from the mentoring relationship than mentees who relied on the mentor to maintain the relationship.

**Mentoring can end.** The data suggest that mentoring relationships end when the mentee no longer goes to the mentor for advice and support. Mentoring relationships can end because of changes in proximity, the needs of the mentee, negative interactions, or balancing the relative wisdom of the mentor in relation to the mentee. For instance, in pondering if his relationship with Mrs. P, his high school teacher, is a mentoring relationship, James decided, “Not currently because we haven't kept in touch, but when I was in high school, most definitely.” In similar fashion, Trevon describes what set his relationships with Mrs. B and Mrs. L, his high school
teachers, apart from several of his mentors that he met in college. “What set them aside from you, Brandon, and Ms. A is that it didn't last after I graduated,” Trevon remembered. “I wish I still had that experience, that relationship with them,” he continued.

Respondents described mentoring as a process which ends when there is no longer consistent contact between mentor and mentee. As mentees gain more knowledge and/or move to new environments, their needs change; and the dynamics of their mentoring relationships shift with their changes in needs and circumstances. When mentoring relationships shift, the respect and appreciation for the role a mentor played during a particular point in life remains.

**Identity matters.** The data show that identity affects the mentoring relationships of successful Black males at the University of Mississippi in several ways. Participants cited race, gender, gender expression, sexuality, age, and perceived similarity in personality, goals, beliefs, and aspirations as aspects of identity that affect mentoring relationships. These findings were consistent with the literature on mentoring. Several studies show that race and gender dynamics (Hinsdale, 2015; Mason, 2014; Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013; Hu, Thomas, & Lance, 2008) and perceived similarity (Allen & Eby, 2003; Allen, Poteet, & Russell, 2000) can have significant effects on perceptions of the quality and value of a mentoring relationship. The respondents' accounts of their mentoring relationships provide support for the capacity for race, gender, gender expression, sexuality, perceived similarity, age, and their intersections to affect the perceived value of mentoring relationships.

**Perceived similarity and mentoring.** Respondents commented on several ways in which perceived similarity between themselves and their mentors enhanced their mentoring relationships. For example, Trey described a mentor as, “Somebody I see who has a lot of
similarities in who we are and we both have the same goals, the same mindset, we're both driven in the same direction.” Respondents’ descriptions of their peer mentoring relationships offer one window into the importance of perceived similarity in mentoring. “Peers can most definitely be mentors,” James thought. “A lot of times, with older mentors, it's a little bit different because you're on two different levels in life, there's this level of respect and authority, you can't just naturally open up and say things, it takes some time to get comfortable to get there,” James differentiated.

Mentor, friend, or other. The theme of perceived similarity in mentoring relationships was closely related to friendship. Respondents unanimously supported the notion that peers could serve as mentors, and they also considered these peer mentors friends. However, respondents did not consider all of their friends mentors. Additionally, respondents rarely referred to mentors who were not peers as friends. Perceived similarity contributed to respondents' perceptions of the value of their peer mentoring relationships. Perceived similarity strengthened bonds between respondents and their peer mentors. For example, both James and Corey described their closest friends as peer mentors. Both also characterized their friendships by saying, “we were two peas in a pod”. The similarity both perceived between themselves and their friends contributed to the value they assessed in their friendships and peer mentoring relationships.

Several of the respondents made remarks that demonstrated hesitance assigning the title of mentor to friends. Perceived similarity in personality, ambitions, and shared experiences emerged as factors respondents used to differentiate between friendship and peer mentorship. For instance, Trey described what made Trevon, his peer and fellow study participant, different from
his other peers. “He's always trying to get me to become a part of some organization or to get me to look at some school, or to get my involved outside of school,” Trey remembered. “A lot of my friends don't just hang out and talk about school, career goals, and what you want to be one day,” Trey continued.

In another example, Demarcus found value in his relationships with lots of his peers. However, he only regarded some of those peers as mentors and he struggled to assign the title of mentor to his peers. “For me, it's hard to be like okay my twenty-year-old best friend is my mentor, but when you look at all the things that he's doing, with my definition of what comes in my head, he definitely fits,” Demarcus conceded.

Demarcus was slow to ascribe the title of mentor to his friend Tommie because of Tommie’s age. Demarcus' reluctance in calling Tommie a mentor speaks to the traditionally hierarchical nature of mentoring conceptualizations, which stems from the origins of the mentoring concept from the Greek story of Mentor (Ismail, Zaidey, Ab Ghani & Omar, 2017) and the earliest modern mentoring frameworks (Levison, et al., 1978; Kram, 1983). Further delineating the differences between peer mentors and friends, Demarcus paused in contemplation before deciding that his peer mentors were more than just mentors, but “brothers.” In a like manner, Corey describes how his relationship with Tonya, transcended mentoring alone. Tonya was not Corey's peer like the mentors in Demarcus' account. However, Corey's description of his relationship with Tonya is consistent with the difficulty of distinguishing between friendships and mentoring relationships. “I would consider Tonya as just a friend. I could say that she's a mentor but she's so much more than that to me,” Corey decided.
Finally, several other respondents resolved that the difficulty differentiating between mentors and other sources of support was sometimes simply a matter of nomenclature. In response to a question about whether he considered his mom and dad mentors, Terrell hesitated before replying, "Yeah, we just call them by different names, we call them 'mom' and 'dad,'" and in reference to his assigning the title of mentor to a good friend, Terrell responds, "It's just like everything, you say things like, 'That's my big bro,' like I call Mark my big bro." Similarly, Corey describes his relationship with Brandon stating, "As far as Brandon, I would say that he is [a mentor] but I don't really see him as that. I see him more as a best friend or brother than I do a mentor." In another example, Demarcus felt that the word mentor was insufficient to describe his relationship with Dr. Lockner. "Dr. Lockner, I don't count her as a mentor just because she's sort of been like a mother figure,” Demarcus decided. No matter what names respondents used to describe their mentors, perceived similarity with regard to race, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, personality, beliefs and/or aspirations played a significant role in the establishment, scope, and value of their mentoring relationships. For example, Terrell spoke of similarities between his, his parents', and Marlon's work ethics, Corey appreciated the similarities in his and Brandon's experiences navigating gender expression and sexuality, and Demarcus deeply valued his and Dr. Lockner's shared race and faith.

**Mentoring and intersectionality.** Several accounts in the data show that multiple identity dynamics affect mentoring relationships. The categories of "Black" and "male" proved too narrow to approach generalizability of the data; as there were respondents whose other identities affected their mentoring experiences in unique ways.
A paucity of studies (Heaven, 2015; Harper, 2012; 2010; 2006; Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010; Strayhorn, 2010; Harper, 2009; Hu, Thomas, & Lance, 2008; Howard-Hamilton, 1997) consider the ways in which race and gender affect Black males' relationships with mentors and other sources of support. However much of the literature on gender and mentoring (Blake-Beard, 2001; Baugh, Lankau, & Scandura, 1996; Haring & Paludi, 1992) focuses on the effects of gender on metrics like satisfaction with the quality of mentoring relationships, organizational commitment, and perceived potential for the mentoring relationship to improve career outcomes; this without respect to how race might influence the gender dynamics studied. Similarly, the literature on sexuality and mentoring (Morgan & Davidson, 2008; Hurley, 1996; Feist-Price, 1994) focuses on mitigating the effects of sexual attraction between mentors and mentees without respect to other identities. A growing body of literature considers the role of intersecting identities on the formation and maintenance of mentoring relationships (Reddick, 2011; Colley, 2003) and on mentoring outcomes for groups like women of color in leadership (Henderson, Hunter, & Hildreth, 2010; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010) and non-White faculty (Suriel & Martinez, 2016; Zambrana, Ray, Espino, Castro, Douthirt Cohen, & Eliason, 2015). However, these studies do not consider how the dynamics of the intersections of race, gender/gender expression, and sexual orientation might affect mentoring relationships.

Despite the lack of literature which specifically investigates how intersections of race, gender/gender expression, and sexual orientation affect mentoring for Black males in college, a plethora of research on the experiences of college Black males sheds light on the ways in which they make meaning of masculinity, manhood, and Blackness in college (Dancy, 2011; Harper &
Harris, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Billson & Majors, 1992). Additionally, a number of studies focus on the experiences of non-heterosexual Black males in college (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011; Majied, 2010; Goode-Cross, & Good, 2008; Harris, 2003). The effects of masculinity, ideas of manhood, and/or sexual orientation on students’ relationships - including mentoring relationships – were common themes in both bodies of literature.

Evidence of the ways in which masculinity, ideas of manhood, and sexuality affect the relationships of successful Black men in college was strongest in the stories of four respondents who described dealing with being Black, LGBTQ, or perceived as LGBTQ, and male. Their stories included components of navigating masculinity, ideas of manhood, and sexuality that never arose in the two focus group sessions; a reality I acknowledged with both focus groups. Even after direct acknowledgement, however, focus group participants did not share these experiences. Study participants were never asked to disclose their sexuality, so it is possible that there were no LGBTQ focus group participants. However, data accrued from LGBTQ interview respondents suggests that LGBTQ Black males experience barriers disclosing those challenges with individuals who may not understand their perspectives first hand. This may explain why no focus group participants discussed similar experiences.

Respondents who self-identified as LGBTQ gave accounts of how their sexuality or perceived masculinity affected their relationships with mentors and others. These respondents found an added value in their relationships with mentors who either shared the experience of navigating multiple identities successfully or who showed unencumbered acceptance of their intersecting identities. For example, Trevon spoke of the sense of comfort he found in his relationship with Brandon, his Luckyday Peer Leader and peer mentor that he could not find in
his relationship with me, his Luckyday scholarship advisor. “It's easy for me to talk to him
because he fights that same battle whereas I could come to you and talk to you about that, but
would you understand it to the extent that he does? No, because you don't experience that,”
Trevon insisted. Trevon explained that one of his most traumatic experiences growing up was
trying to come out to his parents. “It's hard enough for a Black male, so it's even harder for a gay
Black male,” Trevon remembered his mother reacting. Trevon’s experience coming out to his
family affected the way he interacted with other people. He admitted changing the way he
walked and talked; constantly hyper-aware of how others perceived his sexuality and
masculinity. Brandon was instrumental in helping to change that. “Getting adapted to finally
living the way that I was supposed to live and then knowing, finally, that my sexuality had
nothing to do with success was probably one of the best things that Brandon could have taught
me,” Trevon reflected. He continued, “That confidence definitely, definitely helped me be more
confident in the classroom and meet people and not have to worry about one, being a Black male
and two, being a Black gay male.”

Terrell's account of his mentoring relationship with Dillon, his Peer Mentor through the
FASTrack Program, provides another example of the value respondents saw in their mentors'
acceptance of their multiple identities. Despite Dillon sharing the experience of being a member
of the LGBTQ community, his perspective as a White gay male made it difficult for Terrell to
consider Dillon a mentor. “First of all, Dillon was not supportive of anything that wasn't White
and gay,” Trevon griped. Dillon was not an exception in Terrell’s experience. Terrell complained,
“I'm trying to be me, but it's a space where Black people don't really agree with my lifestyle, and
on the other hand, people in this community don't really agree with me just because I'm Black or I'm brown.”

Respondents’ comments suggest that acceptance of multiple identities is a pillar of the mentoring relationships for LGBTQ Black males. The data also reveal stories of LGBTQ respondents' challenges finding acceptance in various spaces. Challenges to feeling accepted is a common theme in the literature on the experiences of Black men in college; especially for Black men who are also members of the LGBTQ community. In one study on the experiences of Black/African American men who have sex with men (AASM) attending Predominantly White Institutions, Goode-Cross & Good (2008) found that AASM take significant risks to develop relationships and find safe spaces on campus. Goode-Cross & Good (2008) also found that these students often selected friends based on perceived tolerance of homosexuality or non-heteronormativity. For AASM students at PWIs, supportive relationships provide needed reprieve from discrimination and stereotyping, which can adversely affect academic performance and engagement (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009).

A number of the respondents shared stories of being discriminated against on the basis of their sexuality, perceived sexuality, and/or performance of masculinity. Negative interactions with others that were based on respondents' sexuality or performance of masculinity influenced their interactions with other Black students generally, other Black men, the broader campus community, the communities surrounding campus, and/or their home communities. Respondents' accounts of being rejected from National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) fraternities because of perceptions of their sexuality, masculinity, and manhood include relevant connections to the literature. In one study on how Black men in college learn and apply ideas of masculinity and
manhood, Dancy (2011) posits that Black males learn and subscribe to hyper masculine constructs that derive from their historical subjugation under White male oppressors. Heavily influenced by White hegemonic masculinity, Black men in groups subscribe to gender scripts which celebrate some behaviors while shunning others (Dancy, 2011). Specifically, Black men in groups were found to exhibit the following: 1) homophobia, 2) devaluation of femininity, 3) increased performance of masculinity, and 4) claiming space in otherwise feminine or feminized contexts (Dancy, 2011).

Several LGBTQ respondents spoke of experiences being rejected from NPHC fraternities and other traditionally Black spaces. Respondents relied heavily on emotional support from mentors on campus and in their families to sustain them through the significant emotional trauma the rejections caused. The rejections elicited significant emotional responses, which added complexity to the ways in which LGBTQ respondents experienced the process of Nigrescence (Cross, 1995). The LGBTQ participants in this study describe a deep desire to find place and meaning in Black male spaces, suggesting a high level of racial salience (Cross, 1995). However, rejection encounters (Cross, 1995) caused LGBTQ respondents to develop negative perceptions of the Black community; with skepticism and resentment toward straight Black men and/or men in groups like fraternities. James’ story of being denied opportunities to join such groups due to his perceived femininity and non-heteronormativity provides a poignant example of this type of discrimination and the challenges it presented to his process of Nigrescence (Cross, 1995). His experience left him feeling unsupported by the Black community on campus. He found himself withdrawing from traditionally Black spaces and student organizations. “I think if I had kept
myself from being as involved with them as I did, I think I would have had a better experience, more positive socially,” he regretted.

James recounted how he'd been rejected from a National Pan Hellenic Council fraternity on two separate occasions. Knowing that it sometimes took people multiple times to try to join the fraternity, James was not as bothered by the first rejection as he was by the second. However, after he confirmed that the way members of the group perceived his gender performance and his sexuality played a role in the rejections, James was so devastated that it affected his grades and overall demeanor. “I was disgusted at the fact that they would allow what they thought, at the time, my sexuality was, or even what my sexuality is, and think that, that automatically disqualifies me as being a member,” James remembered. These rejection experiences were especially challenging because the source of the rejection lay in a space where he expected and desired community. “It's almost as if I expect to have people who don't look like me to have issues with who I am, but people who do look like me or who I'm supposed to identify with, when they have issues with who I am, it hits home a little harder,” James explained.

Like James, Terrell's exclusion from fraternal participation because of his sexuality was a significant part of his undergraduate social experience. Terrell spoke of the deep emotions he experienced in the face of rejections he associated with his sexuality and performance of masculinity. He also spoke of how his sexuality and perceived masculinity affected his relationships with Black males and men more broadly. “I think that one of the reasons why I was not well received by that organization, or Black men in general at the University of Mississippi, was the fact that I was open about my sexuality and who I was,” Terrell speculated. Having come out to his mom and dad during his freshman year of college, Terrell expected other people to
show the same acceptance and support he received from his parents. Instead, Terrell found that there would be multiple layers to his experience. “It's one thing to be a Black student here, it's another thing to be a Black male here, it's another thing to be a Black LGBTQIA male here, that's a whole ‘nother ball game,” Terrell summated.

In addition to being rejected by an NPHC fraternity, Terrell experienced rejections from other spaces. In much the same way as James expressed how racial dynamics exacerbated his emotional reaction to being rejected from the fraternity, Terrell's spiritual identity intensified his response to being rejected from acceptance in the church. “I had never been at a religious space where someone told me that I could not do something because of that,” Terrell lamented. “I didn't understand why people were telling me no for being who I was,” he remembered.

James' and Terrell's experiences with rejection caused them both to give a lot of thought to how they presented themselves around others. For example, James confessed:

Honestly, I don't have issues to like when I go places, I'm like, "Oh, I'm an Black male, so I have to be cognizant of what I say, and what I do." I know that's an issue. But it's not my main concern. When I go into places, I'm concerned about being a Black male and then appearing to be more feminine than what you would expect a male to do.

James and Terrell relied heavily on their mentors for support during their emotional experiences with rejection. Their mentors' acceptance, lack of judgement, and support were integral to helping them to persist through these traumatic experiences. Family, who both men agreed could serve as mentors, played key roles in helping James and Terrell deal with their emotions. James recalls confiding in his aunt Felicia, who he also considered a mentor. James family became concerned about him when they noticed a change in his temperament. His aunt
Felicia’s understanding helped him process his emotions. Terrell posited that deep familial connections created spaces in which he could express himself freely and honestly. Regarding the value of those spaces Terrell reflected, “I can scream, I can curse, I can be hurt, and I know it's okay.”

James and Terrell also found support from mentors who worked on campus. James commented on how much he appreciated the spiritual support of Dr. Lockner, a Luckyday staff member, mentor, and pastor. Whereas his rejection from the fraternity made him ask why he should work hard to stand out “when I'm going to stand out and be left standing out,” Dr. Lockner’s spiritual guidance reaffirmed that his feelings were valid and that his presence mattered. He reminisced:

I really felt, it was just like God had placed in her heart, "This is how he's feeling," and she could glean how I was feeling, and she just knew what to say that encouraged me. It meant so much to me. I don't think I will ever forget that, as long as I live.

Terrell expressed his appreciation for Dr. Thompson's mentorship. Dr. Thompson was Terrell's mentor and FASTrack Advisor. She reassured Terrell that his rejection from the fraternity did not mean that his contributions and perspectives were not valuable. “Just because people don't see what you bring to the table doesn't mean you don't bring anything,” Terrell remembered Dr. Thompson saying. “She just brought me back down to Earth and just let me know that this is not the pinnacle of your academic career,” Terrell realized.

James' and Terrell's' accounts of discrimination and rejection from multiple spaces offer a glimpse of the psychosocial and emotional impact of mentoring. Both men insisted that the mentoring they received with respect to their challenges finding community on campus played
an important role in their success. Their mentors showed that they cared by affirming their multiple identities and providing a safe space for them to process their emotions. Similarly, Trevon's and Corey's relationship with Brandon, the Luckyday Peer Leader and peer mentor mentioned in their previous accounts, provided an emotional reprieve from the tensions of navigating campus as Black LGBTQ males.

_How race affects mentoring._ All but one of the respondents agreed that sharing racial identity was not necessary in mentoring relationships. However, all of the respondents discussed the ways in which race affect their perceptions of their mentoring experiences. Respondents who had both Black and non-Black mentors spoke of the differences between their mentoring relationships with Black and non-Black mentors. And D'andre, the respondent who believed that a mentor must share racial identity, described how and why race informed his perceptions of mentoring.

One example of the respondents' perceptions of the differences between the mentoring relationships of Black and non-Black mentors is in James' comparison of his relationships with Dr. Collier and Dr. Lockner. James remembered how his relationship Dr. Collier, a White male who was his professor of accountancy and mentor, differed from his relationship from Dr. Lockner. Both of these mentors helped support James through academic challenges he faced while dealing with being rejected from the fraternity. However, James did not share the details of the challenges with Dr. Collier. James divulged, “The difference with Dr. Lockner was that she was also Black, and while she wasn't male, she was very well aware of these sort of things that go on in the Black male community.” James added, “I don't think Dr. Collier knew that I was going through that and I don't think he understood how it worked because I think that White
Greek life may have its own downfalls, but I kind of think sometimes it's a little different than what goes on in Black communities.”

Black men in groups like fraternities are subject to suspicion on PWI campuses (Dancy, 2011). James noted that the he feared that sharing his experiences with Dr. Collier might have served to confirm some of those suspicions. The possibility of affirming such suspicion is one reason James was reluctant to share aspects of his challenges joining the fraternity with Dr. Collier. James' concern over confirming this stereotype about Black men in groups is an example of how stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) affected the domains in which respondents' mentoring relationships with non-Black mentors operated.

Trevon's relationship with Brandon is another example which shows how mentors who share layers of identity with their mentees can help their mentees deal with stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995). Trevon shared an account of how his mentoring relationship with Brandon helped him to deal with stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) related to his race and way of speaking. Trevon's relationship with Brandon helped him to deal with pressure to acculturate. In alignment with Trevon's experience, pressure to acculturate is a common theme in the literature on the experiences of Black males in college (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). The size and pace of the University of Mississippi was a stark contrast from Trevon’s high school and home community. Trevon shared that Brandon played a significant role in supporting him in this transition. Trevon's and Brandon's shared identities and experiences were an important aspect of their mentoring relationship. “He [Brandon] made me feel like I was enough,” Trevon explained. Brandon “saw” Trevon in a way he felt others who did not share these layers of identity could not.
In another example, D’andre’s account of the differences between his relationships with Dr. Jake and Mr. H and his relationships with Mrs. Williams and me, show how race affected who he called a mentor and the domains in which his helpful relationships operated. D’andre never expressed fear of fulfilling a negative stereotype, but he strongly felt that shared racial identity was a main pillar of mentoring. D’andre felt that sharing racial identity was the only real way to ensure that a mentor understood him completely. For D’andre, shared racial identity was central to the way he conceptualized mentoring. D’andre stressed the importance of the connection that comes from shared identity. He defined a mentor as, “Someone who, and when I say connect with, I mean like someone who looks like you, like someone Black who - they know where you're coming from.” When asked why he did not consider Dr. Jake and Mr. H mentors, D’andre continued:

Honestly, it's just because they're, Mrs. Williams and you, like y'all Black. It's not like I intend to be like "I'm gonna find me a Black mentor," but I came from a majority Black high school. There are few of y'all compared to the majority. You just have to find those who you, that you think will understand where you're coming from in all aspects.

Demarcus described how fear of confirming stereotypes affected the domains of helpful relationships he developed with two of his high school teachers. Within his account, Demarcus shared why he did not consider Mrs. T and Mrs. M mentors. Stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) demanded formal interactions between Demarcus and his teachers, which did not feel like mentoring from his perspective. Demarcus felt pressure to impress them, and as a result he did not act his authentic self around them. “I think the reason I do it with [Mrs. T and Mrs. M] is because these are people that I'm trying to impress to make sure that I can get to where I'm
going,” Demarcus reckoned. “With you, even though I'm in here chilling with you right, I know okay, if you do write me a letter of recommendation, I would hope that it's still good,” he compared.

Respondents’ recollections of their mentoring and support experiences with non-Black mentors and helpful sources of support show how race informed the nature and definition of their mentoring relationships. Race had a significant influence on the nature and perceived quality of mentoring relationships. All respondents spoke about the differences between their relationships with Black and non-Black mentors and sources of support. However, only LGBTQ respondents framed their discussions about those differences through an intersectional lens. In keeping with the literature on intersectionality, the LGBTQ respondents' accounts prove 'Black male' too broad a category to capture their experiences.

How gender affects mentoring. A number of respondents spoke of the ways in which gender affected their mentoring relationships. A common theme in their accounts is the value of their relationships with women who served as mentors. These participants shared that their mentoring relationships with women were based on a strong appreciation for their perseverance and nurturing. "I have noticed even in my own life that I identify better with women, and I want to say that I think because I have such a strong relationship with my mom, and then my aunts, and they're all Black females,” James reflected: In another example, Terrell describes the reasons he appreciated his female mentors so much.

In some examples, the strength of respondents’ relationships with women was directly related to the behaviors, traits, and experiences they observed in their familial relationships with women. Tracy’s preference for women mentors, for instance, was based on certain qualities that
he observed in women that he did not see in men. Tracy speculated that he got along better with women mentors because they were more mature, focused, and conversational than most of the men with whom he interacted. “I identify personally to feminist, you know- I feel like guys try to have a lot more conversation about things that don't matter,” Tracy concluded.

In addition to contributing to the perceived quality of mentoring relationships, gender also played a role in how respondents characterized their mentors. Many of the respondents described developing maternal or familial relationships with women mentors. For example, Lorenz describes his relationship with his coach and mentor Ms. Y as a maternal relationship. “When I was young on the team, she took care of me a lot and I feel like I opened up to her a lot like a mother,” Lorenz remembered. In another example, Terrell described Ms. S, his Luckyday advisor and mentor, as a “big sister” or “an auntie.” While two respondents also described their male peer mentors as "brothers," none of the respondents characterized their older male mentors as fatherly.

This maternal view of women mentors may result from respondents' conditioning to view women as nurtures and caretakers. It also aligns with the literature on the dynamics of cross-gender mentoring relationships, which show that men who have women mentors often cite their appreciation for traditionally feminine traits like nurturing and emotional support (Baugh, Lankau, Scandura, 1996; Haring, & Paludi, 1992).

**Research Question 3. How do mentoring relationships develop for successful Black males in college?**

The origins of the respondents' mentoring relationships were varied. Mentoring relationships developed between respondents and their friends, teachers or professors, family
members, coaches, and numerous other sources. No matter the source of the mentoring relationship, respondents agreed that mentoring relationship develop organically. Respondents cited defining moments that marked the origin of the relationship. However, those moments came after the students developed a level of comfort and rapport with their potential mentors. Respondents described the formations of their mentoring relationships as mutual, unspoken understandings in which a mentor has sufficiently demonstrated care and understanding such that the mentee entrusts the mentor to provide guidance and support.

**Mentor vetting.** A mentoring relationship begins once a mentee feels safe and welcome enough to approach a mentor for guidance and support that they perceive as valuable to their success. Mentees vet their mentors; assessing their relationships with helpful individuals for evidence of genuineness, intentionality, and trustworthiness. Regardless of the context under which the mentoring relationship formed, respondents agreed that trust, and not a formal conversation or acknowledgement between protégé and mentor, signaled the transition from a supportive relationship to a mentorship.

Despite agreeing that there wasn’t a defining moment at which their mentoring relationships began, several respondents provided examples of how specific interactions catalyzed the mentor vetting process. For instance, Trevon recalled forming a mentoring relationship with his first boss, Katrina after he had the opportunity to watch how she gave advice. “She was one of those that doesn't give advice like, ‘I expect you to do this’ or ‘This is what you do to get here,’” Trevon admired. “But she just started off as my boss; I didn't know that I'd have such a personal relationship,” Trevon concluded.
Tracy also shared a specific account of how mentoring relationships can form after experiences that make mentees feel safe. He describes how his relationship with his superior, Samantha, changed after she engaged him and another colleague about their experiences as Black males at the University. When asked if Samantha was his mentor from the beginning of their employer/employee relationship, Tracy clarified:

It wasn't really a mentorship yet, but then I helped her with her thesis. We had a talk, it was an organic conversation that didn't have anything to do with our work. She was really trying to learn about us and learn about what's important to us, and what we don't like, and what we see at the University.

Mentors can initiate moments and display behaviors which help mentees develop trust, but a mentee's reaction and follow up to these instances seems to sustain the mentoring relationship. For instance, D'andre admitted having a bit of trepidation approaching me for mentoring. “When I first met you, I just thought you were real intimidating because like you seem like you've seen everything. You’re a Black man that holds a high title at the University and you know, you don't know me,” D’andre remembered thinking.

When asked how this dynamic of the relationship changed such that he now considers me a mentor, D'andre continued, “When you pulled me to the side about talking about you know, I need to work on my anxiety and my public speaking.” D'andre still maintained, however, that his job as a mentee was to sustain the mentoring relationship. “I would say, it falls more on the mentee compared to the mentor because I'm pretty sure that y'all have people in and out your office every day,” D’andre reasoned. “I bet y'all get over 100 emails a day, so I feel like if I was a mentee, not only come and talk to y'all about our problems, but how you doing, what you been
up to,” he continued. D’andre’s perception of my position on campus contributed to his ideas about my availability; and thusly shaped how he perceived his role in maintaining our mentoring relationship.

Similar to D'andre, Trey also shared that he felt nervous approaching certain people for support. In particular, Trey shared that his academic performance as a freshmen gave him pause about seeking membership in an Black male student organization called Men of Excellence. Trey described Men of Excellence as an organization which facilitates mentoring between its members as a main pillar of its efforts to support the success of Black males at the University of Mississippi. Trey's concern was that the group might look down on his freshman academics and appearance instead of welcoming him in. “They look really good, but I didn't necessarily know if I was that same caliber of good,” Trey admitted. Trey was hard on himself because of his academic performance during the first semester of his freshman year. “Everything happened in freshman year. I looked down upon myself,” he remembered. “Me seeing some guys that really stuck out as being excellent, I was like wow, ‘I would really love to be a part of that,’” he reminisced. Trey described the encouragement and support he received from Terrell, a fellow respondent and leader in Men of Excellence. Terrell encouraged Trey to apply and stay involved in the organization, which boosted Trey’s confidence in his ability to be successful in college. “He always just is like, ‘I want to be just like you when I grow up,’” Trey remembered. Trey continued, “[Terrell] was just someone who was always very positive when times were negative.”

The respondents of this study agreed that it is not a mentor's tap or a formal mentoring assignment, but the response of the mentee that initiates and maintains the mentoring
relationship. For example, Trevon appreciated his mentee Malcolm's genuine interest and persistence in approaching him for help. “He got everything out of me that he could. I felt like I was actually a mentor then,” Trevon commented.

Student organizations like Men of Excellence, support programs which incorporate peer mentorship, and living learning communities were incubators for mentoring relationships. These spaces provided the conditions under which mentoring relationships flourish. The ways in which the respondents described the impact of the programing and community focus of these spaces is reminiscent of aspects of the seven the Nguzo Saba principles of the Afrocentric Resistance Model (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). *Umoja*, or unity based on shared Black ancestry (Howard-Hamilton, 1997), is supported by Men of Excellence’s focus on the experiences Black males. Their focus on the unique challenges Black males face was an important factor in helping respondents feel comfortable seeking community through Men of Excellence. *Kujichagulia*, or self-determination (Howard-Hamilton, 1997), is supported through interactions with mentors respondents met through formal programs. Individuals who were able to help respondents believe that they could be successful were often described as mentors. *Ujima*, or collective work and responsibility (Howard-Hamilton, 1997), is supported through community service programs; the impact and visibility of which attracted some respondents to join student organizations and support programs like Men of Excellence. *Ujaama*, or cooperative economics (Howard-Hamilton, 1997), is supported through using the collective resources of Men of Excellence members to give back to the Lafayette - Oxford - University community. *Nia*, or a sense of purpose (Howard-Hamilton, 1997), is supported by all of the programs respondents described as sources of mentorship. Mentors helped respondents consider their potential to impact others as a
motivator to encourage positive academic outcomes and networking. *Kuumba,* or creativity (Howard-Hamilton, 1997), was also one of the Nguzo Saba principles which respondents appreciated in Men of Excellence and other support programs. Mentors who appreciated and created space for respondents’ creativity were essential to supporting the self-efficacy of the respondents. Finally, *Imani,* or faith (Howard-Hamilton, 1997), provided a foundation for many of the mentoring relationships; as many respondents spoke of how much they appreciated the spiritual guidance they received from their mentors. Though the Nguzo Saba (Howard-Hamilton, 1997) were not named explicitly, the participants in this study associated these principles with positive mentoring experiences.

**Mentors and support programs.** Support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics were consistent sources of support for the respondents. Program staff and affiliates served as mentors to many of the respondents. Additionally, these programs encouraged student involvement which increased student interactions with individuals who could serve as mentors. Programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics place students in proximity of potential mentors. This proximity aided the formation of respondents' mentoring relationships with faculty and staff; and was particularly important in helping respondents find peer mentors. All the peers with whom respondents developed mentoring relationships were affiliated with programs that included formal mentoring in some way.

Some respondents speculated that, if not for support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics, finding mentors might have been more challenging. For instance, Trevon shared, “Let's say if I wasn't a part of the Luckyday Program or I didn't find a job or anything like that, I don't know who I would reach out to. I really just don't know.” Respondents spoke of the ways in
which their proximity to program staff facilitated interactions that deepened their relationships. These interactions provided opportunities for students to observe the genuineness, intentionality, and trustworthiness of program staff. They also allowed for program staff to get a better sense of individual student needs or concerns.

Mentoring relationships with program staff transcended the normal scope of the staff’s professional obligations. For example, Lorenz’s relationships with his coaches grew past the scope of just sports. “They want the best out of me of course at a sport that I was doing, but then again, they didn't only come around, they didn't only say something to me when it came to the sport,” Lorenz admired. James, who was also a Luckyday Scholar and advisee of mine, reflected on how our relationship differed from other program staff with whom he'd been paired. “I was assigned to you, but what changed our relationship into a mentorship was we were actually able to relate on a personal level,” James shared. “I was able to become comfortable because you were able to relate to me as a student,” he continued.

The proximity between students and staff members in support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics may help to facilitate the formation of mentoring relationships. Instead of mentors picking mentees or mentees picking mentors, these programs simply encouraged interactions which then led to the formation of mentoring relationships. For example, D’andre found both peer and staff mentors through FASTrack. Several of the respondents found mentoring relationships with each other either directly or indirectly because of their participation in student support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics. For instance, Tracy considered Terrell and Trevon, who he initially met through FASTrack, peer mentors. James and Trevon, who met through Luckyday, considered each other peer mentors. Lorenz, who was
encouraged to get involved in student organizations by his coaches, met peer mentors in Terrell and Trevon through his involvement in Men of Excellence. Several other examples of peer mentoring relationships are discussed in previous sections; all of which connected in some way to formal programs that include mentoring components.

Students found lots of formal programs and program staff members helpful but needed to develop deep and relevant connections before seeing program staff as mentors. For example, Tracy formed a valuable relationship with Ms. Miller, his scholarship advisor through Luckyday. Tracy recalls how Ms. Miller supported him through his emotional transition into college; and while he found her guidance and support valuable, he did not view Ms. Williams as a mentor. Instead, Tracy found a mentor in another program staff member, Dr. Paul. Tracy was assigned to meet with Dr. Paul after performing relatively poorly academically his freshman year. Whereas Ms. Williams provided emotional support, Dr. Paul provided structured and consistent technical guidance which fit more squarely into Tracy’s perception of mentoring. “When I was having some problems with my academics, Dr. Paul, he would sit me down, he'd tell me I need to go to the career center, I need to do this, I need to do that,” Tracy explained. In contrast, regarding whether Ms. Miller was a mentor, Tracy clarified, “I feel like we didn't have enough of those conversations, but she was definitely someone who allowed me to acclimate to this college environment.” Tracy’s example reiterates that the mentee's perception of what is and what is not mentoring is central to determining if a mentoring relationship exists.

**Family mentors.** Family served as a consistent source of mentoring for the respondents. Several respondents gave accounts of how family members provided various types of support that bolstered their success in college. Family mentors had background knowledge of the
respondents’ strengths, weaknesses, and lived experiences. This uniquely positioned family mentors to provide emotional support and encouragement. For instance, Corey’s grandmother, who he also considered a mentor, was his first point of contact when he experienced academic and emotional challenges. Corey thought about his grandmother often when he was completing his schoolwork. He recalled talking to her whenever he had an academic or social challenge. Corey credited her advice and encouragement for helping him stay focused on his goal of graduating. Tracy also considered his grandmother a mentor. “Just knowing how hard she worked, and some of the stuff she went through, and how hard she had to fight to get what she got, I would consider her a mentor,” Tracy explained. “I look to her for inspiration,” he continued.

Trey found a mentor in his father. Trey’s father's example and mentorship was an important factor in him persisting through academic challenges and failures. “When my dad witnessed what I was doing up here, he wasn't very proud of me. He was almost ashamed of me,” Trey reflected. “It made me repicture some things and do some things differently,” He recalled. While it was uncomfortable at the time, Trey associated this tough guidance with his concept for mentoring.

Despite unanimous agreement that family members could serve as mentors, several respondents shared that they'd never considered their family members mentors. This hesitance was also reflected in respondents’ responses regarding whether individual friends were mentors. This may evidence that respondents conceptualized mentoring rigidly prior to inquiry. For example, regarding whether family members could be mentors James pondered, “Actually, you know what? The more I think about it, yeah, because some people really look up to their parents,
their mom or their dad, for specific reasons sometimes.” James added that students look up to their immediate and extended family members to help them choose career paths and provide advice about how to navigate life. “Of course, it's easier coming from your parents because that's someone you trust, probably more than you trust anyone else on the face of the Earth,” he added. Similarly, Demarcus questioned of his brothers, “Can they be mentors? Yeah, they're mentors.” When asked about his hesitation in assigning them that role Demarcus replied, “I've never looked at it in this way and I've never given people these titles, so now I'm trying to not overthink it.”

**Mentors as teachers and professors.** K-12 teachers and college faculty were also sources of mentorship for the participants in this study. Respondents vetted faculty members and teachers in much the same ways as their mentors from other groups; evaluating them for evidence of genuineness, intentionality, and trustworthiness. Respondents consistently cited the ways in which faculty members and teachers who served as mentors supported and improved their self-efficacy through words of affirmation (Bandura 1994). In one example, Lorenz appreciated how his high school English teacher and mentor, Mr. Sherman, ensured that Lorenz felt that he belonged. Mr. Sherman advised a social club which was an auxiliary of an NPHC fraternity at Lorenz’s high school. “He basically made me a part of that social club that he created,” Lorenz remembered. “He stayed on me as if I was a part of it. I feel like he's a pretty good mentor,” Lorenz resolved.

Teachers and faculty members who served as mentors to the respondents shared connections with the respondents that extended beyond the bounds of typical in-class interactions. Explaining why two of his high school teachers, Ms. Buckner and Ms. Langley, were mentors, Trevon argued, “I would say that they were because they were two of the few who
sat me down, like outside a classroom and tried to steer me in a positive direction. They care.”

James found mentors in Dr. Collier and Dr. Lockner, both of whom were faculty members. Dr. Collier taught James several classes, and through continued interaction with him, was able to recognize that James' diminishing academic performance in one of his major courses was due to challenges outside of class. Dr. Collier's choice to contact James outside of class about his academic performance showed James that Dr. Collier genuinely cared for his success and wellbeing. This care seemed to be central to James perceiving Dr. Collier as a mentor. James also found a mentor in Dr. Lockner, who he met through the Luckyday Program. The program provided opportunities for Dr. Lockner to interact with students outside of the classroom. Whereas James' mentoring relationship with Dr. Collier begin from in-class interactions which led to out-of-class discussions about his academic performance, his mentorship relationship with Dr. Lockner began with out of class interactions which were facilitated by the Luckyday Program and Luckyday Residential College. Rather than Dr. Lockner becoming a mentor because of having taught James a class, James took Dr. Lockner's class because she had become a mentor.

Similar to James' relationship with Dr. Lockner, Demarcus' relationship with Dr. Bruce began outside of the classroom. Demarcus met Dr. Bruce through their fraternity when Dr. Bruce became the chapter advisor. Their interactions began as more formal and related to the fraternity and later expanded to include discussions about relationships, spirituality, and politics amongst other topics. Demarcus enrolled in Dr. Bruce's course after already having established a mentoring relationship with him. Corey, who also had faculty mentors who he'd met outside of classes, observed:
I know there's five million faculty members on this campus but I feel like the people who are mentors are those people who are always involved, if that makes sense, with the student body. Just by going to their events and working with them and stuff like that, even if it's just showing up, popping in, saying, "Hey, how are you guys doing? Do you need anything?" Or just building a relationship with one of those people in those student organizations that are outside of the student organizations that you align yourself with, if that makes sense.

Some respondents who developed mentoring relationships with faculty members did so with professors who taught their classes. Respondents perceived that these faculty mentors, like the ones that they met outside of their classes, went above and beyond their professorial duties. For instance, Corey noticed the way that former students of Dr. Charles, one of his professors and mentors, praised the way that he continued to mentor them beyond his class. Corey summarized, “Students of his that have come back and talked to his classes and said, ‘This man still, to this day, even though I took his class 20 years ago, helps me with stuff if I need it.’”

Respondents developed mentoring relationships with faculty in whom they perceived proficiency, knowledge, and experience related to their professional aspirations. Lorenz's relationship with Dr. Grant is one example. Lorenz describes Dr. Grant as very well-respected within the field of political science. As a transfer student and athlete, Lorenz struggled academically during his first few semesters at the University of Mississippi. Dr. Grant was able to provide the specific academic knowledge Lorenz needed to be successful. Comparing the support he got from Athletics to his mentoring relationship with Dr. Grant, Lorenz supposed that he could have gone to four or five advisors who were assigned to him through Athletics, but he
did not go to them. Instead, he found academic support from Dr. Grant, who he felt would be best positioned to offer relevant academic help. Additionally, Lorenz commented that he felt comfortable telling Dr. Grant when he was struggling in his courses. His comfort level approaching Dr. Grant was also a factor which led Lorenz to consider Dr. Grant a mentor.

Whether formed inside or outside of the classroom, mentoring relationships between respondents and faculty members did not begin immediately. Instead, respondents developed relationships with faculty in similar ways as they did with mentors from other groups. Continued interaction over time, in classrooms or through student support programs, provided opportunities for respondents to assess how the faculty member interacted with students. Faculty members who showed genuineness, intentionality, and trustworthiness were among the numerous sources of support with whom respondents formed mentoring relationships.

**Research Question 4: If mentorship plays a role in the success of Black males at the University of Mississippi, how does it help?**

The data suggests that mentoring supports the success of Black males in myriad ways. Student motivations to persist in college are affected by the interplay between the competing political interests of education: democratic equality, social efficiency (Labaree, 1997), and social mobility (Labaree, 1997). These tensions present unique challenges to the sense of belonging, perceived value in the curriculum, and self-efficacy of Black males; motivations Vincent Tinto (2016) describe as essential to student persistence in college.Beginning before college and continuing through matriculation, mentors provide support for each of these motivations.

This section will begin by discussing how respondents' pre-college environments affected their expectations for if they would go to college, what they expected to gain from college, and if
they could be successful in college. It will also describe how respondents internalized scripts about their expected educational trajectories from their environments, and how mentors used several pathways to support respondents' self-efficacy in their ability to succeed in college. The section will continue with respondent accounts of their experiences once enrolled in college. The section will conclude with accounts of these experiences, which reveal how mentors supported respondents' sense of belonging and helped them to persist through confusion about their majors or chosen career paths.

**Mentoring supports college aspirations.** Students are motivated to persist in college when they feel a sense of belonging, understand the value of the curriculum, and have sufficient self-efficacy in their ability to be successful in college (Tinto, 2016). Among the three motivations to persist, self-efficacy was associated with how respondents thought about entering and getting prepared for college. These thoughts were inextricably linked to respondents' communities' and families' educational outcomes; accounts of which showed evidence of desires to improve social and economic status through education. Respondents shared the expectation that college degree attainment would provide access to that mobility. Respondents' expectations about going to college and succeeding in college varied significantly based on their pre-college socialization.

People develop self-efficacy through vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, performance accomplishments, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1994). Respondents' environments influenced their self-efficacy in their potential to succeed in college in all four ways. The respondents' perceptions of their expected educational trajectories was informed by their proximity to examples of individuals who had gone to and benefitted from college,
opportunities to succeed at rigorous coursework in their high schools, words of encouragement/discouragement from various sources, and support that they received through emotional challenges.

**Vicarious experiences.** The data included numerous accounts of how respondents internalized messages from their environments which affected their self-efficacy. These messages were linked to the ways in which the respondents perceived their communities' expectations for their educational and professional outcomes. Respondents from rural communities and respondents whose parents had not completed bachelor's degrees shared perceptions that their environments failed to provide enough opportunities for them to benefit from the vicarious experiences of successful college graduates. For instance, Trevon groaned, “It's so traditional the way Black people are brought up in [rural hometown]. Our fathers just teach us to get a trade, learn how to do something with your hands, and work your way up from there.” Trevon felt that his town did not have enough representation of successful Black men. "I think it's more along the lines of us not seeing representation because for me, I can count on my hand how many Black male teachers I had. And it just didn't seem possible," he regretted.

Similarly, Lorenz shared, “When I was in the Delta, coming from a real, the small school that I came from, I was so glad to graduate high school that I didn't even think about college.”

Respondents internalized messages about what was expected of their educational attainment from their environments. The emphasis on finding a trade in Trevon's account may evidence a focus on social efficiency (Labaree, 1997) in his community. Because he observed the expectation that men in his community learned and practiced trades, he set that same expectation for himself. This observed reality cannot be extricated from consideration of the systems which
affected the available opportunities in his community. Lorenz's account shows evidence of a focus on both social efficiency (Labaree, 1997) and social mobility (Labaree, 1997). Lorenz did not have an inherent desire to pursue post-secondary education. He was satisfied with stopping at that level of educational stratification though he understood that would limit his professional options. Like Trevon and Lorenz, several other respondents observed a lack of Black males from their communities who had benefited from college. These respondents internalized messages from their environments which informed their ideas about the purpose of education. These messages had a significant impact on respondents' ideas about where, or even if, they would go to college.

The educational accomplishments of family members were central to the narratives respondents internalized about their educational outlook. They were also instrumental in compelling respondents to persist to higher levels of educational attainment. Even though they lacked the practical experience of having persisted through a bachelor's degree, respondents whose parents had not earned bachelor's degrees explained that their parents played a significant role in supporting their self-efficacy in their capacity to do well in college. These parents relied on verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1994) to support respondents' self-efficacy. For example, Trevon, whose parents both had associate's degrees, confessed:

I started thinking about college in 10th grade and it was just the bare minimum. I was going to go Southwest Community College and follow in my dad's footsteps and become a mechanic. You know, a good one but that's what I really want to do.

Trevon attributed his limited educational exploration to his parents' educational attainment and the outcomes he observed in his community. However, his parents' verbal
encouragement contributed to his decision to attend a four-year institution. “I think it was my parents pushing me to be more than who they were and letting me know that I didn't have to follow in their footsteps and just letting me know that I could be whatever that I wanted to be,” Trevon recalled. Respondents whose parents had not attended 4-year degree granting institutions also benefitted from the vicarious experiences of individuals they admired from afar. For example, Trevon affirmed, “The internet was just a complete, you know, a big factor in what I wanted to be. I started to see more males, period, being doctors, which is what I initially what I thought I wanted to be.”

In another example, D'andre, whose parents did not attend college at all, spoke of how his parent's educational attainment level affected his college aspirations. Reminiscing on the process by which he started considering college, D'andre shared, “My parents were like ‘D'andre, we want you to go to college, want you to get an education,’ but they didn't really have the general knowledge of college that someone who doesn't know anything about college would know.”

D’andre wanted to attend Penn State, and his parents often encouraged him to pursue that goal. However, as he made steps to enroll in college D’andre recognized that he lacked technical guidance from those who best knew his finances. His desire to attend Penn State over more financially feasible options was due to Penn State's overall prestige; and not at all connected with his understanding of financial aid, scholarships, and cost of attendance. Nevertheless, D'andre cited his parents' encouragement as a source of confidence in his ability to succeed in college.

Stories from respondents whose parents had educational outcomes like Trevon's and D'andre's included similar sentiments about the process of entering college. Their parents
encouraged them to pursue bachelor's degrees in part because they recognized the opportunities that were not available to those who did not have bachelor's degrees. These respondents and their parents associated educational attainment level and institutional prestige with increased opportunities to become gainfully employed, climb the socioeconomic ladder, and make positive contributions to society. However, they sometimes lacked the experience to provide specific advice about college. For these respondents, enrolling in college to pursue a bachelor's degree was described as an aspiration.

In contrast, respondents who had parents or several family members who earned bachelor's degrees spoke of college as an expectation. These respondents internalized messages from their environments which had a positive impact on their self-efficacy in their potential for college success. Their proximity to Black men and women who had benefited from college improved their self-efficacy in their college pursuits through vicarious experience. For example, Corey, whose mom graduated with her second degree when he was in middle school, recalled, “I guess I would just say for me, college has always been a thing that I knew that I was going to have to do, if that makes sense. Growing up, it wasn't just like oh, you get out of high school and do nothing.” Corey’s thoughts about attending college were so deeply engrained that he considered not going as “do[ing] nothing”.

Some respondents that did not have parents with bachelor's degrees benefitted from the examples of extended family members who did. Both parents and family members who felt that they had missed out on opportunities because of having not completed college, and those who had achieved various levels of success because of having attended college, encouraged respondents to pursue post-secondary degrees. For example, Terrell’s mom, who he also
considered a mentor, supported his self-efficacy in his ability to succeed in college from a very young age. “My mom always said that my sister and I were going to go to college,” Terrell expressed. Terrell’s mom did go to college for three years, however she left due to bad institutional fit and a pregnancy. Terrell theorized that his mother’s experiences gave her a strong appreciation for the “upward mobility” education promotes. “I think she realized then, afterwards, that of course education is very important as far as upward mobility in general,” Terrell posited.

Respondents and their families saw college as an opportunity to maintain or improve their socio-economic status. However, respondents' families' educational attainment levels informed respondents' self-efficacy in their academic competence. Respondents' parents' and family members' educational levels affected the mechanisms by which they supported the self-efficacy of the respondents. Whereas respondents who had ample examples in their immediate and extended families who attended college gained self-efficacy in their college aspirations through vicarious experience (Bandura, 1994), respondents who did not gained self-efficacy through verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1994).

**Verbal persuasion.** Verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1994) affected the self-efficacy of respondents in both positive and negative ways. In some cases, respondents expressed difficulty maintaining confidence in their ability to succeed in college due to the messages they received from community members, family members, and friends who had experience with college. For example, despite his laudable academic success in high school, James reported that people had doubts about his ability to succeed in college. James internalized comments which questioned his readiness for college and ultimately became concerned about his ability to do well at the
University of Mississippi. "I know he's smart, but does he really think he's going to be able to succeed at Ole Miss?" James recalled people doubting. “These were college graduates themselves and they were just wondering, would I have what it took to succeed,” he continued. Similarly, Trevon revealed, “I did not feel prepared because people would come back and be like, ‘Oh yeah, [My High School] didn't prepare us for this.’”

Respondents developed two main methods of combatting this negative verbal persuasion. Some relied on intrinsic motivation and discipline to develop habits that would support their academic growth and success. James, for example, related, “I think it was a matter of having self-motivation, and then the discipline to do what I needed to do as far as studying and stuff like that.” Others appreciated positive verbal persuasion which encouraged them to persist. For instance, Trevon appreciated Ms. Buckner for her empowerment and support. “She told me that she wanted to get myself together and just, you know, become somebody. And that's what influenced me,” Trevon remembered.

Verbal persuasion was most effective when it inspired respondents to persist through challenges and find success (Bandura, 1994). Verbal persuasion gave respondents enough self-efficacy to keep trying. Succeeding bolstered their self-efficacy even more. Negative verbal persuasion threatened self-efficacy, but experiencing mastery seemed to diminish its impact on respondents' self-efficacy. Positive verbal persuasion from mentors encouraged respondents to take on tough challenges, and the mastery experiences that resulted from their challenge and support helped students mitigate the impact of negative verbal persuasion on their self-efficacy.

Mastery experiences. The data included numerous examples of how students benefit from mastery experiences. Respondents who felt the most academically prepared for college
graduated from high schools which provided them numerous opportunities to master rigorous coursework. For example, Terrell explained that he felt thoroughly prepared for college because his high school put him through an academically rigorous curriculum. He theorized, “I think that the type of mentality that I got from high school, because it was so tough and it was so different from my previous school, has lasted me all throughout my academic career.” Kyle's high school also challenged him in such a way that helped to boost his confidence in his ability to succeed in college. Kyle recalled, “A lot of stuff that I took in back during my senior year of high school, I feel like I did a lot more work then.”

Conversely, some respondents felt that their high schools did not adequately prepare them for college. For example, Corey lamented, “Even the classes that I took my freshman year, I could tell from people that are not from Mississippi and the people that are from Mississippi, how they've learned so much more than I did.” He expounded, “There were things that we would talk about in class that they had already written papers, had already studied and done things on consistently in lower grade levels that we barely talked about my senior year of high school.”

Corey's lack of preparation for college eroded his self-efficacy in his ability to do well in college. He relied on encouragement from his grandmother, who he also considered a mentor, to help him to deal with those feelings. Additionally, Corey found mentors in college who helped to support him through academic challenges. Succeeding through those challenges helped Corey's confidence in his ability to be successful; but that confidence came after a series of academic failures and successes he experienced well after his enrollment.

Some respondents participated in pre-college programs which helped give them confidence in their academic self-efficacy. For example, D'andre did not feel ready for college at
all when he first started thinking about college in 10th grade. He developed self-efficacy through successfully completing courses for college credit with a pre-college program called Grove Scholars. Similarly, James’ experience with a pre-college program helped to increase his self-efficacy. James’ home school district earned a grant which allowed students at his high school to participate in summer camps hosted at the University of Mississippi. James credited these opportunities with helping him realize what college was like early. This early experience boosted his confidence in his ability to succeed in an academic environment which was very different from home.

Mastery experiences were strong drivers of self-efficacy for all respondents. However, only some respondents experienced enough mastery experiences with challenging coursework prior to enrollment to leave them confident in their ability to succeed in college. Mentors were instrumental in providing access to opportunities to develop self-efficacy through mastery. Kyle's psychology teacher, for instance, mentored him through his International Baccalaureate Thesis. Additionally, D'andre's aunt and mother, who he also considered mentors, encouraged him to participate in Grove Scholars, despite being sad to see him leave home. Trevon explained that even though his high school did not adequately prepare him for college, his toughest teachers, Ms. Buckner and Ms. Langley, served as mentors while he was in high school. Trevon attributed what confidence he had entering college with the successes he experienced in their classes.

**Emotional arousal.** Several respondents endured emotional experiences which affected their self-efficacy. The strongest evidence of the potential for emotional experiences to affect self-efficacy prior to entering college came from LGBTQ respondents. These respondents' experiences coming out to their families had deeply emotional impacts on their pre-college self-
concepts. One dynamic common to all of the LGBTQ respondents’ coming out stories was how their family members’ reactions affected their expectations for their future relationships with other Black men and their experiences as Black men. Mentors were key in helping respondents to process these expectations both before and during college. For instance, Trevon admitted that his mother's observation that "It's hard enough for a Black male, so it's even harder for a gay Black male" led him to expect certain challenges as he transitioned into college. Trevon internalized this message and thought about it often during his first year in college. Trevon shared that one of the reasons he appreciated his mentor Brandon so much was because Brandon's success as an Black LGBTQ male positioned him to help Trevon address the fears that resulted from those messages.

Similarly, James explained how his mother, who he also considered a mentor, helped him to push past negative perceptions of his gender performance. James never disclosed his sexuality during the interview. However, he did speak of challenges he experienced because of how others, particularly other Black men, perceived his gender performance. James' mother played a key role in helping him to gain the confidence to be comfortable with his masculinity or lack thereof. James' father, however, desired James to take on more a more masculine demeanor. This contention informed how James sought opportunities within the Black community; and while many of his interactions with Black women in college were positive, his experiences with Black males in college were not. James’ father's reluctance to accept him as he was undermined James’ confidence that he would have positive relationships with other Black males in college. Furthermore, being rejected from Black male spaces while in college was so emotionally taxing that it dampened his self-efficacy.
Several other respondents shared similar experiences. Corey, for instance, shared how his grandmother, who he also considered a mentor, helped him to cope with the sense of rejection he felt from his father in the wake of him coming out to his parents. His parents' relationship began to sour after he came out to them because his father disagreed with his mother’s unwavering acceptance. Corey’s Grandmother’s affirmation that "Whoever you are, whatever you do, I love you either way" resonated with Corey and helped him to deal with the feelings of rejection he felt when he came out.

Both positive and negative reactions from parents had deep and lasting impacts on LGBTQ respondents' expectations for their relationships with others. Terrell, for instance, shared that his parents offered unquestioned and unfettered acceptance of his sexuality when he chose to disclose it to them. Because of them, Terrell, entered college with considerable confidence in his ability to form meaningful relationships. Terrell found, however, that his parents' acceptance was not enough to keep the deeply emotional experiences of rejection based on his sexuality from affecting how he sought other opportunities to interact within the Black community. He associated the depth of the pain he felt from those rejections with the contrast they presented to his parents’ level of acceptance.

**Mentoring Supports Motivations to Persist**

Upon entering college, respondents continued to rely on the support of mentors to improve their self-efficacy to persist through challenges. Students also developed questions about the value of certain aspects of the curriculum and experienced threats to their sense of belonging. The data show that mentors provided role modeling, academic knowledge and support both inside and outside of the classroom, support for setting goals and choosing a career,
and psycho-emotional support for the respondents; the four main pillars of Crisp and Cruz's (2009) mentoring conceptualization. These domains of mentoring continued to support the self-efficacy of respondents while also improving their perceived value in the curriculum and sense of belonging - ultimately bolstering respondents' motivations to persist to graduation.

Respondents' experiences interacting with mentors were also instrumental in shaping their identities as Black men.

**Mentoring as Emotional Support.** Emotional support emerged as foundational component of the mentoring relationships respondents deemed most helpful. The processes by which respondents vetted their mentors focused on the ways in which the potential mentor's lived experiences and identity positioned them to provide emotional support to the respondents. Respondents experienced numerous events which challenged their sense of belonging, caused them to doubt the value of the courses they were taking, and that either buttressed or weakened their self-efficacy. Mentors helped respondents process the complex emotions that resulted from these experiences. James sums up the importance of the emotional support that mentors provide this way:

> Academically, you have your professors, you have tutors, you have people who will help you with that technical stuff. That's not as tough, but I think mentoring is being like, okay, you're dealing with all of these things, these social pressures you're having, this academic stuff that you're having to deal with, and then you're trying to find a happy place in your life, and making sure that you're doing enough of that to sort of balance out the whole stress thing.
Many of the respondents expressed a resistance to talking about their emotions with others. Mentors were able to earn the respondents' trust such that the respondents approached them for help with emotional situations. Respondents disclosed emotional reactions to challenges to their sense of belonging, perception of value in the curriculum, and self-efficacy. Most of the support that respondents attributed to their mentors bolstered respondents' psycho-emotional health in addition to addressing their barriers to persistence. For example, James and Terrell's exclusion from fraternal participation due to their sexuality represented significant challenges to their sense of belonging. Both men described this exclusion as emotionally traumatic. Both men found emotional support from mentors, which in turn supported their sense of belonging. The exclusion also challenged their self-efficacy because of the effect of their emotions on their academic performance. In another example, Trevon explained how his boss and mentor, Ms. Ally, helped him to develop skills to cope with the emotional stress he experienced as he considered changing his major, as he dealt with a break up, and as he harbored self-doubt about his ability to be successful in college.

Respondents' transitions between different phases of their academic and social lives presented emotional challenges through which mentors helped them to persist. Some respondents relied on several mentors to support them as they processed these emotions. For instance, Lorenz’s path to success at the University of Mississippi was arduous. Counselors at the community college Lorenz attended prior to enrolling at the University of Mississippi placed him on an academic path that extended his associate’s degree beyond his expectations. Lorenz was crushed. “The first time you feel, you automatically start thinking, you know what, I didn't want to go to college in the first place,” Lorenz recalled. Lorenz’s peer mentor, Calvin, and his family
mentors, Kourtney and Lindsay, helped him to decide between staying an extra semester and finishing his associates degree and transferring to the University of Mississippi. These three mentors continued to assist Lorenz in his advising process after he transferred to the University of Mississippi. Their personal relationships with him helped them to approach their advising with a level of nuance he did not perceive in his official advising experiences at the University of Mississippi and at the community college.

The support that mentors provided to respondents helped the respondents developed self-efficacy in their ability to persist to graduation. Mentors helped respondents process the emotional arousal from circumstances and actions which undermined respondents' sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and perceived value in the curriculum. Mentor's utilized words of affirmation, technical knowledge, tutorial support, and vicarious experience to support respondents’ emotional wellbeing. Respondents had access to other sources of support but sought their mentors for situations which evoked challenging emotions. Mentors helped respondents chart personalized paths to success in the face of these emotional challenges.

**Mentoring as Academic Support.** Mentors also provided support for respondents in the classroom. Some mentors provided academic support directly, while others connected the respondents to other academic resources. Respondents trusted their mentors enough to tell them about their academic struggles. Mentors assessed the respondents' academic challenges from a personal level and helped the respondents develop specific plans to address the challenges. The high academic expectations which mentors had for their mentees helped to support the self-efficacy of the respondents. Support to help reach high academic expectations ranged from
positive words of affirmation to specific tutorial support, and tracked with the mentor's level of 
education and proximity to the academic environment in which the respondent found challenge. 

Family members served as consistent sources of academic support for respondents. The 
respondents' level of comfort with their family mentors led them to be more open with them 
about their academic struggles. Academic support from family members often came in the form 
of verbal affirmations which reinforced respondents' belief that they could be successful. For 
example, D'andre's mother, who did not attend college, helped him think through academic 
challenges and helped him to get connected with the proper resources. “My mom didn't go to 
college, but if I was struggling with something, she would talk me through it,” D'andre 
recounted. “She's one of those people who just helped me academically excel,” he reflected. 

Peers also served an invaluable role in helping to support respondents' academic goals. 
Just as with family mentors, respondents felt that more comfortable being open and honest with 
their peer mentors about their academic challenges. Peer mentors' proximity to the academic and 
social environment in which respondents struggled helped the respondents feel safe being honest 
about their academic needs and challenges. The data include several instances of peer mentors 
providing tutorial support within certain courses or majors, administering words of affirmation to 
encourage respondents, and serving as role models which helped respondents deal with feelings 
of stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995). Special programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and 
Athletics placed students in supportive environment which encouraged them to “catch up” to 
their peers. For example, Tracy commented, “This is also the thing I like most about Lucky day 
is seeing a bunch of successful people in the same group as me, so I feel like I have to catch up.”
Respondents found mentors in peers who excelled academically; and while friends who struggled academically also provided valuable support, respondents did not consider those friends mentors. For instance, in comparing his relationships with two peers, Margaret and Brittany, Tracy differentiated that Margaret would sit down with him and explain things, go over his study guide, and help him plan how to study. “Now with the Brittany thing, nothing really influenced me, it was just, you know, I had somebody there,” he compared.

Perceived academic prowess added to the vetting process of peer mentors. Not only did peers need to be genuine and accessible to offer academic mentorship, they also needed to be well versed in the academic area in which the respondent faced challenges. The personal connections between peer mentors and respondents helped to alleviate threats of confirming stereotypes regarding the respondents' academic struggles, which presented a consistent and significant barrier to respondents seeking academic help from other sources. To illustrate, Demarcus explained how his peer mentor, Brandon, to whom he was assigned through the Luckyday Success Program, helped him to navigate a particularly tough course. Demarcus' personal relationship with Brandon helped him to trust Brandon enough to admit that he was struggling and needed extra support. In comparing Brandon's support to potential support from classmates or instructors in the course, Demarcus explained:

I mean you don't want them to know you're struggling. Why would you want somebody else to know? You can go to somebody else in your class and be like, okay, I made C's on all these tests. Now they're going out, telling everybody else, oh, he a dummy, you know what I mean?
Stereotype threat and academic support. Respondents were very conscious of stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995). Many respondents cited stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) as a significant barrier to their sense of belonging on campus. Respondents were hesitant to approach others for help in fears that their dialect or lack of understanding would be perceived as subpar intelligence. For example, Trevon rehashed, “I had a real southern drawl. I was talking in slang and all of that. I felt not as educated as everybody else.” He summated, “I, at a point, felt like I needed to be less Black. I just felt like I needed to become more like everybody else.”

As previously described, Trevon's relationship with Brandon, his Luckyday Peer Leader and peer mentor, helped him to find a sense of belonging. Brandon was a successful student who shared several aspects of Trevon's identity and experiences. Brandon's support and acceptance gave Trevon the confidence to interact with others and pursue new experiences. Brandon helped Trevon get involved in student organizations, which influenced his interest in pursuing a career in student affairs.

Race was a consistent theme in the respondents' efforts to avoid stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995). However not all respondents directly named race as a source of the stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) they experienced. Corey attributed his experiences with stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) to others' potential perceptions of his intellect. He was afraid that his public school, Mississippi education had left him relatively underprepared for college compared to his peers who attended high schools outside of the state of Mississippi. Indeed Mississippi's classrooms are some of the most segregated in the nation and the achievement gaps between Black and White students across all educational levels in the state are significant (Mader, 2016). Corey emoted the palpability of his perceived relative under
preparedness. In discussing how it affected his relationships with professors, he remembered, “I never spoke in class. No one wants to be that person that raises their hand and says something stupid in a classroom full of people. Everybody just turns around and looks at you like you don't know this.” Several mentors, including peers, faculty, and program staff members supported Corey as he learned to cope with stereotype threat in the classroom.

**Academic support and making sense of the curriculum.** Academic support from mentors helped respondents make sense of the curriculum and select majors. Several respondents discussed the challenge of finding majors. Family expectations and a lack of understanding regarding degree requirements, subject matter, and technical preparedness for certain subjects all contributed to respondents' uncertainty surrounding their major selections. Demarcus' story of changing his major, for instance, reflects many of the responses from other respondents who struggled to find a major. Mentors played an important role in helping Demarcus find, and cope with the stresses of changing, a major just as they did for other respondents. Respondents who struggled to settle on a major agreed that mentors from several different areas supported them as they considered their options.

**Mentoring as Role Modeling and Navigation.** The benefits of vicarious experiences did not stop with building respondents' self-efficacy in their ability to succeed in college. All the respondents also referenced the value of being able to 'see themselves' in mentors who shared stories about succeeding through challenges that respondents experienced once in college. Respondents also gained confidence in their ability to succeed in their chosen career paths from the examples of mentors who had been successful in those fields or who had combatted challenges the respondents experienced, or feared experiencing, on their paths to success. Just as
they had in preparation for entering college, respondents internalized messages from their college environments which informed how they perceived their potential to succeed beyond college.

**Identity and Role Modeling.** Shared identity reinforced the impact of the role modeling function of mentoring. To illustrate the impact of identity on the role modeling function of mentoring relationships, James reasoned, “Identity is very important because you have to have a vision. You have to sort of see yourself being in a place that you want to reach.” To enforce his point, James argued, “If you don't have an African American who's made it to that peak level in the firm, or a Black professional anywhere doing well in what they do, it's sort of hard to picture yourself being successful.” Having mentors who shared racialized experiences, like pressure to acculturate, was vital to helping respondents develop sense of self as a young adult. James reminisced:

Dr. Lockner says all the time, "I've always been silly, I've always laughed. People say, 'You know you ain't going to make it because you're just too silly,'" and she said, "Well, okay, I laughed my way through my bachelor's, my master's, and my PhD, and I was able to make it." Just having people who are telling you, "It's okay to be yourself, you can still make it." If you stay focused, who you are is only going to add to the experience or to what you're going to bring to the table, it's not going to take away.

James and Dr. Lockner shared racial identity and the experience of feeling pressured to acculturate to certain spaces or situations. Dr. Lockner's success despite having been criticized for her personality gave James the confidence that he could be successful being himself. James' personal relationship with Dr. Lockner contributed to his comfort talking to her about how he felt...
about being judged about his perceived masculinity. Like James, most of the other respondents who spoke to the role modeling function of mentoring had personal relationships with their role models. However, one respondent found mentors and role models in individuals he admired despite not having close personal ties. Terrell posited, “Some of our mentors, I don't think we realize it or not, but for me, some of them, I've never even met before, never even spoken to before.” Terrell described why Brenda, a staff member and mentor he met through his involvement on campus, and Tamron Hall, a prominent journalist and commentator, became role models for him. Regarding Brenda, Terrell related, “I consider her a personal mentor and we don't even have a relationship where I go to her office every day or I talk to her all the time. I just admire her work ethic and what she does.” And in reference to Tameron Hall, he replied “I consider her a mentor primarily because she's such a boss in media. She's worked so hard and she's done it as a person of color, and she did it as a woman.”

Terrell, like other respondents, admired certain characteristics from his role models and mentors that he wished to emulate. However, different from other respondents, these observed characteristics and shared racial identity were enough for him to consider Brenda and Tameron Hall mentors and role models. Other respondents explained that sharing multiple layers of identity added value to mentoring relationships with their role models. James' peer mentors, for instance, were valuable role models with whom he felt safe sharing his most personal challenges. Peer mentors were logical role models for respondents because of their proximity to the challenges the respondents faced. Respondents modeled their behaviors after their peer mentors who had overcome challenges to find success. When peer mentors shared multiple layers of identity with their mentees, the mentees were more likely to allude to the role modeling function
the mentor served in the mentoring relationship. Respondents who identified as members of the LGBTQ community, for instance, were candid about the value of having mentors who'd successfully navigated tensions related to the intersections of racial, gender, and sexual identities. One of the reasons that Brandon's mentorship was so valuable to Corey, James, and Trevon was because of multi-layered identity similarity he shared with them. Brandon's identity mattered significantly to these respondents because of his experience succeeding through the challenges associated with being Black, gay, and male at the University of Mississippi. The specificity of the context of Brandon's shared experiences with his mentees helped to position Brandon to serve as a role model for them.

Peer mentors' proximity to the challenges respondents faced in college buttressed the respondents' confidence in using their peer mentors' experiences as road maps to navigate collegiate challenges. This proximity was also a limitation of the role modeling mentoring function for peer mentors. Respondents also needed the examples of older mentors in whom they could see themselves. Corey, for instance, found a mentor and role model in an old neighbor, Lenny. Corey shared that Larry's example proved very important as Corey worked to maneuver through life as a Black gay male without the full support of his family. Corey shared that, though he didn't really understand it at the time, Lenny's experiences gave him a glimpse of some of the challenges he would face as he got older. Corey reflected:

Lenny was a mentor, but I didn't know it because at the time. I was young and so you think, oh, old people are just talking. So you never realize that they're actually telling you about their experiences or preparing you for something until it happens and you think back about it.
Lenny modeled what life might look like growing up as a Black gay male in America; and while Corey found this valuable as he encountered experiences which reminded him of Lenny's, he still leaned heavily on Brandon's example of how to be successful as a Black gay male at the University of Mississippi. Similarly, Trevon explains that while he appreciated my mentorship and considered me a role model, my status as a straight married man presented some barriers to our mentoring relationship. Despite me offering hope and guidance as he decided on a career path, my status as a straight Black male still presented a barrier to Trevon opening up to me about certain topics. In comparing our relationship with his relationship with Brandon, Trevon assessed, “You were a married straight man. So, I didn't really know what to say or how to say certain things, whereas with Brandon, our initial conversation was like sass, just like that.”

As the examples within this section show, role modeling was an important function of mentoring relationships. Mentees watched their mentors interact with world; gleaning valuable information from their successes, failures, and strategies navigating challenges. Identity played a complex role in determining the extent to which certain respondents' mentors served as role models. Age, sexuality, and race were the primary identity dynamics that respondents identified as variables which affected the role modeling function of mentoring. The role modeling function of mentoring relates closely with the vicarious experience mechanism of improving self-efficacy. The examples of role models succeeding in spaces in which respondents desired to thrive supported the respondents' sense of belonging in those spaces.
SUMMARY OF MANUSCRIPT 2

Black males at the University of Mississippi who participate in student support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics persist at higher rates than Black males who do not (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). This manuscript organizes the data accrued from 10 interviews with graduating participants in Luckyday, FASTrack, and/or Athletics and 2 focus groups consisting of Black males from various classifications and organizations into themes related to the relevance, nature, formation, and mechanisms of mentoring relationships.

The Black male participants in this study perceived mentorship as an important factor in supporting their college success. Respondents experienced a range of challenges including stereotype threat (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Steel, 2000), perceived under preparedness for college, and discrimination based on race and gender on their paths to enrolling in and matriculating through college. Mentors were genuine, intentional, and trustworthy individuals who helped respondents deal with those challenges through an inherently informal and reciprocal process. Respondents met their mentors through several means including formal student support programs, high school classes, community interactions, and informal interactions. No matter how respondents met their mentors, they agreed that the genuine nature of the support and care one provides is more indicative of one’s status as a mentor than formal titles or potions.
Respondents credited their mentors with providing support which helped them develop self-efficacy, find a sense of belonging, and make sense of the college curriculum; three motivations which are critical to student persistence (Tinto, 2016). Respondents internalized messages from their pre-college and peri-college environments which affected various aspects of their college going. These messages informed how the respondents formed relationships, how found community, pursued opportunities, and connected with sources of support. Identity dynamics like race, gender, age and perceived similarity altered the domains of mentoring relationships such that every mentor did not provide the same kind of support for every protégé. Role modeling, words of affirmation, emotional support academic and technical knowledge, and acceptance were amongst the various components of the support mentors offered their protégés.

The complex milieu of support mentors offered mentees was highly individualized to address the needs of the respondents. Despite the unique circumstances of respondents’ stories, the shared challenges, needs, pathways to finding support, and mechanisms by which mentors provided support within the data reveal several themes related to the mentoring relationships of successful Black males which are outlined in this document. A third and final manuscript will use the themes identified within this manuscript to propose solutions to the problem of low Black male persistence to graduation. Manuscript three will also present recommendations for future research and practice related to supporting Black male success in college with mentorship.
MANUSCRIPT 2 REFERENCES


170


MANUSCRIPT 3
FINDINGS

Black males do not complete college at the same rates as several other demographic groups (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). Research on the barriers affecting Black male graduation rates abounds. Scholars cite challenges finding a sense of belonging (Harper 2009; Billson & Majors, 1992), selecting majors and finding academic success (Boatman & Long, 2010), balancing multiple identities (Cuyjet, 2006; Majors & Billson, 1992; Dubois, 1903), experiencing equitable employment outcomes after college (Arum & Roksa, 2011, 2014), and developing relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators (Heaven, 2015; Cuyjet, 2006).

Universities use various strategies to support Black male success (Heaven, 2015; Harper, 2009; Cuyjet, 2006). Mentoring programs are among the strategies which have been proven effective in supporting Black male success in college (Brooms, 2016; Cuyjet, 2006). At the University of Mississippi, Black males who participate in Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics, graduate at a higher rate than Black males who do not (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017). All three of these programs utilize various forms of mentoring to support student success (The Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.).

This three-manuscript dissertation qualitatively explores the mentoring experiences of 22 Black males who found pathways to success while at the University of Mississippi. The first manuscript delineates the local and national context which contributes to the problem of low
Black male graduation. It also contains my professional positionality on the problem of practice, the conceptual framework, research questions, and methodology. The second manuscript presentation of the data, which are organized into themes based on four research questions. This third and final manuscript will include an in-depth analysis of the findings. Manuscript 3 also includes recommendations for improving the theoretical approach to studying mentoring. The manuscript concludes with a program proposal that aims to prioritize creating the conditions under which supportive mentoring relationships develop.

This section presents the findings gleaned from analysis of four research questions related to the perceived relevance, nature, formation, and mechanism of mentoring relationships. This manuscript includes findings presented as answers to the research questions. It also includes findings which were relevant, but adjacent to the research questions. It concludes with recommendations for future research and practice.

**Research Question 1: Do successful Black males perceive mentorship as important to their persistence at the University of Mississippi?**

Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) definition for mentoring provided an objective way to contend with the ambiguity of the mentoring concept. What is and what is not mentoring is up to the perceptions of the protégés; thusly this study allowed the respondents to determine what did and what did not constitute mentoring. Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) definition made room to consider the role of less structured forms of mentoring, which are not dependent on formal programs or hierarchies and were heavily represented throughout the data. Peer mentoring and mentoring relationships in which knowledge transfer is reciprocal fit comfortably into Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) definition for mentoring and were also prevalent throughout the data.
Finally, the definition also makes clear that mentoring is an inherently informal process which formal programs cannot mandate nor ensure. This was also a consistent theme throughout the data in this study. Respondents had multiple mentors; including those they met before and during college. Mentoring was conceptually broad from the perspective of the respondents - but centered, as Bozeman and Feeney (2007) suggest, on personal perceptions of value in the knowledge and social capital transferred between mentor and mentee.

Mentoring was among the various sources of support that participants perceived as important to their success in college. Every individual who helped respondents persist to graduation was not considered a mentor. Respondents reserved the designation of mentor for individuals who they perceived as particularly genuine, intentional and trustworthy. Genuineness, intentionality, and trustworthiness also played a role in determining who the respondents considered mentors.

**Research Question 2: If so, what is the nature of the mentoring relationships?**

The relevance of identity dynamics was the most substantially evidenced theme related to the nature of mentoring relationships. Respondents shared that perceived similarity of experiences and cultural understanding affected the formation and domains of mentoring relationships. Sharing common interests, goals, drive, and life experiences, for instance, were cited as catalysts to peer mentoring relationships. For example, respondents differentiated their peer mentorships from other friendships describing their peer mentors as peers who they perceived as more knowledgeable or wise in a particular domain than themselves and their other friends.
Perceived similarity was related to multiple intersecting identities. Race, gender, sexuality, and age were all identity dynamics which affected respondents mentoring relationships. These identity dynamics were inextricably linked to the challenges for which respondents sought support. Identity also affected respondents’ confidence in their mentors’ capacity to understand certain challenges and offer guidance. Respondents were more likely to seek support from mentors who would not judge their need for support. Perceived similarity with mentors mitigated stereotype threat; which precluded some respondents from seeking support in certain domains from mentors who they did not perceived as similar, culturally knowledgeable, and/or understanding within specific domains. Mentors who shared multiple identity dynamics were presumed to be more capable of understanding the intricacies of challenges; especially those challenges like finding space within NPHC fraternities, overcoming stereotype threat, and navigating negative interactions with professors.

LGBTQ respondents were most thorough in their understanding of, and appreciation for, how intersecting identities affected mentoring relationships. For them, perceived similarity based on race, gender, and ambition were insufficient to catalyze mentoring relationships. These respondents also needed assurance that their potential mentors would understand their challenges and be accepting of their sexuality and gender expression. LGBTQ respondents found mentoring relationships with other LGBTQ Black males, especially those who were close in age, as particularly affirming. LGBTQ respondents also found value in their mentoring relationships with people who affirmed their intersecting identities.

The themes that were unique to LGBTQ interviewees were not represented in the focus groups. Focus group participants were selected without respect to their sexuality and focus group
questions did not ask participants to disclose sexuality. Personal interview selections and questions were also made without respect to sexuality; yet LGBTQ respondents self-disclosed their sexuality as they shared stories of how mentors supported them through discrimination experiences during the personal interviews. Because of the selection criteria, it is well within the realm of possibility that no LGBTQ respondents were represented in the focus groups. However it is important to consider the possibility that group masculinity dynamics and internalized masculine scripts may have suppressed discussion about such experiences within the focus groups. Scholars who wish to study the ways in which individuals with multiple, intersecting marginalized identities experience phenomena need consider how group settings could affect data collection.

Several themes related to the nature of mentoring relationships were apparent in the data. Mentors were individuals who respondents perceived as genuine, intentional, and trustworthy people who were particularly committed to supporting their long-term success. These characteristics, and not formal titles, were what determined if respondents viewed the individual as a mentor. The sense of genuineness, intentionality, and trustworthiness was so central to respondents’ conceptualizations of mentoring, that they based their own personal mentoring styles on those characteristics.

Another important theme related to the nature of mentoring relationships was that all mentors do not provide the same kinds of support. Mentoring relationships operate within domains. Several factors, including title, position, or perceived knowledgeability of the mentor can affect the domains in which mentoring relationships operate. Mentoring is not one-size-fits all; and neither are mentors.
The reciprocity of mentoring relationships was also a consistent theme in the data. Mentoring relationships were perceived as valuable to both mentors and mentees; as several respondents served and found value in both capacities. This sense of reciprocity incentivized serving as a mentor for those respondents. They recognized the benefits of serving as a mentor including expansion of their networks, the inspiration their mentees’ successes brought, and the motivation to be a role model that comes with the responsibility of mentorship. Despite this reciprocity, respondents perceived that the onus for maximizing the impact of a mentoring relationship lie with the mentee. Mentors can help initiate and strengthen mentoring relationships by being available and persistent, but mentees who were open and honest about their needs, eager to receive advice, and driven enough to follow up on the advice were best positioned to benefit from mentoring. Mentoring relationships can end when there is not consistent contact between a mentor and mentee and/or when the mentee feels that they have learned what they can from their mentors.

**Research Question 3: How do mentoring relationships develop for successful Black males in college?**

The origins of the respondents’ mentoring relationships were varied. The data suggest that mentees vet helpful people before considering them mentors. Students develop mentoring relationships in spaces where they feel safe. Respondents sought relationships with individuals with whom they could be vulnerable and honest about their needs and challenges. They also valued relationships that provided challenge and support to develop new skills and competencies. Individuals who felt safe, provided valuable support, and who were perceived to be trustworthy, accessible, and accepting were considered mentors. An organic trust-building process, and not a
formal conversation or arrangement, determined when a mentorship relationship formed. Students sought the conditions under which mentoring relationships develop - the ability to be vulnerable, perceptions of genuineness, relevant knowledgeability, non-judgmental understanding, reprieve from stereotype threat, cultural understanding, affirmation of intersecting identities, and many other factors - and not individual mentoring relationships with specific people.

Students can be nervous about establishing mentoring relationships or approaching others for support. Respondents described being nervous to meet their mentors, and how they became comfortable over time as the mentoring relationship developed. Mentors sharing personal stories about their experiences helped mentees become more comfortable approaching mentors for support and guidance. Prior to these opportunities to hear personal stories and challenges from mentors, mentees can be intimidated by their perceptions of the mentors standards and expectations.

Student organizations like Men of Excellence were important sources of mentoring relationships. Respondents who participated in Men of Excellence had been both mentors and mentees for the organization. The ways in which respondents described Men of Excellence’s programming and mentoring structure suggests that membership develops new ways of conceptualizing Black masculinity, where being a mentee and being a mentor is an expectation of manhood. Men of Excellence offered access to community for respondents; some of whom had experienced rejection from other Black male organizations due to the more stereotypical homophobic and hyper masculine attitudes of their members.
All respondents had mentors they met through support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics or through student organizations like Men of Excellence. Proximity to program staff, faculty, and other student participants in these programs, which was encouraged by living learning communities and cohorts, facilitated interactions that led to mentoring relationships. However, not all of those who were assigned as mentors through these formal programs were mentors from the respondents’ perspectives. Assigned mentors who respondents perceived as not genuine or affirming of the respondents’ complex identities were not considered mentors.

Respondents agreed that family members could serve as mentors. Family members were most knowledgeable about the respondents’ upbringing, which gave them insight on how to best offer advice and support. Additionally, respondents valued the safety their family mentorships offered. They knew that they could talk to their family mentors about some of their more emotionally taxing experiences. Family mentors knew how to help respondents process tough situations, even when they did not have experience with the respondents’ specific challenges.

Many of the respondents had mentoring relationships with teachers and faculty members. Some of these mentoring relationships began in the classroom, with students finding mentors in their course instructors. Others began through formal student support programs, with students later electing to take classes from their faculty mentors. Teachers and faculty members who respondent perceived as genuine, accessible, and understanding were able to support respondents’ sense of belonging and self-efficacy. Faculty and teachers who were mentors affirmed their mentees’ academic ability through words of affirmation and challenging assignments. Mentoring relationships between students and faculty members in whom
respondents did not perceive similarity were limited to academic and professional domains. Respondents did not approach those mentors for support for emotional and personal experiences.

One finding related to the formation of mentoring relationships that emerged during the course of this research is the way in which students describe the start of their mentoring relationships. While all of the respondents of this study described the start of mentoring relationships as organic, unspoken, and informal, several students across campus who did not participate in this study emailed me with formal requests for mentoring. This presents the possibility that student perceptions about the formality of mentoring and its initiation may change as a function of certain variables. Future research on the impact of variables like support program involvement, gender, race, sexuality, and socioeconomic status on students’ conceptualization of the start of mentoring relationships could help practitioners develop population specific mentoring frameworks which account for differences in how students approach developing mentoring relationship across studied variables.

**Research Question 4: If mentorship plays a role in the success of Black males at the University of Mississippi, how does it help?**

Mentors helped to support respondents’ success by helping them believe that they could be successful in college, attending to their emotional needs, helping them navigate tough coursework, serving as role models, and contributing to their sense of belonging on campus. Mentorship proved valuable in supporting students’ aspirations for college and their persistence once enrolled. This section discusses the mechanisms by which mentoring supported respondents’ success.
**Mentoring Supports College Aspirations.** Mentors helped students believe that they could succeed in college. Students developed self-efficacy through the vicarious experiences of people around them, including their mentors. Students’ environments ranged in their access to individuals from whom students could learn about navigating college through vicarious experience, as several respondents were first generation and/or from communities in which college attendance was relatively rare.

Participants in this study presented a range of self-efficacy in their abilities to succeed in college. Some respondents came from educational and family backgrounds which provided ample examples of academic success and the dividends that college completion can pay, while other respondents entered college lacking confidence in their ability to succeed in college due to the messages they internalized from their environments. Mentors were important in helping the high self-efficacy students maintain their self-efficacy through social, emotional, and intellectual challenges. Mentors were also instrumental in helping students who entered college lacking confidence in their ability to be successful develop enough self-efficacy to persist through challenges.

Beginning before college, students internalize messages from their environments which affect how they think about college. Mentors helped respondents build self-efficacy through vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, mastery experiences, and emotional arousal - four pathways for building self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Some students who did not have a lot of examples of people in their communities who had graduated from college, for instance, did not really expect to attend college. Respondents with several family members who had attended college spoke of college as an expectation, while students who lacked such examples spoke of
college as an aspiration. The perceived value of a college education was the undercurrent of both contexts. Both groups of respondents found the support of mentors helpful as they processed their decisions about going to college.

Verbal persuasion also had a powerful effect on building self-efficacy. Some students doubted their ability to succeed in college because of stories from community members, friends, and family members about the difficulty of college. Mentors were individuals who encouraged respondents to persist through this trepidation and engage in challenging activities which would reinforce their confidence in their ability to be successful.

Mastery experiences were powerful drivers of self-efficacy. Students who attended high schools that challenged them with tough coursework and rigor were very confident in their ability to be successful in college. Conversely, students who attended struggling high schools felt unprepared to succeed in college level courses. Mentors, especially teachers and family members, were helpful in supporting respondents through tough courses and challenging situations. These mentors encouraged students to take on new challenges and push through difficult aspects of those challenges to the result of increasing the students’ self-efficacy in their ability to succeed in college.

Emotional arousal also affected students’ self-efficacy. Mentors helped respondents deal with emotional challenges which threatened their self-efficacy in their ability to be successful in college. The importance of this pathway for building self-efficacy was most evident in the stories of LGBTQ respondents. The process of coming out to their families presented some threats to their self-efficacy. Specifically, negative reactions from family members, which ranged from concern about others’ acceptance to downright disdain for their sexuality and/or gender
performance, caused respondents to worry about finding a sense of belonging once in college. Support from mentors both before and after college was instrumental in helping these respondents process these emotions and build confidence that they would be successful in college.

**Mentoring Supports College Persistence.** The respondents of this study provided accounts of their mentoring relationships which align with all four of Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) domains of college mentoring. Psychological and emotional support is related to helping students develop a sense of belonging on campus (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). All of the respondents of this study expressed difficulty establishing a sense of belonging; and it was their mentors who helped them develop strategies to find community. Support for setting goals and choosing a career path and academic knowledge and support were closely related in the data. Most of the goals respondents discussed were related to academics and career, so mentors who helped students set and reach goals often also helped respondents succeed academically. Finally, many of the respondents discussed the importance of having a role model. Individuals who respondents identified as mentors were not always considered role models, however. The role modeling domain of mentoring was dependent upon several factors including perceived similarity related to race, gender, and personality.

**Emotional support for persistence.** Emotional support was linked to the vetting process through which respondents put potential mentors. As respondents endured threats to their sense of belonging, confidence in their academic abilities and/or trajectories, and self-efficacy, mentors were individuals that respondents trusted enough to seek support and guidance. Seeking emotional support was not a comfortable experience for respondents, as many of them struggled
to be emotionally vulnerable. Mentors were the supportive individuals with whom respondents built relationships that made them comfortable seeking emotional support. Emotional challenges stemmed from situations at home, discrimination, stereotype threat, and myriad other sources. In order for someone to be a mentor, they had to first demonstrate that they were the type of individual with whom respondents could approach for support to deal with these challenges. Identity dynamics still influenced the comfort level with which respondents shared specific challenges with their mentors. Mentors who did not share multiple identity dynamics were not the individuals that respondents approached for situations that were responsive to cultural occurrences, like pledging a NPHC fraternity or dealing with stereotype threat.

Academic support for persistence. In addition to providing emotional support, mentors were helpful in supporting respondents’ academic success. In fact, several respondents experienced challenging emotions related to their academic performance in certain classes. Academic rigor and terse interactions with professors both contributed to emotional distress for respondents. Academic support to address these emotions bolstered students’ sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and the ways they perceived value in their coursework. Mentors either attended to these academic needs directly or connected respondents to individuals who could provide the support they needed. Family members, support program staff, peers, and professors assessed mentees’ academic needs and connect them with the resources they needed to find success. Mentees vetted their mentors’ academic prowess as they made decisions about which mentors they should approach for academic support and how seriously they should take the advice that they received from specific mentors.
Peer mentors and student support program staff were very helpful sources of mentoring in this domain because they made respondents feel comfortable discussing their challenges. Just as with emotional challenges, respondents sought academic support from individuals with whom they felt comfortable being vulnerable. Stereotype threat was a major barrier to the academic support component of mentoring relationships. Respondents were most likely to seek academic support from mentors who shared some identity dynamics. When respondents did form mentoring relationships with individuals who were older and not Black, the relationships often situated primarily within the academic domain. Students did not talk about emotional challenges with these kinds of mentors, who were often professors for multiple courses the students took within their majors.

*Role modeling as support for persistence.* Role modeling was a significant mentoring function in the data. The data included a wealth of evidence that suggest that a lack of representation of Black males in college and within a student’s desired field can cause them to question their place in college and/or within specific majors. Mentors who prevailed through familiar challenges and found success represented opportunities for mentees to “see themselves” as successful individuals. The college environment was rife with messages about Black male success which shaped respondents personal expectations for themselves. Mentors who served as role models gave respondents new messages from which they could conceptualize new, more positive expectations about their success in college and beyond. Mentors played important roles in helping students perceive enough value in their educational opportunities to help them persist through doubts about their majors and chosen careers. Just as with other domains, similarity in
experiences, race, gender, and other identity dynamics contributed to the initiation and perceived value of the role modeling function of mentoring relationships.

**Mentoring Supports Nigrescence.** Respondents of this study had high levels of racial salience, and were keenly aware of the ways in which race impacted their lives. However, in some respects, they still harbored some anti-Black attitudes which were reminiscent of Cross’ (1995) pre-encounter phase of Nigrescence. For example, several respondents’ responses to questions about their choice to attend the University of Mississippi included disparaging remarks about Historically Black Institutions. Even for these respondents, however, Blackness seemed central to their self-concepts.

The respondents of this study shared experiences of situations that caused them to “encounter” their Blackness (Cross, 1995). These encounters caused respondents to become more aware of how their Blackness affected their interactions with the world. For some respondents, the encounter was related to their perception of their relative preparedness for college compared to White students. For others, the encounter came in the form of interactions with professors which caused feelings of stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995). These and other examples of events which moved respondents to reconceptualize their Blackness were plentiful in the data.

The data contain several examples of the rage and subsequent leveling of the immersion-emersion stage of Cross’ (1995) Nigrescence model. Despite the variety of encounters that sparked the reconceptualization of Blackness associated with this stage, Black mentors consistently modeled how to be successful despite racial oppression. Respondents did not allude to their White or non-black mentors serving this same function.
Respondents appreciated their Black mentors’ embrace of their racial identity, which helped respondents develop new scripts about how their Blackness would impact their lives. Observing this embrace supported the internalizations phase of Cross’ (1995) Nigrescence for the respondents.

Finally, the data also include examples of internalization/commitment (Cross, 1995). While there was evidence that respondents experienced all of the different stages at various points throughout their lives, all of them had developed an appreciation for their Blackness. They were dedicated to maintaining that appreciation internally, and projecting it to others. Many of the respondents viewed mentoring others as one mechanism by which they could model a healthy racial self-concept, which evidenced a forward thinking commitment to help create a sustainable positive state of Black affairs for students at the University of Mississippi.

**Mentoring as Afrocentric Resistance.**

Respondents demonstrated a sharp awareness of the barriers to their success and a strong drive to support each other through those challenges. Robinson and Howard-Hamilton’s (1994) Afrocentric Resistance model places a strong emphasis on cultural pride; encouraging students with Afrocentric heritage to reject assimilative ideas in favor of seven Nguzo Saba principles: Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujaama (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). These principles offer a pathway to liberation and empowerment through which Black students can support each other’s success and Black identity development.

Cultural appreciation and understanding was central to mentoring relationships between respondents and their mentors. Respondents were clear that this level of cultural appreciation and
understanding was most perceivable in their mentoring relationships with other Black people. Living learning communities, formal student support programs, and student organizations promoted the Nguzo Saba principles, though never by the names Robinson and Howard-Hamilton (1994) designated.

**Sexuality Affects Mentoring Relationships**

The theoretical framework for this study proved useful to contextualizing barriers to Black male success which are embedded within the socio-political milieu of the education system in America, connecting those challenges to the student motivations to persist to graduation, and in providing a method to assess the role of mentoring in supporting success of the respondents. However, the framework did not provide a sufficient lens for analysis of the challenges LGBTQ respondents experienced as they sought a sense of belonging within the Black male community and on campus.

LGBTQ respondents navigated all of the same obstacles as non-LGBTQ respondents - plus the added layers of discrimination they faced from family members, community members, and other Black males in college. Societal interactions shape and influence people’s conceptualizations of manhood, or ideals and ideas about what it means to be a man (Dancy, 2011). These ideas and ideals inform how individual perform and demonstrate their manhood (Dancy, 2011). Masculinity is the performance and demonstration of the socially influenced ideas and ideals of what it means to be a man (Dancy, 2011). LGBTQ respondents seemed concerned about how others perceived their manhood and presentation of masculinity. While heterosexual males also described the challenges they faced in the process of “becoming men,” LGBTQ
respondents did so with the added stress of being rejected from groups or spaces based on their perceived masculinity.

Black males in college cling to White hegemonic conceptualizations of manhood and performances of masculinity, which subjugate identities that are not White, male, affluent, or heteronormative (Pelzer, 2016). This restrictive, deficit-mined view of Black masculinity is due to a historically negative depiction of the Black male as hyper-sexualized, unintelligent, brutish, and inarticulate (Pelzer, 2016; Dancy, 2011; Harper, 2009). Black males internalize the stereotypes that result from negative depictions of Black masculinity (Dancy, 2011). In this hegemonic masculine conceptualization, male academic success is associated with Whiteness and/or perceived as non-masculine, which can lead some Black males to avoid behaviors which might cause others to view them as capable of academic success (Pelzer, 2016; Dancy, 2011).

Internalized Eurocentric conceptualizations of Black masculinity lead Black men in college to affirm their manhood in ways that are not necessarily conducive to success (Dancy, 2011; Billson & Majors, 1992). Athletic prowess, romantic relationships with women, competition, and use of urban colloquialisms are amongst the behaviors associated with Black masculinity in college (Pelzer, 2016; Dancy, 2011; Billson & Majors, 1992). Exclusive groups of Black men can inadvertently exacerbate pressures to exhibit masculine characteristics; favoring heteronormative, patriarchal perceptions of manhood and masculinity over “generally accepted Nguzo Saba Afrocentric epistemologies that emphasize familial connectivity, community leadership, and collectivity” (Pelzer, 2016, p. 18).

Creating new perceptions of Black manhood and masculinity which disrupt the cycle of negative perceptions of Black masculinity informing the behaviors Black males will require a
major shift in how scholars and practitioners problematize Black male success. Deficit-mindedness regarding Black male success has unnecessarily pathologized the intersection of Blackness and masculinity due to color, gender, and economically-blind devotion to the concepts of objectivity and meritocracy in the scholarship (Pelzer, 2016; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Harper, 2012). As a way to upend this devotion and conceptualize new understandings of Black masculinity Pelzer (2016) posits, “Critical race theory requires scholars, administrators, and students to understand the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality, among other identities, and how these cross sections merge in varying ways to create unique, individualized conceptions of masculinity” (Pelzer, 2016, p. 21).

The framework’s use of the Afrocentric Resistance paradigm provides a critical perspective on navigating society as Black students, but falls short of unpacking the unique challenges LGBTQ respondents described as they sought membership in groups which they perceived to exhibit Nguzo Saba principles (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1997). All respondents exhibited some perceptions of manhood and presentations of masculinity which aligned with the Nguzo Saba principles, but these dynamics did not make up for more hyper-masculine dynamics which seemed to affect LGBTQ respondents disproportionately. While none of the respondents in this study shared homophobic views during their interviews, it was clear that several respondents had experienced discrimination based on their sexuality and/or presentation of masculinity. If the purpose of this study is to propose methods to support all Black males’ success through mentoring, the path forward must address the ways that Black males apply and develop the Nguzo Saba principles, or some other critical/intersectional framework for Black men, across sexuality and gender performance.
Critical Theory and Mentoring

Critical theories are those that seek to change society through critical reflection (Horkheimer, 1976). Whereas traditional theories provide a way to understand and describe society, critical theories seek to “liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244)” through critical reflection on traditional scholarship. Horkheimer (1976; 1982) posited that oppressive systems taint exploration of societal problems; thereby requiring critical reflection of both the scholarship and the scientific and theoretical tools scholars use to study the problems.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a critical theory born out of critical scholarship on the effects race and racism on law, politics, and society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Many scholars use CRT to analyze educational theories, practice, and scholarship, which have all proven susceptible in some way to the impact of oppression based on race, class, and gender (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Scholars who utilize CRT to examine educational outcomes for Black males have extensively cited the need to create narratives that counter the stereotypical depictions and combat the negative internalizations of Black masculinity (Brooms, 2016; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Heaven, 2015; Harper, 2006; 2009; 2010; 2012; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). One method to collect and analyze these new narratives is through a three-pronged approach using personal narratives, group narratives, and composite narratives (Pelzer, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Chronicling stories from individual Black males who are successful provides an opportunity to glean counter-narratives from which other Black males can draw information with which they can build new conceptualizations of Black masculinity (Pelzer, 2016).
The theoretical framework for this study as presented failed to integrate a basis for critical analysis of the potential for gender, gender expression, sexuality, and their intersections with Blackness to affect the challenges respondents faced and their pathways to finding support from mentors. Incorporating Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002) counter-narrative approach into this study’s framework could enhance it - making it more useful for application to future research and potentially expanding its applicability to other demographic groups and contexts. Instead of relying on the set of identity development theories that comprise the scaffolding portion of the framework, CRT, and particularly Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002) three narrative approach to creating counter narratives, could help scholars to identify the proper theories to best study their intended populations.

This study’s use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups served to create space for personal and group counter narratives; however inadvertently. Making critical race theory more central to the analysis may have helped to contend with the roles of complex intersecting identities on respondents’ perceptions of mentoring and its essentiality in supporting success.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this section is to move beyond analyzing the problem of low Black graduation rates, pontificating the myriad challenges which contribute to this problem, and investigating perceptions of the role of mentoring in supporting success. This section proposes a path forward. Because mentoring is inherently informal, it would be errant to propose a “mentoring program” to support Black success at the University of Mississippi. Instead, the proposed program will focus on supporting the *Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix* for Black males at the University of Mississippi. The structure will prioritize creating the conditions under which mentoring relationships develop and providing the components of mentoring which respondents perceived as most contributive to their success in college.

Implications for Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice

Failure to respond to disparities in equity and social justice is unethical. If oppressive structures impede Black male success, measuring their outcomes from purely objective and meritocratic perspectives is inherently unjust. Black males do not experience the challenges delineated in this dissertation and the literature in a vacuum. However, the way a problem is defined influences potential solutions to the problem. For Black males, the intersection of Blackness and masculinity has been pathologized at the expense of critical thought about the systems which present challenges to Black male success. This dissertation and the continued research it will frame, will add to the growing body of research which problematizes the
historical approach of exploring disparate outcomes for marginalized groups. Rather than promote assimilation into the campus environment, the program presented in this manuscript will seek to make the campus culture more expansive and responsive to the needs of Black males. Additionally, if the program is successful, more Black males will gain access to the benefits of college completion.

Pursuing equality in opportunity is an insufficient approach to addressing disparities in educational outcomes. The disparities in outcomes that Black males experience in college are already well established and have deeply influenced both society's perceptions of Black men and Black men’s perceptions and expectations for themselves (Dancy, 2011). Pursuing equality in opportunity alone cannot account for the effects of internalizing these perceptions. Additionally, simply increasing student retention resources without respect to the unique barriers which contribute to the relative lack of success for Black male students could perpetuate reliance on purely meritocratic assessments; reinforcing deficit thinking regarding Black male success (Harper, 2009).

Disrupting the cycle of failure and forming new expectations for Black male excellence will take a specific investment in Black men. Increasing resources for programs which support Black male success, including creating opportunities for others to invest in, and hear stories of, Black male success will contribute to the formation of counter-narratives which combat deficit thinking. These counter-narratives are key, but it is important to make clear that it is not the sole responsibility of Black males to change the ways others perceive them or their success. The campus community must also be willing to adopt new conceptualizations of Black masculinity as well.
The findings from this study may also have implications for applying mentoring theory to the pursuit of equitable outcomes populations which are marginalized in college. Specifically, the findings related to the inherently informal nature and formation of mentoring relationships present a challenge to using formal mentoring program structures to support success. The data suggest that mentoring relationships develop when and where the right conditions exists to support the development of the relationship.

The term matrix refers to the “the cultural, social, or political environment in which something develops” (Oxford Living Dictionary, n.d.). Matrix models for mentoring exist in several contexts; including teacher education (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2010), biomedical research (Byington, Keenan, Phillips, Childs, Wachs, Berzins, & Clark, 2016), and spiritual leadership (Pue, 2005). These models describe the characteristics of mentoring relationships for specific populations in specific contexts.

**Defining the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix.** The *Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix* refers to the cultural, social, and political environment which supports the informal transmission knowledge, social capital, and psychological support perceived by the recipient, a marginalized student in college, as 1) supportive of their equitable access to success and 2) relevant to work, career, professional development. The definition borrows from Bozeman and Feeney’s (2007) definition for mentoring and the Oxford Living Dictionary (n.d.) definition for matrix. The definition implies that marginalized students are aware of the obstacles they will face as they pursue college success, and that they view mentors as people who can help impart the
knowledge, social capital, and psychological support they will need to circumvent or surmount those challenges.

**Mentoring Research and Equity.** The oppressive structures which contribute to the disparate outcomes that mar the experiences of marginalized populations also affect how scholars study problems and approach interventions (Horkheimer, 1976; 1982). Attempting to apply mentoring theory universally across all student populations, for instance, sets up the possibility of pathologizing a student’s race, gender, or other identifiers if that student does not experience the benefits of mentoring in the same ways as other students. The pathology of Black masculinity is one example of the deficit thinking that can result due to the relative absence/imbalance of perspectives which consider the impacts of oppressive structures on Black male success (Harper, 2009).

Critical Race Theory requires scholar practitioners to consider the ways in which race, gender, and numerous other identities intersect to affect what they study (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Creating narratives to counter the pathology which has resulted from perspectives which lack this consideration is essential to more equitable study of marginalized populations (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002) counter-narrative approach, for instance, uses personal narratives, group narratives, and collective narratives from a specific group to construct understandings which reflect the role of race, gender, and the intersections of countless other identities in shaping how those populations experience phenomena.

**Presenting the Mentoring Matrix.** The program structure proposed within this manuscript does not seek to establish formal mentoring relationships. Instead, the program seeks to support a culturally relevant framework so that participants can form the kinds of relationships
they perceive to be valuable to their success in college. I refer to this framework as the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix (CEMM).

The data accrued from the personal interviews and focus groups provide the personal and group narratives which, once analyzed, produced a collective narrative for how successful Black males perceive the role of mentoring in supporting their success. These narratives describe the essential elements of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for successful Black males at the University of Mississippi. The Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix will likely change as a function of identity dynamics and sociological, political, and cultural context of the mentoring relationships analyzed.

Establishing a mentoring program to support success must begin with evaluating the state of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix within a specific context. What constitutes a healthy and supportive Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix could change depending on the context of the environment, including the perceptions, actions, experiences, and expectations of the individuals involved. Investigating the substance of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix requires attention to a specific population’s perceptions of the social, cultural, and political factors which affect their experiences. Specificity to the intended population is key, especially for marginalized student populations.

Figure 3 is a visual depiction of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix Framework (CEMMF). The framework provides a basis for the theoretical analysis of the cultural, social, and political factors which inform how specific populations experience mentoring. The CEMMF is very similar to the original framework presented within Manuscript 1, but differs in one significant way. The theoretical scaffolding in the original framework was presented as an
educated guess about the best theories to understand how mentoring might support success for Black males in college. The guess was based on my review of the literature prior to the study and my own lived experiences. The data acquisition and analysis processes revealed that sexuality and gender expression impact mentoring relationships in ways I did not consider when I proposed the original framework. Specifically, as a cisgender straight Black male, my sexuality and gender have not presented the same perceivable challenges to establishing mentoring relationships with other Black males as the LGBTQ participants in this study. I did not include a component of the framework which was reflective of these respondents’ experiences. The CEMMF seeks to mitigate the effects of such oversight by using the personal, group, and collective narratives of the target population to comprehend how specific populations experience mentoring. The framework could be used to design context specific interventions which support mentoring relationships.
Figure 3. Collegiate Equity Mentoring Framework.
The top portion of the framework, which remains unchanged from the original depiction, contends with the socio-political and cultural factors which affect education, student motivations to persist, and how mentoring can support those motivations. Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002)
counter-narrative method is appended as a way to flesh out how specific populations experience the top portion of the framework. Whereas the top portion is helpful to understand the broader socio-political and cultural factors which shape how students experience education and mentoring, the CEMMF in its entirety adds depth to what that means for a specific populations and contexts. The lines depicted between boxes which represent stratification, credentialism, undifferentiated curriculum, and support are not unique to a certain set of individuals - as they describe broader socio-political tensions affecting student persistence and the connections between the different components of mentoring. However, understanding how differently they manifest for specific groups of students will help scholar practitioners create favorable mentoring conditions to support those groups’ success in college. For example, whereas a line depicts how social mobility can lead to credentialism which can challenge students’ perception of value in the curriculum, applying the framework to a specific population would use the personal, group, and composite narratives of that group to explain how they experience credentialism, how it affected their perception of value in the curriculum, and how mentoring supported their perception of value in the curriculum. This nuanced understanding reveals context-specific considerations for applying mentoring theory to support the success of specific groups and/or individuals.

**Programmatic Changes in Support of Black Male Success**

The findings presented within this dissertation suggest that Black males at the University of Mississippi encounter barriers which threaten to impede their success in college. Successful Black males benefitted from mentoring relationships as they overcame the impediments to success. Mentors were helpful in several different ways - not the least of which was helping to create a foundation upon which mentees could positively conceptualize Black masculinity.
Academic support, emotional support, support for self-efficacy, and the numerous other components of mentoring relationships had the net effect of shaping mentees’ perceptions about what it means to be Black, male, and successful. *Ascending* negative stereotypes and expectations about Black masculinity was central to the notion of success for the participants of this study. Thusly, creating the conditions under which Black males at the University of Mississippi can develop relationships which help them to build healthy conceptualizations of their identities will be an elemental goal of the proposed program. The name *A.S.C.E.N.D.* reflects the centrality of this programmatic aim.

*A.S.C.E.N.D.: Aspiration, Scholarship, Community, Excellence, Navigation, and Dedication*. The components reflect the findings describing the challenges Black males faced in college and the mentoring relationships which helped support their success. As such, each component of *A.S.C.E.N.D.* is meant to help support the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for Black males at the University of Mississippi. *A.S.C.E.N.D.* is presented here as a proposal for a living and malleable program to support the success of Black males, and potentially all men of color, at the University of Mississippi. The significance of the name *A.S.C.E.N.D.* is not meant to preclude applying the findings to existing programs and/or future programs of a different name. Rather the acronym is meant to describe the substance of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for Black males at the University of Mississippi; and thusly could enhance existing student support programs in which Black males are already involved.

**Personnel.** The University of Mississippi Department of Human Resources posted the Assistant Director of Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement position in December of 2018
(Assistant Director of Inclusion & Cross Cultural Engagement, 2018). The position description lists the following as examples of work performed:

- Develops programs and services that aid in the growth and retention of underrepresented student populations, fosters multicultural awareness and cross-cultural interaction among students, faculty, and staff.

- Works with a wide variety of constituents to assess programmatic needs that support diversity issues.

- Coordinates training opportunities for students and provides oversight for mentoring programs. Facilitates initiatives and cross-cultural interaction and promotes diversity.

- Recruits, selects, and trains graduate staff and student workers.

- Serves as a multicultural resource specialist and oversees an online and physical Multicultural Resource Library.

- Coordinates the distribution of communication supporting diversity and inclusion.

- Develops partnerships with departments and organizations campus-wide to support retention efforts for underrepresented student populations. Assist with updating content and resources available on the departmental website.

- Manages and maintains budgets for programming and retention initiatives to include oversight of purchases for student leadership teams and preparation of budget reports and updates.
• Provides advising support and programming resources to student organizations and coordinates cross-cultural leadership development and training opportunities.

• Designs materials to promote and encourage student participation and involvement in programming.

• Collects, maintains and distributes statistical information regarding underrepresented student populations.

• Creates assessment tools for evaluation of programs and services, assesses programs and utilizes information to enhance or develop new initiatives.

• Collects, maintains and distributes statistical information regarding underrepresented student populations,

• Assists with the coordination of History and Heritage Month programming.

• Performs similar or related duties as assigned or required.

While the job description for the position does not make direct mention to a specific population, an advertisement for the position reads:

The University of Mississippi is searching for an Assistant Director of the Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement. This newly created position will have primary responsibility for initiatives supporting the retention and graduation of underrepresented student populations with a special focus on men of color. The Assistant Director will join the Director, another Assistant Director, and two Coordinators in advancing the mission of
the CICCE (S. Mead, Job Advertisement in Student Affairs Professionals, December 10, 2018).

The proposed structure and intended duties of this position make this research timely. The Assistant Director for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement could satisfy the responsibilities listed by seeking to support, maintain, improve, and expand the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for Black males and men of color at the University of Mississippi. The role includes recruitment, selecting, and training Graduate Assistants, who could also serve as key personnel to support A.S.C.E.N.D. The partnerships the Assistant Director will establish could provide another source of human capital and other resources which could support A.S.C.E.N.D.

**Partnerships.** The Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement reports through the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (Diversity, n.d.). The Assistant Director of Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement position within the CICCE makes partnering with other programs and initiatives within Diversity and Community Engagement make sense. For example, many of the respondents benefited from mentors who had no direct connection to the University of Mississippi. This may present an opportunity for partnership with community organizations, which is within the purview of the Division. These partnerships could be mutually beneficial, with the community serving as a source of mentoring for the participants and participants serving as mentors to community members. Additionally, the CICCE has already branded programs like Mississippi Outreach to Scholastic Talent (MOST) which aims to enroll, retain, and graduate students of color (Center for Inclusion and Cross-cultural Engagement – Services, n.d.).
In addition to the obvious partnerships within the division to which the position will report, systemizing the University’s efforts to support the success of men of color will require establishing connections with other departments. The University of Mississippi Diversity Plan, affirms the following System-Level Diversity and Institutional Goals from the Mississippi Institutes of Higher Learning:

Board Goal 1: Increasing the enrollment and graduation rate of minorities.

Board Goal 2: Increasing the employment of minorities in administrative, faculty and staff positions.

Board Goal 3: Enhancing the overall curriculum by infusion of content that enhances multicultural awareness and understanding.

Board Goal 4: Increasing the use of minority professionals, contractors, and other vendors. (Diversity and Inclusion - Diversity Plan, 2016)

All four board goals present opportunities for partnerships and/or resources that could benefit A.S.C.E.N.D. Partnerships with departments/offices/programs like Admissions, Orientation, Enrollment Management, and student support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics could help to support efforts to enroll, retain, and graduate men of color. Diversifying the workforce may present more opportunities for A.S.C.E.N.D. participants to develop mentoring relationships. Identity and perceived similarity catalyzed and enriched mentoring relationships for the respondents of this study, so pursuing a critical mass of Black professionals is important to establishing robust mentoring relationships quickly. A.S.C.E.N.D. programs could certainly “infuse content that enhances multicultural awareness and understanding.” And finally, A.S.C.E.N.D. could benefit from racial/ethnic minority vendors,
contractors, and professionals who could provide goods and services for the program and its members.

The potential for partnerships is expansive. Establishing a robust network of support through partnerships should be a primary goal of A.S.C.E.N.D. Additional partnerships which may be helpful to supporting the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for Black male and men of color at the University of Mississippi are discussed throughout the detailed A.S.C.E.N.D. program description which follows. The description fleshes out the significance of each of the words which comprise the A.S.C.E.N.D. acronym; providing a detailed description of how each component supports the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix.

**Aspiration.** The Aspiration component of the A.S.C.E.N.D. program structure is reflective of the respondents’ challenges “seeing themselves” as successful. For examples, respondents cited the lack of representation of Black male college graduates in their communities, discouragement from friends, family, and community members who had gone to college and struggled, and inadequate college preparation as contentious with their aspirations to attend and succeed in college. The Aspire component of the A.S.C.E.N.D. is meant to support participant’s aspirations to succeed in college from access (enrollment) through achievement (retention through graduation).

**A.S.C.E.N.D. Summer Bridge.** Pre-college programs like MOST (Center for Inclusion and Cross-cultural Engagement, n.d.), Jump Start (University of Mississippi Division of Outreach, n.d.), and the Luckyday Retreat (The Luckyday Program, n.d.) were amongst the programs which helped make college more accessible to respondents. These programs give participants the opportunity to build community in small cohorts before the full academic rigor
of college commences. Respondents met many of their mentors through these programs. A.S.C.E.N.D. may benefit from both partnering with existing pre-college programs and creating a new program-specific bridge program for men of color. These programs could represent points of access to pipelines to success for Black males; helping students to ease into the full brunt of college rigor and social challenge. A summer bridge program for Black males and men of color might allow participants to take classes in smaller cohorts, earn credits before the semester starts, develop a sense of community, and improve self-efficacy.

Teach Inspire Empower Conference. The data indicate that barriers to access begin before individuals reach college age. Bridge programs may help individuals who have already decided to attend college develop the skills and network that will support their success in college, or even those who plan to attend college but are worried about their ability to be successful. However, the data suggest that an individual’s self-efficacy in their ability to find success in college and beyond can be threatened well before it is time to attend college.

In March of 2018, the University of Mississippi Men of Excellence hosted the Inaugural Teach Inspire and Empower Conference (TIE Conference) (Men of Excellence, n.d.). The conference invited Black males in their junior and senior years of high school to spend a day on campus with the Men of Excellence, several alumni, administrators, and community members (Men of Excellence, n.d.). The TIE Conference focused on teaching participants the quintessential characteristics of leadership, inspiring participants’ personal visions for future success, and empowering participants through team building and sharing stories of triumph through challenges (Men of Excellence, n.d.).
Programs like the TIE conference have the potential to start the process of helping prospective Black male students develop sufficient self-efficacy to be successful in college. Not only did high school participants benefit from “seeing themselves” in the successful college students and graduates who ran the conference, they also had the opportunity to compete for scholarships to attend pre-college programs at the University of Mississippi (Men of Excellence, n.d.). As A.S.C.E.N.D. expands in scope and resources, the TIE conference presents one way for Black males to establish connections with individuals and opportunities which will help support success for its participants.

**Project Aspire.** A.S.C.E.N.D. should not focus exclusively on increasing the number of Black males and men of color that enroll at the University of Mississippi. It should also focus on retaining men of color to graduation. Respondents found motivation to persist to graduation from several sources. Mentors served as role models, which helped respondents envision themselves being successful during and after college. Mentors’ personal stories about their challenges and successes inspired respondents to push through difficulties of their own. Project Aspire would seek to collect and distribute messages of personal triumph through challenges from alumni, community members, parents, staff, faculty, and other sources of support and inspiration for A.S.C.E.N.D. participants. A.S.C.E.N.D. staff would record, edit, and disseminate short videos, blog posts, journal entries, and other media chronicling stories which inspire students to aspire to succeed during and beyond college.

The precedent for such a program is clear. Paul Tough (2014) explains a similar interventions conducted by Stanford University researchers David Yeager, Greg Walton, and Geoffrey Cohen. Walton and Cohen, Tough (2014) explains, designed a simple and effective
intervention to support first-year students’ motivations to persist. The first-year students read essays from upperclassmen in which the upperclassmen reflected on their experiences as freshmen (Tough, 2014). The first-year students then made similar videos for future students (Tough, 2014). Tough (2014) found stark differences between the effects of the hour-long intervention on White students and Black students. Whereas White students seemed unaffected by the intervention, Black students experienced benefits throughout their college trajectories (Tough, 2014). The intervention only took one hour, but it had a positive impact on the college experiences of the Black students who were studied. “Compared with a control group, the experiment tripled the percentage of Black students who earned G.P.A.s in the top quarter of their class, and it cut in half the Black-White achievement gap in G.P.A.,” Tough (2014) highlights. The experiment also impacted student health outcomes, with Black intervention participants visiting the doctor less often than a control group through three years after the intervention. (Tough, 2014).

In a similar experiment, David Yeager conducted a 25 minute long intervention on 600 students entering ninth grade in Northern California (Tough, 2014). Students read articles and testimonials from older students which focused on the message that people can grow and change (Tough, 2014). The messages helped students reconstruct internalized negative perceptions about their own traits due to others’ actions toward them. Yeager was astonished with the findings (Tough, 2014). Tough (2014) remarks:

Indeed, among the control group in Yeager’s experiment, symptoms of depression rose by 39 percent during that school year. Among the group who had received the message that people change, though, there was no significant increase in depressive symptoms. The
intervention didn’t cure anyone’s depression, in other words, but it did stop the appearance of depressive symptoms during a traditionally depressive period. And it did so in just 25 minutes of treatment (Tough, 2014).

Given the low cost and tremendous success of these messaging campaigns, Project Aspire might be a worthwhile priority for A.S.C.E.N.D. Additionally, several respondents discussed experiencing emotional challenges, including depression, anxiety, stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) and loneliness. Mentors helped these respondents process these challenges by providing messages very similar to those delivered in Yeager, Cohen, and Walton’s interventions. A program which encourages current and past members of Men of Excellence, MOST, FASTrack, Athletics, or any of the myriad programs or spaces on campus to reflect on their experiences in ways that help to support the aspirations of younger students fits squarely within the mission of supporting Black male success.

Partnerships with the University Of Mississippi School Of Journalism, the University of Mississippi student newspaper, the Daily Mississippian, University of Mississippi Office of Communications, the Department of Psychology, the University of Mississippi Counseling Center, and students/alumni with journalistic prowess might prove instrumental in helping to design and administer these interventions.

**Scholarship.** Respondents associated their success in college with their academic performance. Periods of academic challenge led respondents to doubt themselves. Students who struggled academically questioned their academic majors, and sometimes even their place in college. Mentors were instrumental in supporting respondents through these periods of academic challenge. Respondents benefitted from hearing about their mentors’ successes in overcoming
academic challenges. Some mentors, like major professors, provided direct academic support for coursework. Other mentors, like peer mentors, mentors from students support programs, and family mentors, helped respondents process academic challenges and think through ways to approach courses more effectively. Respondents only trusted the mentors from whom they did not perceive stereotype (Steel, 200) threat with their academic troubles. Incorporating scholarship as a main pillar of A.S.C.E.N.D. is meant to pre-empt the formation and/or exacerbation of stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) that Black males and men of color experience at the University of Mississippi. The focus on scholarship as a main programmatic thrust may help establish connections with faculty, staff, advisors, other students, and resources which support academic success. It is important that A.S.C.E.N.D. participants view the program as a safe source of academic support.

*An Academic Support Model.* As the University of Mississippi seeks to increase retention and graduation numbers for Black males, men of color, and other marginalized identities, examining programs which have experienced success in supporting similar populations may help to prioritize efforts. The Texas Interdisciplinary Plan (TIP) implemented by David Laude at the University of Texas provides a model for addressing achievement gaps between different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographical groups of students (Tough, 2014). Laude noticed a bimodal distribution for the scores in his introduction to chemistry sections at the University of Texas (Tough, 2014). About 20% of each of his classes would earn Ds and Fs while the other 80% scored As and Bs (Tough, 2014). Laude sought to better understand what factors could predict which students might fail his course (Tough, 2014). Laude prioritized helping TIP students develop a positive sense of community identity, which had been
harmed by the historically meritocratic philosophy of using introductory courses in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics as gatekeepers for “weak” students (Tough, 2014). This philosophy maligned professors’ perceptions of the failing students’ aptitudes. However, Laude’s critical analysis of the data found that non-White students, students from certain geographical regions, and students with relatively low standardized test scores, family income, and family educational attainment levels were heavily represented toward the bottom of the bimodal distribution (Tough, 2014). Laude refused to attribute these students’ lack of success to aptitude alone (Tough, 2014). Instead, Laude used these “adversity indicators” to select a cohort of students to invite to participate in TIP in the fall of 1999 (Tough, 2014).

TIP students mastered the same coursework and rigor as the students who did not participate in TIP. TIP sections were 90% smaller (50 vs. 500) than the non-TIP sections (Tough, 2014). Additionally, TIP students benefited from two extra hours of instruction per week, advisors who could intervene to help students when they encountered challenges, and upper-classmen peer mentors who worked with TIP participants one-on-one (Tough, 2014). Reflecting on the efficacy of the program, Tough (2014) writes:

Even Laude was surprised by how effectively TIP worked. “When I started giving them the tests, they got the same grades as the larger section,” he said. “And when the course was over, this group of students who were 200 points lower on the SAT had exactly the same grades as the students in the larger section.” The impact went beyond Chemistry 301. This cohort of students who, statistically, were on track to fail returned for their sophomore year at rates above average for the university as a whole, and three years later they had graduation rates that were also above the U.T. average.
Because of the effectiveness of the program, similar programs for schools across the University of Texas took root. The “adversity indicators” proved useful in predicting success rates for all students (Tough, 2014). Laude worked with the University of Texas Department of Institutional Reporting, Research, and Information Systems to expand the “adversity indicators” to a much more in-depth tool call ‘the Dashboard’ (Tough, 2014). Using the Dashboard, Laude was able to focus his programs on the students who were least statistically likely to graduate (Tough, 2014). The programs have grown to include the University Leadership Network (ULN), a scholarship for statistically disadvantaged students with unmet financial need. The $5,000 annual award helps to support students financially and to incentivize participation in the community service, discussion groups, and lectures associated with the ULN program.

The University of Mississippi has established several committees which focus on some of the same indicators/predictors of student success (Diven-Brown, 2018; Mead, 2018). The Mississippi Minority Retention Task Force and the Retention Advisory Board Financial Issues Sub-Committee both have formal charges that could contribute to understanding the complex factors at interplay affecting retention for Black males and men of color (Diven-Brown, 2018; Mead, 2018). Using the data from these committees and working alongside the University of Mississippi Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning could help to identify the Black males who are most at risk of stopping out. In-depth statistical analysis of what factors contribute most to Black male attrition and success at the university of Mississippi would add needed context to the findings from this dissertation, and could help to prioritize and/or reshape the recommendations presented herein.
To support this level of in-depth analysis, A.S.C.E.N.D. participants should be carefully tracked. Individuals involved in the administration of A.S.C.E.N.D. might benefit from coding participants in the institution’s data information systems. Such coding could support comparisons with control groups, early warning systems, and longitudinal analysis of the success and efficacy of the program. So long as academic success is a main indicator of completion, data related to academic performance should shape A.S.C.E.N.D.’s offerings in ways that support academic success for participants.

*First-year experience course.* A student who finds a sense of belonging, develops a perception of value in their curriculum, and who believes that they can be successful in college is more likely to persist to graduation (Tinto, 2016). It is very important that students are given timely support when they encounter academic and social challenges in college (Tinto, 2016). Tinto (2016) posits, “To be effective, such support must occur before student struggles undermine their motivation to persist -- thus the need for institutions to employ early-warning systems that, when properly implemented, alert faculty and staff to struggling students and trigger support when needed. Midterm grades will not do” (Tinto, 2016, p. 1). A number of respondents benefitted from early access to support for academic and social challenges. Respondents described many of the individuals who helped to administer this support as mentors. Proximity and frequency of interactions served to help mentors recognize when the respondents were in need of assistance and respondents trust those mentors to disclose their challenges and accept the mentors’ support.

One way to establish a support structure early is through EDHE 105 (Center for Student Success and First Year Experience, n.d.). Several respondents reported meeting mentors in their
EDHE 105 classes and/or getting connected with resources which helped them to persist through participating in EDHE. The Center for Student Success and First Year Experience (CSSFYE) describes the course as follows:

EDHE 105 is designed to help our freshman students make a positive transition from high school to college, develop a better understanding of the learning process, enhance their academic skills, acquire essential life skills to ensure their success, and to begin their exploration of the career and major that are best for them. During the semester, our students will be introduced to the mission, values, and constituencies of the University of Mississippi and the ethical and social concerns that they may face as a member of this community.

The multi-faceted purpose of this course is to introduce our freshman students to a broad overview of the following:

- University life, history and traditions
- Time management skills
- Budgeting and money management skills
- Decision-making skills
- Goal setting techniques
- Learning styles
- Listening and note-taking skills
- Effective writing and speaking skills
- Reading strategies
- Exam and test-taking strategies
• Critical thinking skills
• Healthy relationships
• Salubrious living habits

Additionally this course helps our freshman students:

• Become aware of their individual personality type and their learning style preferences.
• Become socially and academically integrated into our University.
• Become involved in community service with Oxford/University/Lafayette County communities.
• Begin the process of academic major and career selections.
• Understand, value, and honor diversity.
• Develop values and ethics that foster healthy human relationships.

Based on this description, EDHE 105 could set the foundation for A.S.C.E.N.D. Program specific sections of EDHE 105 could help Black males and men of color connect with resources early. The course structure is sufficiently broad to tailor a curriculum specific to the challenges Black males and men of color face at the University of Mississippi. Training for instructors could focus on helping them incorporate cooperative and problem based pedagogies, which support sense of belonging, perceived value in the curriculum, and self-efficacy (Tinto, 2016). Contextualization, or learning basic skills in the context of another subject area, might also support student learning and motivation (Tinto, 2016). Respondents consistently cited the need for spaces to discuss their challenges and to seek support free from fear of stereotype threat.
EDHE could be A.S.C.E.N.D.’s way of creating this space and facilitating early access to the support that Black males and men of color need at the University of Mississippi. By staying attentive to the data and committing to culturally responsive trainings and pedagogies A.S.C.E.N.D. sections of EDHE 105 could support the infrastructure of the academic components of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for Black males.

**Tutorial support.** The successful Black males who participated in this study all benefited from academic support outside of the classroom. Mentors provided tutorial support directly, and by getting respondents connected to tutoring resources on campus. Incorporating tutorial support directly into the structure of A.S.C.E.N.D. could support the programs efforts to support student persistence. Students may benefit from having a centralized place to go for academic support outside of the classroom in several ways. For instance, the existence of such a resource within a student success program implies to program participants that needing and seeking academic assistance is a normal part of academic success. EDHE 105 instructors and Project Aspire messages could also help to normalize seeking academic support.

Student support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics all incorporate some form of tutorial support (The Luckyday Program, n.d.; FASTrack, n.d.; Ole Miss FedEx Center, n.d.). For examples, several respondents shared how their Luckyday Peer Leaders helped them to write papers and complete assignments. Luckyday’s mandated study hall hours are proctored by Peer Leaders. Luckyday scholars’ familiarity with their Peer Leaders helped them to open up about their academic challenges, sometimes during study hall hours. FASTrack and Athletics participants benefited from tutoring resources provided directly through these programs. In addition to tutorial resources provided by student support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack,
and Athletics, students also benefited from course-specific Supplemental Instruction programs. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (n.d.) describes Supplemental Instruction (SI) this way:

Supplemental Instruction is not your average study group. SI is a set of weekly review sessions that are run by students that have recently taken the course and earned high grades and have been selected by their professor to be the SI Leader. Students will compare notes, discuss readings, develop organizational tools, and predict test items in informal review sessions. SI is used in historically difficult courses and is open to all students. National statistics on the effectiveness of SI sessions at other universities clearly indicate that students who participated regularly in SI sessions earned higher grades than those who did not participate in SI sessions (Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

A priority for A.S.C.E.N.D. administrators should be getting students connected with tutorial resources. The program should develop connections with existing tutorial resources, and seek to find new sources of tutoring. For example, graduate students who majored and/or excelled in courses in which Black males and men of color struggle might make a good pool of tutors with which A.S.C.E.N.D. administrators could connect undergraduates. However, establishing connections with the resources is not enough. Helping students to overcome the stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) which can prevent them from seeking tutorial support is essential as well. Incorporating resources which support academic success through challenge could help support student motivations to persist by buttressing students’ self-efficacy, helping them feel a sense of belonging amongst other students who have also benefited from tutorial
support, and helping students appreciate the relevance of the challenging coursework their curricula require.

**Student Leadership and Academic Support.** Peer mentors were consistent providers and facilitators of academic tutorial support. Peers were important in supporting academic success because respondents trusted them and did not feel as threatened approaching them for support. Taking advantage of this and the existing infrastructure might be one way for A.S.C.E.N.D. administrators to help establish a network of tutorial support.

Several of the respondents were members of Men of Excellence (MOX), a student organization which seeks to “provide excellent educational, cultural, and social, community services and intellectual programs that will enhance the personal, professional, and social growth of Black males” (Men of Excellence, n.d.). MOX was a consistent source of mentoring relationships for the respondents. Men of Excellence’s Executive board consists of a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Outreach Coordinator, Parliamentarian, Director of Community Service, Treasurer, Wellness Director, Historian, Director of Public Relations, Administrative Assistant, and a Chief of Staff. The organizational structure might benefit from incorporating another role, Vice-President for Academic Success, into their executive structure; even if academic responsibilities are encompassed within one of the existing roles.

Men of Excellence’s Vice President for Academic Success could consider what tutorial support looks like from a student perspective. The position could focus on removing barriers to access for tutorial resources, setting standards for academic performance for MOX members, identifying existing tutorial resources and connecting members with those resources, and finding/grooming members to serve as tutors. Efforts to combat stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson,
and connect students with tutorial resources might benefit from a student perspective. Stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) is toxic to a Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix. Mitigating it should be a main target of A.S.C.E.N.D. administrators. Working closely with students to better understand stereotype threat and other challenges finding and benefiting from tutorial resources must be a focus of A.S.C.E.N.D.

**Community.** Respondents were very attentive to the paramountcy of finding a sense of community to support their success. Mentors helped students connect with other students, staff members, professors, community members, and several others who supported their success. The Community component of A.S.C.E.N.D may help students get connected to resources, expand their networks, and develop a healthy conceptualization of their place and role in society.

**A.S.C.E.N.D. Living Learning Community.** Living learning communities helped respondents develop a sense of belonging. Several respondents met and became mentors through their involvement in living learning communities. Most of the living learning communities respondents cited as contributive to their success were associated with students support programs like Luckyday, FASTrack, and Athletics. Living learning communities promoted student proximity to other students, faculty, and staff members; many of whom became mentors to the respondents. This proximity supported interactions which helped students recognize the genuineness and accessibility of those mentors. Students were motivated by other students who also participated in the living learning communities. Additionally, respondents experienced convenient access to staff members, faculty, and physical resources like printing and study space due to their affiliation with living learning communities.
An A.S.C.E.N.D. Living Learning Community could help to support components of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix which support persistence. Based on the data from this study, an A.S.C.E.N.D. Living Learning Community could catalyze mentoring relationships between participants and other students, faculty members, staff members, and community members who all help to support student success. The A.S.C.E.N.D. Living Learning Community could also support programs, outings, and community outreach through service and mentoring.

**Cohorts.** Respondents who participated FASTrack, which places students in cohorts for three shared courses during participants’ first year of college, reported finding it easier to get academic support from other students. Students organized study groups on their own and worked together to help each other succeed in the cohort courses. Respondents who participated in Luckyday also had experience with cohorts. Cohorts can complement living learning communities by helping with contextualization. Tinto (2016) explains:

Colleges and universities can also achieve contextualization through the use of learning communities. When properly implemented, students co-register in two or three courses that are linked through an issue, problem or project that provides a unifying theme to the community. Such multiple course linkages can provide not only academic and social support but also promote a form of interdisciplinary learning that is not easily achieved in stand-alone courses. Lest one forget, the goal of persistence is not simply that students complete their degrees, but that they learn in powerful ways while doing so. Education is the goal of our efforts; persistence is only a vehicle for its occurrence.
Cohorting courses could be a beneficial component of A.S.C.E.N.D. because it has the potential to help students form relationships that support their sense of belonging, develop self-efficacy through group problem solving and the shared experience of academic challenge, and better understand the context of the knowledge and skills they gain inside the classroom.

**Internal threats to sense of community.** Living learning communities and cohorts are two ways of helping students connect to smaller communities within the larger campus structure, which can be important in helping students feel a sense of belonging on campus (Tinto, 2016). Finding a sense of belonging is paramount, as many Black males find the pressure to acculturate which accompanies college attendance emotionally and psychologically taxing (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

The data from this study suggest that not all of the impediments to respondents finding a sense of belonging were due to external factors. In-group discrimination also played a role; particularly so for LGBTQ respondents. Focusing on Community as a foundational component of A.S.C.E.N.D. may provide a basis upon which program administrators and affiliates can challenge this internal threat. Not only should A.S.C.E.N.D. aim to make sure that Black males find spaces that are affirm their racial identity, it should also make sure that student participants recognize their role in supporting a sense of community which affirms members’ intersectional identities. Including Gender Studies courses into the list of potential cohort classes and weaving lessons which discuss intersectionality into the EDHE 105 curriculum are both ways that A.S.C.E.N.D. could mitigate and/or preempt the toxicity of hyper-masculinity and homophobia from poisoning the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix.
Excellence. Respondents did not strive for mediocrity; they worked to be their best. Mentors modeled what their mentees’ best could look like, and helped them to chart paths to actualize those possibilities. Mentors supported respondents in their efforts to achieve the mentors’ high expectations. When mentees observed that their mentors had high expectations, it helped the mentees think of themselves as capable of meeting those expectations. Because there is no singular set of experiences which defines the Black male experience, there is not one manifestation of Excellence on which this program should focus. Rather, the program should focus on helping participants adopt a healthy conceptualization of Black masculinity which will support their success in college and beyond. Excellence, as incorporated into the A.S.C.E.N.D program structure, is much more about challenging detrimental conceptualizations of Black masculinity than about prescribing any singular manifestation thereof. Exuding excellence, then, is not just about engaging in any one set of positive behaviors; it is also about rejecting negative stereotypical aspects of Black masculinity which could prove contentious to success.

Supporting Excellence as an Expectation. As previously stated, A.S.C.E.N.D. stands poised to benefit from existing infrastructure which supports student success. Several of the respondents found value in their membership in Men of Excellence. Men of Excellence’s focus on encouraging “confidence, integrity, self-respect, and self-esteem, by way of proving positive role models and networking with other professionals” makes it one logical conduit through which A.S.C.E.N.D. administrators could promote healthy conceptualizations of Black masculinity (Men of Excellence, n.d.). Men of Excellence could adopt an Afrocentric Resistance paradigm to help its members confront the ways in which White hegemonic oppression has affected their perceptions of Black masculinity.
The data included evidence of these effects, including examples of homophobia, hypermasculinity, and being associated with racist stereotypes. For instance, respondents who were musculearily built shared experiences in which people assumed them brutish. Additionally, respondents who were LGBTQ or perceived to be relatively effeminate experienced discrimination on campus, in the community, and from their families.

The seven Nguzo Saba principles as presented within the Afrocentric Resistance paradigm provide a way to combat these and other manifestations of internalized Eurocentric conceptualizations of Blackness (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). Umoja refers to a sense of unity with African people which transcends other identity differences like sexuality, age, or socio-demographics (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). Emphasizing the importance of this transcendent togetherness may help Men of Excellence participants recognize their own biases and connect with a community which can help them combat affronts from others. Kujichagulia is the idea that self-determination requires repudiation of oppressive affronts to self (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). Men of Excellence could support kujichagulia (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994) by developing programs which focus on developing a personal set of ethics based on the pursuit of equity and social justice. Ujima is a sense of responsibility which connects one’s sense of self to a common destiny for all African people (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). Men of Excellence could support Ujima by helping participants see themselves as part of a whole group of individuals who are collectively committed to success. Ujaama refers to collective economics, sharing resources, and shifting from focus on “I” to “we” (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). Men of Excellence could support Ujaama through collecting membership dues, and giving members oversight over how the funds are spent. Study groups,
collective note taking via shared drives, and resource banks comprised of used exam and professional school study guides are all ways that Men of Excellence could promote Ujaama. Nia encourages persistence through challenges by promoting a sense of purpose in which connects one’s success to that of the collective (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). Respondents shared that mentors helped model persistence through challenges. Men of Excellence could focus on promoting mentoring as a way to demonstrate Nia. Kuumba is related to creatively discussing ways to build new paradigms for the community (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). Programs that focus on facilitating such dialogue might help keep the approach to supporting Black males and men of color relevant and fresh. Imani is faith based on knowledge of the past and hope for the future (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 1994). Alumni speakers, historical discussions and/or lectures, and Project Aspire profiles are all ways that Men of Excellence can expose their members to the history of the past - inspiring hope for the future and giving purpose to continued resistance. Ultimately, using the Afrocentric Resistance model as a framework for Men of Excellence programing could model to participants that a Man of Excellence is one who strives to embody the Nguzo Saba principles.

**Navigation.** The respondents of this study found barriers on their paths to success in college. They experienced emotional challenges, academic struggles, feelings of exclusion, and stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995), which all made it difficult to navigate college successfully. Mentors helped respondents chart paths to circumvent and surmount challenges. Respondents described mentors as people that they could trust when they were seeking direction to avoid challenges when possible and encouragement to overcome obstacles when necessary. Mentees developed this trust through one-on-one interactions with their mentors. Mentees
perceived mentors as individuals who went above and beyond to provide individualized guidance that would help them navigate their specific set of challenges in ways that worked for them as individuals.

Formal student support programs, academic majors, living learning communities, EDHE courses, and experiential learning opportunities were all examples of environments which encouraged the kinds of one-on-one interactions which supported the navigation component of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for Black males at the University of Mississippi. The three student support programs from which this study drew all interview and some focus group participants, for instance, include various levels of academic advising, goal setting, and leadership development that helped participants develop critical thinking and decision-making skills and proved valuable in helping them reach success.

*Academic Advising.* Several respondents experienced challenges like choosing a major, being underprepared for the rigor of certain majors, losing interest in certain subject areas as coursework progressed, and uncertainties about how their academic preparation would prepare them for their career and personal goals. Respondents described meeting with mentors who helped them process some of these feelings. Some of the mentors who helped with academic advising did so as part of their job responsibilities, while others offered advice and support related to academic advising despite not having the title of academic advisor. Both roles proved important to the respondents of this study, and both might support the aims of the A.S.C.E.N.D program structure.

Academic advising is deeply personal. Respondents shared how difficult it could be to select courses and majors which interested them, played to their strengths, and set them up for
success. Other respondents’ accounted terse academic advising experiences that left them feeling like one of many students; describing the encounters as rushed and impersonal. In some cases, respondents described advising experiences that did not even put them on paths to graduation. Entrusting some level of academic advising to program administrators that get to know students beyond advising sessions allows those administrators to make personalized recommendations about courses, majors, and academic approaches.

**Personal Leadership and Navigation (PLAN).** Respondents who participated in the Luckyday Success Program benefited from Personal Leadership and Navigations (PLAN) sessions (Luckyday, n.d.). Luckyday staff members conduct periodic PLAN sessions throughout the fall and spring semester of scholars’ freshmen years (Luckyday, n.d.). PLAN sessions provide the opportunity for Luckyday staff to meet with students to personally discuss their adjustment to college (Luckyday, n.d.). PLAN sessions can cover a number of topics including emotional adjustment, home sickness, sense of belonging and community, academic performance, confidence in academic major, course schedules, and financial issues. The sessions are mandated as a condition of accepting the Luckyday Scholarship (Luckyday, n.d.).

Several respondents cited PLAN sessions as directly contributive to their success. Students discussed forming mentoring relationships with the Luckyday Program staff members who were responsible for conducting their PLAN sessions. These PLAN sessions led to discussions which helped mentees decide what majors they wanted to pursue, cope with emotional challenges, and map out paths to success beyond college.

Mentoring does not work without understanding, and PLAN sessions provide the chance for mentee and mentor to understand the unique milieu which affects how individual students
experience and persist through challenges. A.S.C.E.N.D. should prioritize opportunities for mentors and mentees to get to know each other personally. A.S.C.E.N.D. Navigation Sessions could use the acronym to guide session structure. Mentors could use A.S.C.E.N.D. Navigation Sessions to assess the aspirations, scholarship, sense of community, perception of excellence, confidence in navigation/trajectory, and determination of individual participants. The data accrued from sessions like A.S.C.E.N.D. Navigations Sessions or PLAN sessions could add more personal narratives from which practitioners can adjust the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix to reflect the needs of the target population.

A.S.C.E.N.D. Navigation sessions may reveal information that academic advising sessions may not. Whereas an academic advising session might focus on the academic path of the student, an A.S.C.E.N.D. Navigation session could focus on the personal, developmental, social and academic needs students will have along that path. An academic advisor may not be as privy to the personal needs of their advisees due to caseload, but student support program staff who conduct meetings like PLAN sessions or A.S.C.E.N.D. Navigation sessions can augment this process with their personal knowledge of individual students.

Goal setting and Career. One important outcome of mentoring relationships is support for setting goals and choosing a career path (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Respondents reported that mentors helped them set and reach goals inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, mentors helped respondents pick majors and access opportunities that would help them succeed professionally.

A.S.C.E.N.D. could include several opportunities to support this domain of college mentoring relationships for Black males at the University of Mississippi. Goal setting and career
exploration are relevant to the intended outcomes for EDHE 105, for instance. Assignments which ask students to engage in short and long term goal setting could catalyze and/or supplement mentoring interactions related to goal setting and career. A.S.C.E.N.D. Navigation sessions are also an opportunity to engage students on goal setting and career exploration. As A.S.C.E.N.D. participants and administrators learn more about each other in the one-on-one meetings, personalized strategies for supporting goal setting and career exploration will emerge. Respondents met some of their mentors who helped support their goal setting and career exploration through their living learning communities. Several respondents, in fact, provided the same guidance for younger students as part of their responsibilities while serving in leadership in living learning communities. As such, the living learning community this dissertation proposes might also be a space in which support for setting goals and exploring careers is championed.

*Student involvement and goal setting.* Student engagement supports student success (Tinto, 2016). Individuals who work with students can perceive Black males as unengaged (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Intentional promotion of involvement might help participants get engaged in organizations which help them to develop the skills they will need to be successful. Respondents of this study were members of professional student organizations and programs like the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA, n.d.), National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ, n.d.), McNair Scholars (McNair Scholars, n.d.), and Increasing Minority Access to Graduate Education (IMAGE) (The Louis Stokes Mississippi Alliance for Minority Participation – IMAGE, n.d.). Establishing relationships between students, these and other student organizations, and the University of Mississippi Career Center could support A.S.C.E.N.D.’s goals.
Alumni mentoring. One source of potential mentors which was missing from the respondents’ lists of mentoring relationships was alumni. While respondents did have mentoring relationships with University of Mississippi graduates, those graduates were also family members. There were no examples of mentoring relationships between students and alumni which formed after meeting alumni in college. This presents an opportunity to establish partnerships with the University of Mississippi Alumni Affairs. The partnership should begin by affirming mentoring as a way alumni can give back to the institution. Finding ways to get students engaged with alumni could help to support student aspirations, as those connections provide the opportunity to see themselves in individuals who have found success beyond college. Respondents benefitted from the vicarious experiences of their mentors. Forming connections with a pool of individuals who have navigated college environment successfully might catalyze mentoring relationships which support self-efficacy through vicarious experience.

Determination. The respondents of this study recognized that they reached success because they kept going. Community backgrounds, family structures, and perceived quality of their schools systems all affected how respondents thought about college and their capacity to be successful therein. The variation in these conditions meant that participants entered college with a range of pre-college preparation and confidence in their ability to be successful. Whether relatively confident or skeptical of their preparation and self-efficacy upon entering college, all respondents encountered barriers to success during college. Mentors helped respondents believe that they could be successful despite these challenges. In other words, mentors helped mentees to develop and/or maintain a growth mindset, or the belief that one can develop skills with practice and intentional effort (Dweck, 2006).
Several respondents described how their mentors instilled self-efficacy in their ability to acquire new skills and succeed in college. Much of that self-efficacy was related to supporting a growth mindset. Students became increasingly convinced that they could surmount challenges as they successfully accomplished goals. The loftiness of the goal accomplished was due in no small part to mentors’ encouragement and focus on growth mindset.

Fixed mindsets juxtapose growth mindsets (Dweck, 2006). Whereas a growth mindset is the belief that one can acquire skills through hard work, creative approaches, and practice, a fixed mindset is the belief that talents and abilities are “fixed.” Changing students’ mindsets can help to improve learning (Dweck, 2015). Helping A.S.C.E.N.D. participants become better at practicing a growth mindset is worthwhile.

Some people have worked to develop a stronger growth mindset than others. As the model implies, however, having a growth mindset is something to work toward. Dweck (2015) explains:

Let’s acknowledge that (1) we’re all a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets, (2) we will probably always be, and (3) if we want to move closer to a growth mindset in our thoughts and practices, we need to stay in touch with our fixed-mindset thoughts and deeds (Dweck, 2016, p. 3).

Dweck (2015) also warns against a common miscorrelation between growth mindset and effort, stating:

Perhaps the most common misconception is simply equating the growth mindset with effort. Certainly, effort is key for students’ achievement, but it’s not the only thing.
Students need to try new strategies and seek input from others when they’re stuck. They need this repertoire of approaches—not just sheer effort—to learn and improve. We also need to remember that effort is a means to an end to the goal of learning and improving (Dweck, 2016, p. 1).

Incorporating Determination into the A.S.C.E.N.D. framework is not meant to imply that Black males are not succeeding at the University of Mississippi due to some generalized lack of effort; nor is it meant to suggest that Black males who do not succeed are not determined to do so. Rather, determination is included because it can be taught, developed, learned, adopted, and adapted as a trait which depends on a growth mindset. This makes determination an applicable aim for both A.S.C.E.N.D. as a program and its student participants.

**Determination: participant-focused.** Mentoring support students’ confidence in their ability to be successful. Helping individuals to develop a growth mindset requires understanding how fixed mindsets affect the learners’ approaches to challenges, how those who teach give feedback, and how both parties think about the others’ capacity to improve (Dweck, 2015). For example, whereas a practitioner who approaches an issue with a fixed mindset might say “Don’t worry, you’ll get it if you keep trying,” inadvertently encouraging the student to reinforce efforts which may not work, a practioner who understand growth mindset might say “That feeling of math being hard is the feeling of your brain growing,” which reiterates that difficulty and challenge are not insurmountable (Dweck, 2015, p. 21).

These examples make it clear how well-meaning feedback can do harm if it is framed from a fixed mindset perspective. Scholarship has consistently characterized Black males as unengaged (Farmer & Hope, 2015) and unconcerned with academic performance (Billson &
African-American males can internalize these perceptions, which can prove detrimental to their expectations for themselves (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Howard-Hamilton, 1997; Billson & Majors, 1992). This may exacerbate the prevalence and impact of fixed mindset approaches; especially from practitioners who have latent biases about Black males. Training practitioners and students who participate in A.S.C.E.N.D. on how to have a growth mindset could improve learning for participants. Practitioners who work with A.S.C.E.N.D. programs should remain determined to ensure that growth mindsets prevail for mentors, mentees, and the other sources of support which will contribute to participants’ success.

This dissertation includes numerous descriptions of the barriers to success that Black students face in college. A.S.C.E.N.D. participants will undoubtedly be familiar with some of those challenges. Support for sufficient self-efficacy to overcome those challenges is one of the many components of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for Black males at the University of Mississippi. Programs which help A.S.C.E.N.D. participants to connect success with determination, and to associate developing determination with growth mindset, might also nourish the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for Black males and men of color at University of Mississippi.

**Determination - program-focused.** Improving outcomes for Black males will also require determination from the individuals who support programs like A.S.C.E.N.D. The barriers to success are numerous. Program administrators will undoubtedly encounter challenges moving the needle on Black male success. It is important that they too connect determination to growth mindset; remaining willing to learn from mistakes and understanding the task of supporting the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for any specific population will be inherently iterative.
Low expectations for Black success represents the intersection of a fixed mindset with internalized biases regarding Black males. Believing that A.S.C.E.N.D. and/or the various other support mechanisms for Black male success can improve is paramount to the success of the target population. Absent this belief, stakeholders could misallocate human and capital resources; misattributing any of A.S.C.E.N.D’s potential successes and/or lack of success to the level of “effort” practitioners have put into the program.

Just as a growth mindset requires more than just effort to support learning (Dweck, 2015), effort will not be enough to improve Black male success. To suggest so is to imply that practitioners and/or students have not put in the effort to support Black male success to date. As the data have shown, this is not the case. An effort to create and administer a program like A.S.C.E.N.D. is for naught if it does not begin with clear, measurable goals and outcomes from which practitioners can learn what works for this community. Indiscriminately implementing what has worked for other populations, remaining committed to projects and initiatives which are not working, and becoming bogged down in the social and political milieu that contribute to the problem of low Black male graduation rates could prevail absent those metrics. Routine and robust evaluation of all program components can give magnitude and direction to the goal of supporting and enhancing the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for Black males at the University of Mississippi.

Improving graduation rates is the most obvious goal, but other metrics are also important. Retention rates, grade point averages, class attendance, levels of engagement in student organizations, climate studies, and perpetual expansion of the personal, group, and composite narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) will shed light on the efficacy of A.S.C.E.N.D.
Being determined to support Black male success at the University of Mississippi requires committing let the data lead the way; being willing to pivot if/when specific program components could improve.

**Determination - researcher focused.** I began this inquiry in hopes of learning more about the components and dynamics of mentoring that contributed to Black male success. I will never complete the inquiry. I am determined to continue to aim my scholarly pursuits at identifying ways to support marginalized groups. That determination compels me to commit to applying the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix Framework (CEMMF) to other marginalized groups of students at the University of Mississippi and other institutions to learn more about the ways they experience mentoring. My hope is that this contribution will serve as a blueprint for creating the conditions under which healthy, sustainable, and enriching mentoring relationships develop; and that those relationships help to improve outcomes for marginalized students.

Formal mentoring programs are not enough to support student success. Instead of simply establishing mentoring programs, practitioners should instead focus on making mentoring a goal of formal programs. Reframing mentoring as the goal of formal student support programs, rather than just one of many methods by which they support success, means prioritizing the nourishment of the Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix for the intended population. With mentoring as a goal, the question "Do you have a mentor?" is really asking “have you developed relationships with people that provide support which you perceive to be relevant to your success as a student?” From there practitioners can assess “why?” or “why not?” and adjust their efforts to catalyze supportive mentoring relationships accordingly.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Several areas of inquiry which could further understanding about how students experience mentoring at the University of Mississippi and beyond remain. The data reveal that mentoring is one of many factors that contributed to participants’ success in college. Because mentoring affects so many dynamics of personal development, it is difficult to use the data to specify the unique role mentoring plays among the other factors. This section suggests areas of study which could enhance research and expand the application of the findings to other populations.

Mentoring and Socioeconomics

One example of a factor that leads to attrition that is not directly addressed in this study is affordability. Data analysis from this study suggests that the respondents represented a range of economic diversity. However socioeconomic status was only inferred in students’ descriptions of their college preparation, stories of the challenges they faced as students, and participation in programs which consider financial need like Luckyday. Because Black people are more likely to experience financial difficulty affording college (Arum & Roksa, 2011; 2014), more direct study on the impact of socioeconomic status to affect the potential for mentoring to support success is worthwhile. Such study could add layers to the counter narratives of Black masculinity and success that may contribute to best practices for supporting Black male graduation.
Mentoring and Academic Struggle

The data revealed that the participants, who were all academically successful, benefitted from various mentoring relationships; some of which supported their academic success. However, this acknowledgement cannot infer that Black males who do not find academic success do not have mentors themselves, or that they do not find mentoring helpful to some other areas of their development. Further study on how less academically successful Black males perceive their challenges and perceive the potential of mentoring to support them is warranted. Additionally, knowing more about disparities in pre-college preparation and academic preparedness could allow for more complex and robust study of the potential for mentoring to support success.

The Mentor’s Perspective

Another helpful area of inquiry regards the perception of mentoring from the perspectives of those who are positioned to serve as mentors. The list of individuals who respondents identified as mentors was expansive, so better understanding how mentors conceptualize mentoring could be meaningful to the process of tooling mentoring to address Black male success. Discrepancies between how mentees and mentors view mentoring may help to shape how mentors and mentees are trained to make the most of mentoring relationships. Additionally, this area of inquiry may reveal differences in how mentors and mentees approach the formation of mentoring relationships. Knowing how and why mentors seek and maintain mentoring relationships with mentees could help to develop best practices that ensure that more Black males get the chance to benefit from mentoring.
Mentoring and Success Beyond College

In many ways, the success of a college education is measured in terms of post-college outcomes for both groups and individuals (Arum & Roksa, 2011; 2014). Mentoring theories have origins in business and career advancement (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Kram, 1985), but have since expanded to include college contexts (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). While this study was helpful in investigating the ways respondents perceived the role of mentoring in supporting their success in college, analyzing the role of mentoring in supporting post-college outcomes was beyond its scope. Scholars have bemoaned the lack of learning that occurs in college and the challenges that presents to finding post-graduation success (Arum & Roksa, 2011; 2014). Black people are deeply affected by these challenges; graduating at lower rates, with more debt, and with lower employment outcomes than many other demographic groups (Arum & Roksa, 2011; 2014). An important next step for this research is to assess the effect of mentoring on post-college outcomes. If the mentoring can support collegiate success, it might also prove useful for supporting successful transitions beyond college. Future study could include investigating if and how individuals perceive mentoring in their success before, during, and after college. It could also include exploration of the nature of mentoring relationships that begin before, during, and after college, and how the nature of the relationship affects its potential to support outcomes for both college students and graduates. Understanding the relationships between mentoring and post college outcomes could shape how practitioners shape Black male success programs.
Intersectional Mentoring Research

As mentioned within the overview of the theoretical framework, identity dynamics related to gender and sexuality were important factors of many of the respondents’ experiences. LGBTQ respondents had very different experiences than non-LGBTQ respondents. Studies that seek to support Black male success should consider the role of sexuality and gender in their designs; as shared racial identity did not preclude the respondents of this study from having disparate experiences across gender and sexuality dynamics. Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002) three-sourced narrative model for creating counter narratives for marginalized populations could be used to find out more about common and unique dynamics in how marginalized identities interact with mentoring.

Future research which seeks to utilize or examine this framework should consider using Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002) approach, or some of the numerous other CRT methodologies, to help determine the specific needs of the populations they wish to support. Scholars should approach this work with intentionality; attempting to consider as fully as possible the ways in which oppressive paradigms have affected the study of educational disparities across multiple identity intersections. Several other CRT methodologies are useful to studies that focus on the ways in which various forms of oppression affect disparities between demographic groups. However, Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002) counter-narrative method is particularly useful to the study of the potential for mentoring help address those disparities due to the previously acknowledged centrality of personal perception in exacting mentoring conceptualizations. Scholars could use Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002) method to answer questions like:

1. How do intersecting identities affect specific populations’ mentoring in college?
2. Does race affect mentoring relationships in the same ways for different genders?

3. Does gender affect mentoring relationships in the same ways for different racial groups?
SUMMARY OF MANUSCRIPT 3

Black males encounter barriers to college completion (Rowley, 2001), and do not complete college at the same rates as other demographic groups (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Black males at the University of Mississippi who participate in student support programs that promote mentoring graduate at higher rates than Black males who do not (Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2017).

This qualitative dissertation examines the mentoring experiences of 22 successful Black males who participated in programs which utilize mentoring to support success. Ten graduating seniors who participated Luckyday, FASTrack, and/or Athletics gave interviews in which they described the relevance, nature, formation, and mechanisms of their mentoring relationships. Themes accrued from those interviews were presented to two focus groups for corroboration. Focus group participants were more broadly selected across classifications and programmatic affiliations to increase generalizability of the findings.

The inquiry revealed that successful Black males perceive mentoring as important. Mentorships take on various forms. Mentoring relationships develop organically between individuals of varied titles, positions, and designations. Identity plays an important role in aiding the formation of mentoring relationships and informing the mechanisms by which it works to support success.

Mentors support students’ aspirations to attend college and help to bolster college persistence. This dissertation makes several recommendations for future research and practice.
related to supporting student success for marginalized groups of students through mentoring. The Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix Framework is one of the key findings of this dissertation. The CEMMF provides a framework for assessing marginalized students’ needs within a given context. Practitioners can use the framework to formulate support structures which catalyze and maintain mentoring relationships.

The Collegiate Equity Mentoring Matrix at the University of Mississippi requires support for Aspirations, Scholarship, Community, Excellence, Navigation, and Determination. The ultimate goal of this dissertation was to analyze the mentoring experiences of successful Black males to inform ways to improve outcomes. The A.S.C.E.N.D. program presented within this dissertation uses the data analysis to propose ways of supporting Black male success at the University of Mississippi. Future research will explore the applicability of the CEMMF to other populations.
MANUSCRIPT 3 REFERENCES


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249


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MWISHOWE
“I want to quit.” That was all I could muster. I sent those words to administrators in my Doctor of Education program with no intention of enrolling in dissertation hours the semester after I completed my coursework. As a Black male father, husband, family member, student, and educator, there was so much I carried home every day, so much that I brought back with me to work the next, so few people I trusted enough to share, and even fewer who I felt could ever understand, that I simply did not know how this could come to be. There was no more “me” to give to this educational pursuit; no matter the possibilities it represented or opportunities it might help me secure. I felt like an imposter, or at least naive, for daring to have believed myself capable of finishing. I had made a career of helping students to graduate, but I felt like a shell of the image I maintained in my efforts to get students to that point. I realized the irony, challenge, and opportunity was that the “me” which positioned me to help Black students dare to expect to thrive in college came with a price that played against being able to sustain the effort.

“You’re so close. Your ideas are great! Just keep going.” I heard those words more often than I could count. It had always helped that family, professors, colleagues, and acquaintances thought me capable, but this time was different. This time the words rang hollow against the enormity of the task. They echoed in the chasms between my personal, academic, social, professional, Black, University of Mississippi, and Ole Miss selves - all of which felt necessary and heavy to maintain. The multiplicity of responsibilities, expectations, outward presentations, goals, doubts, and fears I balanced as a Black male father, husband, family
member, student, and educator helping students from Mississippi graduate, many of them also Black, male, and facing barriers which seemed much more tangible than my own, made it tough to reconcile the consistent laudations and encouragement with how I felt about myself. I did not know what I did not know. But worse, I feared everyone around me knew that. If I wanted to quit, how could I help my students? What could I offer to help them persist if persistence was proving too daunting for me?

“Yes, you’re special, but neither is anyone else.” My dad has always had a way with words. Effectiveness – and not always tact – was his hallmark. If it hurt and worked; it worked. If it felt great and didn’t leave an impression; it didn’t leave an impression. He bore little interest in anything but what his words compelled people to think or do. He knew no shortage of colorful ways to make clear that I was not any more or less capable of anything than anyone else. My mom took a different approach. “It is not that I’m so smart, son. I just know how to treat people.” Her words helped to instill a sense of responsibility to treat other people with dignity and respect above all else. In their own way, they both helped me understand that 1) if it can be done, I can do it; 2) that everyone who has dreams worth dreaming doubts themselves from time to time; and 3) that the most successful people are the ones to match their work with their genuine cares and talents. I drew from these lessons more than I expected as I wrestled with the scholarly, familial, professional, and existential tasks which I encountered on this pursuit. This basic understanding of self as capable is not to suggest preparedness. It does not guarantee success. However, it is a foundational need to reach success; one I no longer take for granted.

“Tell me about a problem.” A simple request. One that made sense. One that seemed timely. One I could do. One I now recognize as a masterfully timed, masterfully crafted request.
from a mentor who took time to pause and see me. One he must have known, that once accomplished, would start to quiet the messages that told me I was selfish to want this and replace them with messages that affirmed that I had something meaningful to say. One that equipped me with the confidence to take on future tasks like "Now tell me what other scholars have said about this problem," “Tell me what questions still remain,” “Tell me how you plan to answer those questions,” and/or follow the advice from other mentors like “Just make the call, EJ.” However, these requests and the series of successes they brought were not enough to still the turbulence of being who I was to everyone who counted on me while also trying to become someone I had not yet met: a successful Black male father, husband, family member, student, and educator. I did not mind telling this mentor about my academic problems, but I felt his willingness to help was tied to my success. I feared what would change if I was honest about how much mental and emotional work it really took to respond in any satisfactory way to these tasks.

“Stand ‘em up.” My grandfather died about a week after I submitted my literature review. I felt it was coming. Two weeks before, my grandmother called and asked if, when the time came, I would be able to honor my grandfather in song. I agreed. When I asked what he wanted me to sing, he did not know. “Stand ‘em up” was his only impetration. I did not know how I would, but I knew that if he asked me to do it, he trusted that I could. Where Dr. Norris A. Edney I’s life gave me an image of an excellent husband, father, professional, mentor, scholar, and man to follow, his death made me grapple with the finiteness of life. It gave me a sense of urgency to accompany the confidence I was slowly building. The experiences of succeeding at the tasks my mentor gave me affirmed that I could finish, but the emotional experience of losing
my grandfather ensured that I would do so in a way that would make him proud. Toward anything that will bare our name I will always work to “Stand ‘em up.”

“Man, you OK?” I am blessed to have lots of people in my life who care, but caring and understanding are not one and the same. My friends and peer mentors kept me grounded. When they asked “Are you OK?” I could really answer. I could tell them about my frustrations and their sources without implication. I could draw from their experiences as they balanced similar selves: young, Black, professional, educated, family oriented, equity-minded, and hungry for opportunity, progress, and success. I could see myself in most of my mentors. However, I did not always allow all of my mentors to see all of me. My peers could relate to my experiences in ways I felt my mentors in more familial, professorial, or professional positions could not.

“I am so thankful that God allowed me to meet you.” I am always grateful when people – my children, students, mentors, and others – thank me for the role I have assumed in their lives. Such thanks have always levied in me a deep sense of responsibility to be a model of the success I wanted for others. And I felt good at it. Students trusted me. They felt better when they talked to me. They took my advice. It became hard to square the positivity and optimism I was able to impart to my students against the internalized self-doubts I had about myself as a whole man. Sure, I was good at what I did professionally, but my sense of pride did not always quiet the doubts in other parts of my life. I needed to understand what it meant to be a mentor because the idea of being worthy of others’ thanks for being one – especially that with which they associated with some divine providence - had always compelled me when nothing else could. “I must not quit; this pursuit will help me help them.”
“Everyone doesn’t need the same things from you, EJ”. I wanted the same things for my family that I wanted for my students: to make sure they felt that they belonged, that their dreams had value, and that they had confidence in their ability to be successful. But my wife was right. I had dedicated so much time to supporting college students’ ambitions and placed so much stock in how much my mentoring meant to them that I didn’t always notice my blind spots with family. The frustration of watching a student make the same mistakes bled over into math homework with my son. The sadness of watching a student deal with loss borrowed my attention from my daughter. The constant pull of expectations from all directions made me blind to how my wife must have viewed both. I found myself a Black male husband, father, family member, student, and educator simultaneously learning to recognize just how much assuming the responsibility of mentoring had shaped the whole of my life. I constantly told my students what life taught me: always make meaning of your learning. I needed to do the same. My students taught me that what someone thinks of themselves or their position in another’s life is not as important as their capacity to show empathy. I listened. The lesson has necessarily shaped how I conceptualize myself as a Black father, husband, family member, student and educator. It is not how I think of myself nor what I want for my wife, children, students, peers, and colleagues that make me a good man and mentor. Instead, the measure of my success as man and mentor is in what I will do to earn trust and in how attentive I can be to the unique needs of those who trust me. Benefitting from mentoring may have sparked my scholarly inquiry, and my scholarly inquiry will certainly shape how I mentor. But more importantly the wisdom I gain in my effort to become a better mentor will also make me a better man - one who is more responsive to the unique needs of all who entrust me to enhance their lives.
Mentoring and mentorship did not just help me to actualize Dr. Norris A. Edney III; they helped deepen and nuance my concept of success. I am hopeful that those who engage with this research find it instructive in not only helping students graduate, but in helping them graduate more whole.
VITA

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EDUCATION

M.A. in Higher Education, University of Mississippi, May 2013

B.A., Biology, University of Mississippi, May 2011

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Assistant Director, Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement

March 2019 - Present

The University of Mississippi

Program Coordinator, Luckyday Scholarship Success Program

October 2014 - March 2019

The University of Mississippi

Coordinator, Fraternity and Sorority Life

June 2013 - October 2014

The University of Mississippi

SERVICE

Member, Retention Advisory Board Financial Issues Task Force

October, 2018 - Present
Member, Mississippi Minority Retention Task Force

February - May, 2018

Mentor, NASPA National Undergraduate Fellows Program

August, 2016 - Present

Mentee, NASPA African American Knowledge Community Mentoring Program

March 2018 - Present

Advisor, University of Mississippi Men of Excellence

October 2014 - Present

Advisor, University of Mississippi Gospel Choir

October 2014 - Present

Hearing and Appeals Officer, University of Mississippi Judicial Council

August 2013 – Present

Co-Chair – University of Mississippi Multicultural Center Working Group

August 2012-May 2013

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

EDHE 105 (Freshman Experience)

August 2013-Present

EDHE 101 & 333 (Academic Skills for Freshmen - 101 and Transfer Students - 333)

January 2016 - Present

HONORS AND AWARDS

Laws Innovation Award and Scholarship, University of Mississippi School of Education
May, 2018

The Donald Cole Award for Excellence in Empowering, Leading, and Mentoring,
University of Mississippi Black Student Union

February, 2016