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Introduction the Importance of Mentee-Mentor Relationships: A Qualitative Study That Examines Students of Color in Academic Settings

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INTRODUCTION THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTEE-MENTOR
RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY THAT EXAMINES STUDENTS
OF COLOR IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

by

Candace Dixon

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THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTEE-MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY THAT EXAMINES STUDENTS OF COLOR IN
ACADEMIC SETTINGS

Candace Dixon, M.A..

Western Michigan University, 2005

Given the importance of mentoring, this study will explore mentor relationships in academic settings (Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, & Kearney, 1997). Participants were both undergraduate and graduate students with and without mentors. The goal of this thesis study was to understand whether students of color with formal mentors become more successful than similar students who do not have mentor relationships. This research also explored how students who lack formal mentors get important information. In addition, this study explored many differences between men and women of color who seek or utilize mentoring relationships. Mentor and mentee characteristics, students of color in formal / informal mentorships, the benefits of mentoring, supportive communication and information seeking are topics that have been researched in this thesis study. A total of 20 students, ranging from ages 18-99, from Western Michigan University, participated. Focus groups were used as a primary method to gain insight into the importance of mentoring experiences and for data collection in this study. As a result, three essential themes emerged: (a) Perceptions of success; (b) The search for important information; (c) Race, ethnicity, and gender among mentoring experiences, using McCracken's (1988) guidelines and Owen's (1984) criteria as a thematic framework.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring relationships help guide students by bringing encouragement, feedback, training, interpersonal support, and visibility to the junior member of the relationship (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). Mentoring is an age-old developmental tool whose practice extends as far back as 800 B.C (Ensher & Murphy, 1997). The term “mentor” originated in Greek mythology in the book, *The Odyssey*, written by Homer (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Russell & Adams, 1997). Mentor, was a friend of Odysseus in *The Odyssey*, who was entrusted with educating his son Telemachus (Buell, 2004; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Russell & Adams, 1997). Mentor’s duties were to manage the personal, professional, training, and socialization for the king’s son (Buell, 2004). Mentor became the inspiration for the term mentoring, which is the process of one person supporting, teaching, leading, and serving as a model for another person (Buell, 2004).

Mentoring has been defined in the literature in a variety of ways. Descriptions range from somewhat simple dyadic relationships in which an older individual coaches, guides, and helps a protégé to a relationship between two individuals whose nature changes over time (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Hunt & Michael, 1983). Mentoring is generally viewed as a process involving the transfer of skills and knowledge from the mentor to the mentee (Buell, 2004). A mentor is usually several years older, a person with greater experience and seniority in the world the young man or woman is entering (Burke, 1984).

The purpose of this proposed study is to conduct research on mentee-mentor relationships in academic settings. Specifically, this study will examine undergraduate students of color including African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic/ Latino and Native Americans who have and do not have mentors. Mentors are individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing support and encouragement to their protégé's careers (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000).

Most mentees do not know how to go about initiating a mentoring relationship (Waldeck et al., 1997). They may be unable to identify with a faculty member in their program (Waldeck et al., 1997). Other students unable to identify with a mentor do not feel they need to be mentored (Waldeck et al., 1997). Yet, previous studies have found that protégés advance more quickly, professionally, achieve higher incomes, and overall have more desirable professional outcomes than those not mentored (Kalbfleisch, 2002b; Schrodt, Cawyer & Sanders, 2003). Mentoring is considered critical to successful socialization into organizational life (Buell, 2004).

The rationale for this research is to address the problem of undergraduate students of color who are not paired with mentors, lack supportive communication and information seeking skills (Myers, 1998) in order to further their higher education goals. Very little research has investigated why some individuals get mentored compared to those who don't (Turban & Dougherty, 1994). However, existing literature discusses initiating stages and advantages that identify the impact that mentoring has on students.

Specifically, Kalbfleish and Davies (1991) investigated patterns among minority professionals in mentoring relationships. Therefore, no existing research has focused on students of color with and without mentors in academic settings specifically. In this regard, this study will fill a gap in the literature. In addition, this study will also explore students in both formal and informal mentoring relationships. Particular attention will be devoted to undergraduate and graduate college students of color who previously and currently have had a mentor and those without mentoring experiences.

The proposal will discuss the differences between students of color with mentors and similar students without mentors. Chapter Two will examine the benefits and characteristics of mentees and their mentors. In addition, Chapter Two will discuss mentees in formal and informal relationships and the importance of supportive communication and information seeking. Chapter Three will explicate the use of focus groups as a method to capture the importance of mentoring experiences. Chapter Four will focus on the thematic analysis of the text transcribed through focus groups. The final chapter will involve the discussion, limitations of the study and implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature will focus on the benefits of mentoring, students of color and women in formal and informal relationships, and mentoring issues among students of color. The literature will also examine the impact of supportive communication and information seeking that enhances individual's knowledge. Finally the theoretical framework that contains three stages in the enactment theory and Buell's (2004) models of mentoring will also be described.

Mentee and Mentor Benefits

The mentor relationship provides immediate and long lasting benefits to mentees (Halatin, 1981). Mentors who are at mid to advanced stages of their career can also benefit from a relationship by nurturing and sharing their wisdom with a younger adult, and by deriving feelings of challenge and stimulation from the close association (Olian, Carroll, Giannantonio, & Feren, 1988). Halatin (1981) also reported that individual attention by the mentor helps the mentee resolve personal development problems. Mentors provide their mentees (protégés) with advice, support, information, and professional sponsorship (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993). Mentors provide guidance to their protégés and also support them as their knowledge grows and the mentoring relationship develops. Shea (1994) suggested that mentees benefit by having an opportunity to learn from the mentor's particular experience, personal insights, and knowledge. Mentees can also benefit by having a chance to establish a network of

valuable contacts that may assist them in the future such as helping to define their personal career and other developmental objectives (Shea, 1994).

Both mentors and mentees gain from these alliances through increased power, personal control, gratification, recognition, and promotion (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993). Mentoring relationships are not one-sided, in which mentor does all the helping and the protégé receives all the benefits (Buell, 2004; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993). The senior member in a mentoring relationship also benefits through increased admiration, respect, possible workload support, and visibility in the institution or also organizations (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). In fact, most acknowledge that the benefits of mentoring are reciprocal and benefit the institution as well as the protégé (Schrodt et al., 2003). According to Ragins and Cotton (1999), the benefits of mentoring extend beyond the duration of the relationship. In fact, Chao (1997) found that the advantages of being mentored continue over time. This time period is relevant when considering promotions and advancements within the organization, which usually changes once a year according to Ragins and Cotton (1997).

In addition, several studies have found that protégés advance more quickly, professionally, achieve higher incomes, and overall have more desirable professional outcomes than those not mentored (Kalbfleisch, 2000b; Schrodt et al., 2003). Moreover, research has concluded that mentoring relationships are frequently identified as having had the greatest impact on professionals in the corporate world, long after the professionals leave the university (Bullis & Bach, 1989). Recent evidence indicates that mentoring relationships are related to career success (Turban & Dougherty, 1994).

Mentoring Relationships

According to Turban and Dougherty (1994), mentees' personality characteristics are important determinants of the amount of mentoring they receive and also influence their attempt to initiate mentoring relationships. As noted by Allen, Poteet, and Burroughs (1997), it appears that a mentor's perception of the expected benefits and costs, as well as the decision to engage in the mentoring relationship, is influenced by particular personal characteristics. For example, self-esteem is associated with the likelihood of participation in mentoring relationships. Specifically, higher levels of self-esteem are expected to be related to increased involvement as a protégé (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993).

According to Hunt and Michael (1983), protégés are usually young managers, professionals or students who either attract the attention of a mentor or initiate a relationship. Protégés are selected by mentors for several reasons including: (1) good performance, (2) the right social background, (3) they know the mentor socially, and (4) they have similar personalities (Hunt & Michael, 1983). Allen et al. (1997) found that mentors anticipated greater rewards and were more willing to mentor protégés who were high performers than those who were moderate performers. It is not only ability or specific skills that mentors find appealing in a protégé, indications of high motivation and a learning orientation are also important (Allen et al., 1997).

Protégés are likely to be attracted to mentors with good interpersonal skills (Olian et al., 1988). In addition, mentees will welcome the mentor's interest and concerns, learn and practice self-empowering behaviors, set realistic expectations with the mentor, be

open to feedback, be open to his or her needs and deficiencies and communicate problems clearly (Shea, 1994).

Students of Color Mentoring Issues

Bradshaw (1992) noted that one of the important factors that contribute to success in college among students of color is an adequate adjustment to the college environment, personality, socially, and academically. However, Shippensburg University offers a mentoring program that provides personal counseling to students of color on a daily basis for the purposes of issues the mentee may have (Bradshaw, 1992). Academic advising also is a critical link for students of color (Bradshaw, 1992). Academic advisers assist students of color in identifying career goals and enhancing their decision making skills (Bradshaw, 1992).

Barriers to the success of people of color and women (Smith & Markham, 1998) included exclusion from information sources and / or the informal network and a lack of mentors and role models (as cited in Smith, Smith, & Markham, 2000). Ragins (1995) argued that even when women and people of color overcome perceived barriers to getting a mentor, their gender and race are believed to have an impact on the experience of mentoring and potential outcomes. Because these groups face numerous discriminatory barriers and alienation, they will likely have different developmental and career needs when compared to their majority counterparts (Ragins & Sundstorm, 1989). In addition, people of color (Smith, Smith, & Markham, 2000) often lack role models in their respective organizations. Therefore, they are more likely to establish mentors outside of their organization (Smith et al., 2000).

Students of Color and Women in Formal / Informal Mentoring Relationships

Most mentor-protégé partnerships appear to be same-race, rather than cross-race (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). Smith et al. (2000) findings suggested that students of color, in spite of their efforts to work harder at finding mentors inside and outside of their organization, have fewer mentors if they want a same-race pairing. Compared to white graduate students, there were a low number of blacks in senior positions in education and society as a whole (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). In most contemporary university settings, white men usually are the main persons positioned to mentor black women (Allen, 2000). Thomas (1990) noted that women and people of color are as likely to have mentors as their male or Caucasian counterparts because of the lack of women and people of color mentors. According to Levinson (1978) “One of the great problems of women is that female mentors are scarce, especially in the world of work. The few women who might serve as mentors are often beset by stresses of survival in a work world dominated by men” (as cited in Alexander & Murphy, 1992, p. 3). Research revealed that cross-race or cross-sex mentoring relationships seem to focus more on task related issues than same-race and same sex relationships do (Allen, 2000). Based on previous literature (Auster, 1984; Kalbfleisch, 2000; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Smith, Smith, & Markham, 2000), gender has been studied more than race.

In terms of gender, previous research has suggested that more males are involved in mentoring relationships than are females (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Studies have shown that women report less access to mentoring relationships than do men (Smith et al., 2000). According to Kalbfleisch (2000), if most mentors are males and they prefer to

mentor male students instead of females, then females will have more difficulty finding mentors than will males. Male mentors prefer male protégés and female mentors prefer female protégés (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). Therefore, females are most likely left unmentored. Burke (1984) reported that female protégés indicated that their mentors performed more psychosocial functions than career development functions. “Psychosocial functions include providing role modeling, acceptance, confirmation, counseling, and friendship – activities that influence the protégé’s self-image and competence,” (Chao, 1997, p. 18). As determined by Ragins and Cotton (1999), psychosocial functions contribute to the protégé’s personal growth and professional development.

Chao (1997) suggested that career functions include providing sponsorship, exposure, visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments – activities that directly relate to the protégé’s career. Career development functions serve as the ability to facilitate the protégé’s advancement in the organization (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Russell & Adams, 1997). Because there are more men at high levels of organizations, and more male than female mentors, a woman who desires a mentoring relationship often must acquire a mentor of the opposite sex (Schrodt et al., 2003; Turban & Dougherty, 1994).

There were a few differences that exist when comparing cross and same-gender mentoring relationships. One key finding was that cross-gender protégés were less likely than same-gender protégés to report engaging in after-work social activities with their mentors (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). Another key finding was that women face many

barriers to establishing cross-gender mentoring relationships. This is in part, because women may be less likely than men to initiate mentoring relationships (Turban & Dougherty, 1994).

Most studies indicated that in a cross-sex mentoring relationship whereas the mentor was a male and the protégé, a female, often operated as a disadvantage to the female (e.g., Auster, 1984). According to Epstein (1970), male sponsors usually prefer a male candidate in the belief that a woman will be deflected from her career by her marriage and children. In addition, her husband, his wife, and their colleagues may be suspicious of the relationship (Epstein, 1970). Previous research suggests those demographic factors, such as gender and race, may predict the likelihood of having a mentor, other factors that may influence participation in mentoring relationships are not as easily discerned (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993). The age of a protégé may also be an important factor in the selection process, during the time when a mentor selects a protégé (Hunt & Michael, 1983).

One key difference between formal and informal mentoring relationships is that informal mentoring relationships develop spontaneously, whereas formal mentoring relationships develop with organizational assistance or intervention (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Formal mentoring relationships are also less likely to be founded on mutual perceptions of competency and respect (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Schrodtt et al. (2003) stated that informal relationships, which emerge naturally, are more beneficial to newcomers than formal relationships initiated by the institution. As stated later in this

chapter, informal mentoring last 3 to 6 years, whereas formal mentoring last 6 months to 1 year (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Within Ragins and Cotton (1999) study, they found that male mentees with formal mentors reported more personal counseling than female mentees with formal mentors and both male and female mentees with informal mentors. As a result, Ragins and Cotton (1999) suggested that female mentees have the least to gain from entering a formal mentoring relationship. Kalbfleisch and Davies (1991) found in their study that African American professionals, who are protégés, were selected by black mentors rather than different race mentors. In a related study, they examined the effects of race similarity among students of color who were assigned to formal same-race mentoring relationships that lasted for a short period. Ensher and Murphy (1997) found that the students reported more career development functions than other students of color mentees, assigned to different race mentors within formal mentoring relationships.

Supportive Communication Relationship and Information Seeking

There have been numerous studies conducted on supportive communication and information seeking that occurs in a mentoring relationship. Supportive communicative relationships enhance an individual's work life (Myers, 1998). Myers (1998) reported that in the academic setting, communication support emerges in several ways. Two of those most central elements to the academic setting are mentor-protégé relationships and peer relationships (Myers, 1998). This information can especially be valuable for a mentee seeking advancement either in a career or the academia (Halatin, 1981). Olian et al. (1988) noted that protégés who have close contacts with a mentor see two primary

dimensions to the benefits obtained from the relationship: job and career benefits through information provided by the mentor.

A protégé can receive career mentoring or psychosocial support simply by asking their mentor for information or advice; this is not as easily accomplished with the more amorphous function of role model (Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997). In fact, mentors are seen as influential for both personal and career development (Burke, 1984). As the mentee advances in any organization, he or she continues to remember the personal support from the mentor (Halatin, 1981). In addition, when mentors socialize with protégés and develop friendships by offering support and encouragement, protégés feel connected to their mentor (Schrodt et al., 2003). Male protégés in the academy typically receive higher levels of communication support and information than female protégés (Schrodt et al., 2003). Overall, mentoring relationships have been positively related to career success for the protégé (Ensher & Murphy, 1997).

Three Stages to Enactment Theory

The enactment theory describes, explains, and predicts communication in mentoring relationships (Kalbfleisch, 2002a). This theory addresses three stages that explain how mentoring relationships are initiated and maintained through communication (Kalbfleisch, 2002a).

Initiation is the first stage and occurs when a protégé searches for a mentor and tries to initiate a mentoring relationship (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). Through initial interaction, a prospective protégé respects the competence of a potential mentor who serves as a valuable role model (Chao, 1997). Informal mentoring relationships develop on the basis

of mutual identification and the fulfillment of career needs (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Common popular advice for finding a mentor is simply to ask a specific person to be a mentor (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). Another method of establishing a mentoring relationship is through a third party. This may be arranged informally or may be a part of a structure-mentoring program (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). A program coordinator, on the basis of application forms submitted by the potential mentor and protégé, may also assign members of formal mentoring relationships to one another (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Mentors select protégés who are viewed as a younger version of themselves, and the relationship provides mentors with a sense of generativity, or contribution to future generations (Allen et al., 1997; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Mentors select protégés whom they believe can bring certain desirable attributes and competencies to the relationship (Allen et al., 1997). Protégés often select mentors who are viewed as role models and have desired expertise (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Members of informal mentoring relationships select partners they enjoy working with and often report a mutual attraction that sparks the development of the relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Russell & Adams, 1997).

Repairing is the second stage that occurs in a case of conflict (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). It is reasonable to predict that both mentee and mentor will experience ups and downs, and differing goals and desires within the mentoring relationship (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). Protégés are most likely expected to make more communicative attempts to rectify a situation than would the mentor (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). Kalbfleisch (2002b)

found that female protégés made more attempts to repair the relationship with mentors than did male protégés.

Maintaining the relationship is the final stage. In this stage, often times, a mentor has invested significant time and resources in the mentoring relationship, and may be reluctant to see the relationship end (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). Mentors may also expend communicative effort in maintaining and repairing their mentoring relationships (Kalbfleisch, 2003b). Kalbfleisch (2002b) noted that when a mentee attempts to rectify a conflict, mentors are likely to forgive, respect, and hold the mentee in esteem. “It is possible that the mentorship may never truly end, with the mentor and protégé always serving in the roles of master and disciple” (Kalbfleisch, 2002b, p. 68).

Investment of time and resources are very significant in a relationship (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). Likewise, if a mentor has invested time and resources in a mentoring relationship, he or she will not want the relationship to end (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). However, such mentors may also expend communicative effort in maintaining and repairing their relationships with mentors (Kalbfleisch, 2002b). In case of conflict in the mentoring relationship, mentors are likely to respond by forgiving and holding the protégés in esteem (Kalbfleisch, 2002b).

Informal relationships last between 3 and 6 years, whereas formal relationships are usually contracted to last between 6 months to 1 year (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Kalbfleish (2002b) states that it is possible that the mentorship may never truly end, with the mentor and protégé always serving in the roles of master and disciple. However, if relationships with mentors end, they tend to end with positive feelings (Burke, 1984).

The goals of formal mentor relationships are specified at the start of the relationship and are screened by the program coordinator. In contrast, the goals of informal relationships evolve over time and adapt to the career needs of the individuals (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Needless to say, developing and maintaining mentor relationships requires hard work by all involved (Burke, 1984).

Cloning, Nurturing, Friendships, and Apprentice Model

Buell (2004) developed four models of the mentoring process that were conceptualized by the participants. Each model represents different mentoring styles that were formed in faculty and student mentor relationships. The *Cloning Model* is characterized by a relationship in which a mentor seeks to control a mentee (Buell, 2004). The Cloning Model develops when a mentor tries to produce a duplicate copy of him or herself from a top down position (Buell, 2004). According to Buell (2004), the mentee is expected to follow the same direction as the mentor, which includes working on the same research problem, attending the same graduate program, getting a job at the same type of institution, and sustain the same values as the mentor.

The *Nurturing Model* represents a parenting mentor style (Buell, 2004). The mentor's role is to create a safe, open environment in which a mentee can learn. Likewise, the nurturing faculty mentor (Buell, 2004) is empathic, supportive and encourages the student mentee. In the nurturing model, the focus tends to be on guiding the mentee and assisting that individual in finding his or her own voice (Buell, 2004). The communicative style of the Nurturing Model includes "being nonhierarchical, open,

safe, invitational and also knowing when to push, critique, or set the bar high for the mentee” (Buell, 2004, p.66).

Within Buell’s (2004) study, the *Friendship Model* also emerged. This model was viewed as more collaborative and co-constructed of both the Cloning and Nurturing Models (Buell, 2004). In the Friendship Model, the mentor and mentee are seen as peers in which collaborative, reciprocal, mutual engagement are the norm (Buell, 2004). Reciprocity is one important element in this model, in that each member of the mentoring relationship enjoys, learns, trust, listens and respects one another (Buell, 2004). In addition, this mentoring style is not just task oriented (Buell, 2004), but it is a major factor in a mentee’s life.

The *Apprentice Model* represents a mentoring style in which the mentee works under the mentor for a number of years (Buell, 2004). “The Apprentice Model is a pragmatic, largely “hands-off” model that involves mentoring without moving into the more personal or social aspects that characterize the Friendship Model” (Buell, 2004, p. 70). A professional relationship is the focus of this model (Buell, 2004) as the mentor guides the mentee through the process of producing quality work.

A number of studies in the literature review have discussed topics related to mentoring relationships. Such topics include the benefits of mentoring, characteristics of mentoring relationships, students of color mentoring issues, and students of color and women in formal and informal mentoring relationships. The literature also examined the impact of supportive communication and information seeking, the three stages to enactment theory and Buell’s (2004) four models of mentoring.

Based on existing literature review, I propose three research questions when viewing the importance of mentoring relationships.

RQ 1: Are students of color who seek formal mentoring more successful than students who do not seek mentoring relationships?

RQ 2: How do students of color who lack formal mentors get important information?

RQ 3: What differences if any exist on mentoring experience based on race, ethnicity, and gender?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As described in the opening chapter, the objective of this study is in three-fold. First, it is designed to understand whether students of color with formal mentors become more successful than similar students who do not seek mentor relationships. Second, the study explored how students who lack formal mentors get important information. Third, it explored any differences between men and women of color who seek or utilize mentoring relationships. In this regard, the study has examined mentor relationships and its affects on students of color compared to similar students without mentors. McCracken (1988) and Owen (1984) are the two thematic analytic frameworks that were chosen for this qualitative study. This chapter describes how the work of McCracken (1988) and Owen (1984) were used to develop unique and important emerging themes to capture the experience of mentorship in academic environments. In addition, this chapter also discussed the use of focus groups as a method to gain insight into the importance of mentoring experience in the academic arena. Chapter Four will present the analysis of texts that has been compiled of central themes identified through focus group transcripts. Chapter Five will facilitate a discussion in regards to the themes, discuss limitations, and suggest future directions for research.

Overview of Methodology

The goal of qualitative research is to isolate and define categories during the process of research (McCracken, 1988). Specifically, qualitative research looks for patterns of interrelationship between many categories:

The purpose of a qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world. (McCracken, 1984, p. 17)

McCracken's (1988) method takes into account the lifeworld of the participant, as a means to see the content and pattern of their experience. According to McCracken (1988, p. 42), there are five stages to the analysis process (see also Orbe, 2004; Wright & Orbe, 2003) that represent a higher level of generality that analysis should follow. The first step is to treat each utterance in the focus group transcript in its own terms, ignoring its relationship to other aspects of the text. Basically, this translates into sorting out important from unimportant data. The first stage requires that the researcher must read the transcribed data with a careful eye to identify what is in the data, and what the data "sets off" in the self. Moreover, certain avenues that appear to make sense will emerge when working through the data. Within the second stage, observations are then examined, one in relation to the other for making sense between relationships and contradictions of themes. In this regard, observations are related back to the transcript.

Next, as noted by past research (McCracken, 1988; Orbe, 2004; Wright & Orbe, 2003), rereading of transcripts (stage three) is important to confirm and disconfirm

emerging relationships and begin the recognition of general properties of the data. At this time, a field of patterns and themes begin to rise into view. During the fourth stage, general themes are formulated and sorted out while others are eliminated. Valuable themes are then organized in a hierarchical fashion carefully identifying themes that do not contradict one another. The final stage involves a review of emergent themes from the transcripts in order to explore how they can be integrated into major themes.

Now that a clear understanding of the analysis process according to McCracken's (1988) guidelines is established, it is important to recognize how it will break down the data in sections. For this, I rely heavily on Owen's (1984) three criterion. Owen's (1984) thematic analysis process can be complemented with McCracken's guidelines by identifying emergent themes using *recurrence*, *repetition*, and *forcefulness* criterions.

“Themes are less a set of cognitive schema than a limited range of interpretations that are used to conceptualize and constitute relationships” (Owen, 1984, p. 274). Owen (1984) noted that a theme was discovered in relational discourse when one of three criterions was present: *recurrence*, *repetition*, and *forcefulness*. *Recurrence criterion* was examined when no more than two parts of a report had the same thread of meaning, even though different wording was used to indicate the exact meaning. *Repetition criterion* is an extension of recurrence in that it is a repeated use of the same key words, phrases, and sentences used to describe or interpret an experience. *Forcefulness criterion* refers to the vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses in written communication. Forcefulness helps understand the importance of certain words and phrases in print by underlining, increasing the size, or using color marks to focus on passages in the written

reports. Capital and bold letters were used in this study to emphasize phrases and certain comments.

Owen's (1984) criteria were utilized at different stages in McCracken's guidelines. Once the transcripts were reviewed the second time, I looked for key words or phrases that have been repeated. Recurrence criterion was used to sort out important data from unimportant data in the case where different wording is used to represent the same meaning. Forcefulness criterion enabled the researcher to measure the intensity of key words or phrases identified within the emergent themes.

Methods

Now that the methodology section has been explained, the method section describes the particular procedures and tools utilized to conduct this thesis study. Specifically, three important sections were discussed. The first section describes the participants in the study. The second section explains the procedures. Within the procedures, focus groups were described as a method design used to collect data. Lastly, the final section describes the process of analysis for this study.

Participants

Twenty college sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students of color, ranging from ages 18-99, participated in this focus group study. There were a total of six focus groups. Three focus groups were comprised of students who have had mentors; the other three focus groups contained students without mentors. Three to six persons was the size for each focus group. Each focus group had a combination of women and men

who are students of color including those of African American and Hispanic/Latino descent.

Recruitment Procedure

Morgan and Krueger (1997) found that recruiting participants to the mentoring focus group could occur in several ways, such as being contacted by the researcher or volunteers. For the purpose of this thesis study, participants were recruited based on a flyer. The flyer targeted participants who have mentors and similar participants without mentors (see Appendix A). The flyer indicated the purpose of this study and the location. The flyer also stated the requirements of participation (i.e., participants must be at least a sophomore in college), include the researcher's contact information, and indicate that an incentive for participating will be provided. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), traditionally focus groups have been composed of participants who didn't know one another, yet, grouping participants who regularly interact, such as socially, might facilitate self-disclosure on certain topics. Nevertheless, the intent of the focus group is to promote self-disclosure among the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Therefore, I tried not to group participants who know each other in the same focus group. Instead, I assigned friends and acquaintances to other focus groups. Focus groups consisting of participants who have mentors were held on different dates from participants without mentors. Each participant was contacted a week before the scheduled date by phone and email.

In addition to those participants recruited through flyers, the snowballing technique was used to recruit other students who have mentors and students without

mentors. Snowballing is a method strategy used in most qualitative research (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000). Most researchers who utilize snowballing technique, ask respondents to refer others who are eligible for the same study. Students who participated in the focus group were asked to give my contact information to friends, classmates or roommates who have mentors and who have not experienced a mentoring relationship.

Focus Groups Procedures

Specifically, this thesis study has examined the lived experiences of people involved in mentoring relationships. According to Morgan and Kruger (1997), focus groups are group interviews. Focus groups were chosen as a method to gain in-depth insight from participant's who have shared their lived experiences regarding mentoring relationships. Using focus groups as a qualitative method attempts to probe the group of participants about their attitudes, values, and behaviors that identify deep feelings and motivations (Hockings, Stack, & McDermott, 2003). The purpose of a focus group is to listen and gather information that will help to better understand how people feel or think about an issue (Krueger & Casey, 2000). A focus group study is a carefully planned method designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a nonthreatening natural environment (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Krueger and Casey (2000) noted that most focus group discussions are relaxed so that participants can enjoy sharing ideas, and stimulate other participants to respond to each other ideas and comments. Mitofsky (1996) indicated that focus groups provide a quick and inexpensive way to collect qualitative information.

The focus groups took place at Western Michigan University in the 2nd floor conference room in Sprau Tower. Each focus group lasted approximately 45-60 minutes (Morgan & Kruger, 1993). When permission was granted, the focus group discussions were audio taped. At the outset of the focus group, mentors and mentees were assured that their responses remained confidential and anonymous and not be discussed outside the focus group. In addition, participants were required not to reveal their real names. Instead alias names were accepted.

Moderators (facilitators) must be familiar with research, prepared and skillful, and have experience with focus groups (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Therefore, the researcher of this thesis study facilitated each focus group. A standard set of questions pertaining to both students who have had mentors (see Appendix B) and students without mentors were asked during the focus groups (Ragins et al., 2000). Students without mentors were asked similar questions to students with mentors. For example, students with and without mentors were asked how important is it to have a mentor? In addition, open-ended questions were used to lead to additional nonscripted questions whenever new information appears (Allen et al., 1997).

Analysis

Transcripts from audiotapes are a primary data source that produces great depth and detailed (Morgan & Krueger, 1997). After the completion of the focus groups, the data collected on audio tapes were transcribed by the researcher of this study (Morgan & Krueger, 1997). Consistent with McCracken's (1988) guidelines, I used five stages to facilitate an analysis of focus group transcripts. First, I read through each transcript one at

a time without taking notes (see also Hopson, 2002). After reading through each transcript a second time, I sorted out important data and discard the rest based on Owen's (1984) three criteria. Second, any comments or notes that compare any relationships and contradictions in the data were written along the side of the margins. Third, I reread the transcripts and any comments or notes to confirm or disconfirm emerging relationships or contradictions. Fourth, the central themes were organized so that minor themes weren't contradicting one another. Fifth, as completed by Hopson (2002), I typed out, printed out, and reviewed the emergent themes and determine how the themes can come together to form larger themes (see also, McCracken, 1988).

After completing the first step of the thematic analysis, Owen's (1984) three criteria – *repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness*, helped shape the next step in the analysis process (Orbe, 2004). By using repetition, I looked for key words and phrases that described experiences and emotions in a mentor relationship. For the recurrence criterion, meanings expressed throughout the transcripts that participants worded differently, but represented the same meaning were examined. Participants communicated in various ways using similar ideas. Forcefulness criterion enabled me to understand the importance and uniqueness of key words and phrases. This criterion was used to highlight any experience that stood out.

Conclusion

Since the term “mentor” was used first in Greek mythology, many new findings about mentoring have been discovered over time. Recent literature for this study found that a relationship with a mentor is beneficial for the protégé's academic success.

Likewise, a relationship with a mentor is an important contribution to the career development and psychosocial function of a student's life. In the end, well-mentored mentees who have gained significantly from the mentoring experience tend to become mentors. In addition, research focusing on the protégé seems critical to expanding understanding of mentoring relationships.

What makes this thesis study so unique versus other existing research is its focus on students of color as opposed to gender. This study explicates issues of mentoring that occur among students of color and different models that can aid the development of mentor relationships. After viewing existing research related to mentoring, there has not been a study conducted that involves a comparison of mentored and unmentored students of color. This thesis study has the advantage of conducting focus groups to gain insight of the lived experiences of students of color with mentors and similar students without mentors. This thesis can contribute the awareness on college campuses based on issues that many students of color and women face concerning mentoring.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

The objective of Chapter Four is to explicate major themes developed from the transcripts of lived experiences of students of color with and without mentoring relationships. The findings were collected through the use of 6 focus groups comprised of a total of 20 African American and Hispanic/Latino American men and women. Three of the focus groups consisted of students of color with mentoring relationships and the other three were composed of students of color without mentoring relationships. Chapter three described how McCracken's (1988) and Owen's (1984) thematic frameworks were used to analyze patterns of themes. After collecting the data, the process of thematizing produced a total of 39 single spaced pages of transcripts that examined the importance of mentoring relationships among students of color in the academic setting.

According to McCracken's (1988) five stages to the analysis process, the initial stage was that the entire transcript be read through without making any written marks. After a second review of the transcribed data, I began sorting out important from unimportant information by highlighting using blue color marks (McCracken, 1988). The second step involved the elimination of slices of data that contradicted one another, such as students of color specifically identifying characteristics of a mentor and the expectations that a mentor should have. Both concepts were examined but not central to the research question of this thesis study. In addition, I also began double underlining unique words or phrases that have been repeated (Owen, 1984) by several participants to

describe their experiences. One unique phrase that was continuously repeated by participants was “my first year...”

In the next step, Owen’s (1984) criteria of recurrence were used to describe different key words or phrases that represented the same meaning. For example, one African American woman participant a part of the women with mentoring relationship’s focus group stated, “...a mentor can be an upperclassmen,” and another African American man participant a part of the men and women without mentoring relationship’s focus group said, “...my roommate a year older than me was like a mentor.” After repeatedly reviewing the data, major themes began to emerge. Forcefulness criterion was also used to measure the intensity of key words identified with in the major themes, such as bolding words like “academic success” that represented the volume of a participant’s voice. As a result, three central themes were identified.

Using McCracken’s (1988) guidelines and Owen’s (1984) criterions as a thematic analytic framework, the three central themes that emerged from the transcripts were: (a) Perceptions of success; (b) Information seeking among students of color without formal mentoring relationships; and (c) Race, ethnicity, and gender among mentoring experiences. Within each central themes, an emergence of 14 sub themes were developed: (a1) Defining success; (a2) Achieving goals; (a3) Spiritual relationship with God; (a4) Academic success; (a5) Using success to influence other people; (a6) Doing your personal best; (a7) Learning and applying knowledge and skills to your life; (b1) Transition to college as a first-year student; (b2) Family as a source for important information; (b3) Peers as a source for important information; (b4) Constituents as a

source for important information; (c1) Positive/ negative experiences; (c2) Influence of race, ethnicity, and gender; (c3) No influence regarding race, ethnicity, and gender; and (c4) Conflicting feelings about race, ethnicity, and gender of a mentor. This section of chapter four will elucidate these three essential themes along with their sub themes.

For clarity purposes, participant responses were marked using a letter and number coding system. Letters A-C represents participants with mentors and D-F refers to participants without mentors. The number indicates the specific page of the transcript. For example, a quote followed by A1 signifies that it was taken from page 1 of the transcript consisting of the *All Women with Mentors* focus group. The letter B signifies the focus group consisting of all men with mentoring relationships. The letter C pertains to the men and women with formal mentor's focus group. An excerpt followed by the letter D refers to the all women without formal mentor's focus group. Responses marked with the letter E represent the focus group of men and women without mentoring experiences. The letter F symbolizes participants in the all men without formal mentoring relationships.

Perceptions of Success

In this part of the findings the sub themes were structured into two major sections. The first describes what the definition of success means to the participants with and without mentoring relationships, while the second shares what participants identify as most important to their academic success.

Defining Success

One of the themes that correlated with the first research question was the definition of success. Participants were asked the question, “Define what success means to you?”(see Appendix B). This first remark was stated by one of the Hispanic male participants, a senior pursuing his bachelor’s degree in bioscience. The participant had a mentoring experience through college and reported that “anything” can be defined as success. He explicated anything from being punctual to increasing your fitness weight at the health recreational center:

I mean you can make anything into success. It depends on your definition of success. Um I mean there are a lot of things that you can call success. Success being up on time in the morning or you’re at the rec working out like yeah I hit a new higher weight, that’s success. B2

One African American woman who participated in the women and men focus group with mentoring relationships explained what success meant to her. As a fourth year senior studying broadcast and cable production, she explained that success does not have to be about money. She gives an illustration about how she can still be successful even if she works at a low income job:

When you think of success, a lot of people think money. And it’s not all about money. I don’t think. Because no matter what you make you can have a job that’s a low income job and you can still be successful with it opposed to someone who is at a higher level who makes a lot of money. C2

Many participants found that success meant more than just being rich. This African American male participant, who is a fifth year education major a part of the men focus group without mentoring relationships addresses how he defined success. He

shared that success was having it all, such as wealth, health, spiritual, and family as stated here:

I look at success like having it all. Um you know especially right now because I'm working so hard to make sure that once I do become you know older I can have it a little bit easier or you know my goals won't be such a stretch to have it all. What I mean by having it all is you know being healthy, you know living comfortably as far as finances. Um having spiritual wealth, having a family, um things like that determines success to me. Um I like to kind of have a balance of everything like I would rather you know be a middle class person with that then to be rich and not have anything or anyone. So I think success, of course it depends on the person because some people value things more than others. F1

Achieving/Accomplishing Goals

The theme accomplishing goals appeared to be at the top of the participant's list when asked to define success. Often times the participants would give personal examples of how setting and achieving goals amounted to successes. One African American woman, a junior at the University a part of the women with mentoring experience's focus group, shares her definition of success:

Um it's achieving a goal and achieving that goal because its usually not just one set goal. Even if you just have one goal in life. It's usually that goal with a whole bunch of little goals under it. So it's just achieving them. A5

One woman participant, who is in her second year of graduate school, working towards her master's degree in development administration, spoke about success being defined as an accomplishment. As a participant of the men and women with mentoring relationship's focus group, she shared that finishing a paper ahead of time attributed success:

One thing is accomplishment. I mean whether it be something really small. I mean you might accomplish a paper that you had done what next week or the next hour. That could be defining success. C2

The smile on one African American male participant's face, also a part of the men and women with mentoring relationships focus group, revealed that success was definitely something that he was experiencing at this time in his life. As a sophomore in college, he discussed that success involved preparation, struggle and achievement. The volume of his voice and the dramatic pause when this participant said the word success caused everyone in the group to laugh:

Success (laughter from everyone). Um... I think success is preparation, struggle and achievement. To me that's what it is because I don't think I'm doing something until I planned it anyway. And then there's always going to the struggle time where its like do I really want to do this. But in the end when I've achieved what I did, then I guess I'm more happy with the situation. C2

Similarly, another participant who is a senior majoring in Africana studies shared how success meant achieving something and striving to reach her goals. This African American woman participated in the women without mentor's focus group. Majority of the participants with and without mentoring experiences defined success in similar ways:

And achieving them in what ever, in by any means you have to achieve them. Because it is unnecessary to your life um where you reflect back on how hard it's been for you. You will use that as a motivator um that is what success is to me. If you're just, if you're just willing and determined to accomplish some goals in your life. Um in spite of what obstacles are you know along in your path to reach them. D1

In addition, fulfillment was also a topic that evolved from the discussion about what participants defined as success. Two participants, from the different focus groups described their feelings for fulfilling goals in life no matter whether it pertains to personal or professional aspects of their life. The first excerpt was stated by an African American woman in her first year of grad school pursuing a master's degree:

Success means to me fulfilling the goals that I set for myself as well as succeeding at the personal obligations that I have. A5

A Hispanic American male also shared the same personalized definition of what success is to him:

Fulfilling. Enjoying what you're doing. It's fulfilling to you and making you at the end of the day feel like you've done something that means something. B2

For some participants, accomplishing and fulfilling a goal in life, defined what success meant to them. However, other participants shared their insight on how success is gaining a spiritual relationship with God.

Spiritual Relationship with God

Having a spiritual relationship with God was a key concept that was most participants defined as success. One fourth year secondary education major, who participated in the women with mentoring relationship focus group, mentioned that success was obeying God's commandments, as she states here:

For me success is following God's law and his commandments and trying to live Christ like. A6

For some participants, spiritual, happiness and contentment were ultimately key concepts that determined what success meant to them. One junior who is an African American participant from the women with mentoring relationship's focus group defined success as being happy and content with life:

And also just overall being happy and satisfied with life that just defines success for me personally. A6

Another participant, who is a Hispanic American senior in college and from the men with mentoring relationship's focus group, also shared that success isn't about his status, but it's based on happiness:

Well success is actually something I talk about or think about a lot. And to me it's just happiness, it doesn't matter your status and it doesn't matter as long as you're happy. B2

Identical to the other two participant's response, another African American woman, a fourth year senior in the broadcast and cable productions program who participated in the men and women with mentoring relationship's focus group, spoke about being happy in whatever she does defines success:

And I think um, happiness has a lot to do with it. Is just being happy in what ever you do. And that may be a success to you. You are doing something that makes you happy. Career or what ever it is. C2

For a number of participants, having a spiritual relationship with God meant being happy and content. Having these aspects seemed to flow together because they ultimately satisfied the participants' lives. Moreover, each key concept defined what success means to the participants.

Academic Success

Academic success differentiates from spiritual and the overall definition of success stated by the participants. Academic success revolves around the educational progress of the participants. For instances, grades, studying, prioritizing social life and education, influencing others, and applying skills learned in classes to life. The participants in all the focus groups were asked the question, "What do you identify as most important to your academic success?" (see Appendix B). The participants spoke

about experiences with time management, the impact their success had for others, doing their best, and actually learning from classes.

Time management was one key aspect that majority of the participants sought to improve. Several participants felt that managing their time wisely would be a great avenue for balancing education and social life that would ultimately lead to success. When asked to describe what's most important to their academic success, one African American woman, a senior in college participated in the women with mentoring focus group, explained:

Learning about time management, how to manage your time wisely so that you can make time to study, trying to find a balance between studying and having a social life, things like that. A6

A similar response was made by a sophomore African American man who participated in the men and women with mentoring relationship's focus group. He also explained that learning how to manage his time is important to his academic success. Additionally, he gave an example of the improvement he made from last year by utilizing time management:

I mean being prepared and learning how to manage your time. I struggled with that last year, my first year. And now I'm more mature. My grades are attainable now. My standards are attainable. C3

Similar to the man and woman participants with mentoring experience responses, one African American senior studying Africana studies, who was a participant in the women with out mentor's focus group, felt that being well rounded was another key aspect that she identified as most important to his academic success. She described her

views that one should be versatile and have a balance of education and other curricular activities, as she shares here:

I think just to show how well rounded you can be. You can make sure that you have a balance of academic and different extra curricular activities...um that will provide some support that can possibly help you with you know your academics and everything. Because I think that it's really a positive, um just to show that you have some type of versatility through out your college career. And you're just not...I guess you know participating just only in class. Doing everything in class and you don't have a life outside of that. D2

Prioritizing was another key aspect of academic success. Participants were able to speak about various incidents where they did and did not prioritize. Two African American participants who were apart of different focus groups discussed their views of how prioritizing contributed to their academic success. One of the participants who is a secondary education major and took part of the women with mentoring relationships focus group stated:

The most important strategy for my academic success would probably be just prioritizing and just having my own study habits in line. Taking care of the things before even consulting people. You know reading a chapter, studying for test, not waiting until the day [before]. Taking those extra steps to make sure that I get an "A" on the paper. A6

The other African American first year graduate student studying development administration who took a part of the men and women with mentoring relationships focus group offered the following example:

I'm trying to think which one to say first. Um...because I always had a problem with time too (laughter). I'm a huge procrastinator unfortunately. And I think when I got up here it was actually challenging. So I ended up pushing a 45 paged paper in 6 hours. And I will never do that again so. C3

Although many of the participants felt that prioritizing their time was most important to their academic success, other participants believed that impacting people in life was even more relevant to their academic success.

Using Success to Influence Other People

Impacting others was another key concept that seemed to develop with in the focus group discussions. Many participants felt that contributing back to others was most important to their academic success. For a number of participants, this meant sharing their success with other people and not selfishly keeping it all to themselves. Examples of this can be seen in the comments of two male participants with mentoring relationships. They felt that being able to do something good for society and others was very beneficial to their academic success. One Hispanic American senior studying bioscience offered an example:

And then also I actually think about this yesterday like happiness would be great, but if you actually affected someone's life I think that would be success too. B2

The other man participant, who is an African American senior studying bioscience also a part of the same focus group that consisted of men with mentoring relationships, expressed the importance of impacting someone's life. He felt that contributing back to the world by doing something positive was a key component to his academic success:

Or something that contributes to the benefit of the world. Not meaning in the sense of saving the world, but at the end of the day you're impacting someone's life and making it better. You're doing something good for society. Um that's a big part of success, I would say personally. B2

Likewise, one African American participant who was a part of the women with mentoring focus group also discussed how impacting other people contributed to her academic success. Specifically, she felt that family benefited from the knowledge she gained in school:

So remembering that my success is for other people. I can do a thesis and write papers, but I'm not writing papers so that I can read it over and over again. So that other people can read it and get that knowledge. And so that my family can be fed or so that other people in the world can be impacted by the research that I find out. So when, I always keep that in mind, I know that ok I got to study so I can get a good grade so that, the better grades I get the smarter I get, the more knowledgeable I'll be in this material, the more people I'll be able to impact. A6

Impacting family and others was important for some male and female participant's academic success. However, others felt that doing their personal best in school also contributed to their academic success.

Doing Your Personal Best

When asked what is most important to your academic success, participants felt that doing their personal best in college was a very significant aspect that reflected academic success. One African American woman, who was a participant in the men and women with mentoring relationships focus group and a senior in the broadcast and cable production's program, believed that sustaining in college and graduating in four years was more important than achieving a 4.0 G.P.A:

The most important thing to my academic success would be just doing my best. And I don't have to get a 4.0. As long as I go through college and do my best and know that I tried and know that I had the drive to stay here when I wanted to leave. And just maintaining for 4 years doing what I had to do to stay. I think that's success for me going through the whole thing process and just at the end graduating. C3

Furthermore, one African American man who participated in men and women with mentoring relationships focus group also concurred with the woman above. For his second year as an undergraduate student in college, he mentioned not being content with just passing a class. Instead, earning at least a 3.0 G. P.A was more of a standard for him that contributed to his academic success:

Setting a standard for myself. Um, I think that it's just like you can't be content with...uh just passing a class. But you can't always be like uh I have to get all 'A's.' For me it's a reality (laughter). It's like not going to get all 'A's' but we going to get a 3.5 or a 3.0 what ever something like that. So I think it's just a standard or whatever. C3

Another participant in the men and women without mentors, discussed how actually accomplishing what he set out to do is most important to his academic success. One example that this second year African American grad student a part of the organizational communication's program mentioned was of graduating in April, as stated:

When you actually accomplish what you set out to do. So if my goal right now is to graduate in April and I graduate in April, then I feel that I am successful in that goal. E1

Several men and women with and without mentoring relationships explained that passing a class and graduating on time were all examples of doing their personal best. In other words, they felt that doing their personal best contributed to their academic success. Additionally, the next section will explicate how participants felt learning something from a class was most important to their academic success.

Learning and Applying Knowledge and Skills to Your Life

Similar to the theme that described how success is defined by the participants, this too was a recurring theme that developed as the participants began to discuss their grades and classes. Learning something from a class was more important to the participant's academic success than just taking the class for a grade and credit. They often described their drive for learning from a class and applying the skills and knowledge to other things in their lives. For instance, one African American senior, and a participant from the women with mentoring experience focus group, stated that:

It's another thing to internalize and to actually learn what it is that you're trying to study. Its one thing to learn the facts and get an A, but if you don't learn anything...if you can't apply it to anything, then what's the point. You know, so um, I think that just learning it and internalizing all the information that you get is really important. That would reflect on your grades, you know later on. So either way it goes you'll be successful academically. A7

One African American sophomore and participant in the men with out mentoring relationships focus group also shared his view point on understanding what you studied from your field. He spoke about utilizing the skills you learn from books and classes:

Understandings of whatever you're studying of what ever field or um... like ahh application or whatever. Understanding of whatever you're learning. Whatever you're being taught. Like I think um if you feel as you get a good grade in class and literally don't understand it, you're kind of at a lost. Like especially if it's something that you can really use and apply it to your own life. And um knowledge is basically knowledge about the book and applying things from the book. And some classes and like having everything together. Skills are basically um, you know just knowing how to do what you need to do. And know how is the same thing, just knowing. F2

Likewise, another African American male senior studying bioscience took part of the men with mentoring relationships focus group and explained that learning something

from a class is more important than the grade you earn. Therefore, he shared the same views as the woman above who participated in the women with mentoring relationships focus group:

When you actually feel like you learned something, to me that's success! Because so often you'll be in a class and you get an "A." And you know that's ah an institution definition of excellence and success, but you may not learn anything and when you come out a class, like, "man I actually learned something." That to me is so much more fulfilling you know it's no matter what the grade is, I actually learn something. B2

Within this section, many participants with and without mentoring relationships were able to offer their perception of success. As a result, they described what success meant to them and what attributed mostly to their academic success. A number of key concepts developed through out the focus group discussions. Accomplishing goals and gaining a spiritual relationship with God were two sub themes that personalized the definition of success. Influencing others, doing your personal best, and learning and applying knowledge were also three key ideas that participants identified as most important to their academic success. In addition, the next section will discuss where participants without mentors find their information and resources.

The Search for Important Information

When asked, "Where do you find important information and resources?" Many participants responded to the open-end question by stating that they receive most of their information from upperclassmen and organizations on campus. Various themes emerged from this open ended question as participants described their experience in college without a formal mentor. More specifically transition to college as a first year student and

networking were recurring themes that developed from the open-ended question posed throughout the focus group discussions.

Transition to College as a First-Year Student

When the participants discussed the advantages of finding resources, (e.g. educational, professional/career, personal, and social) on campus they would often refer to their transition to college during their first year. For example, when participants conversed about finding educational resources, they referred to the writing center. The writing center is a source where students on campus can have their papers edited. Participants heard about the writing center through upperclassmen. On other occasions, participants referred to professional resources, such as acquiring advice from a professional established in a career that a student is interested in. Learning how to budget money from peers who have been on campus for a number of years is what most students referred to as personal resources. Moreover, social resources meant finding out about campus organizations, such as *You Beautiful Black Woman*. These participants conversed about what it was like for them to be at college for the first time and who they received resources and information from.

One African American man, a senior and an education major who participated in the men without mentoring relationship focus group described his initial experience as a college freshman:

I know during my freshman year and the transition from being a senior and being the oldest... And you know within the educational setting to being the youngest all over again...um it was hard for me. And you know luckily I found my resources early in my freshman year. But the resources that I came across were getting involved in organizations on campus. F3

Likewise, another African American male, a graduate student pursuing his master's degree in organizational communication, who participated in the men and women without mentoring relationships focus group, also described his lived experience as a first year student. This participant experienced a dissimilar transition to college than the male participant in the men without mentoring relationships focus group. He depicts how a peer played the role of an informal mentor by providing resources and socializing him to college life. He explained that his peer provided him with personal information, such as how to budget money:

When I came to this University, my roommate who was my friend from high school was my mentor. But he wasn't on payroll or he wasn't in a program designed for mentor-mentee relationships. He just told me, you know this is what you need to do, this is what you should do with your books, and this is what you should do with your money. And I learned from him...um I took pieces of what he was saying...and I used what worked for me. Um, as far a mentor being established uh...what's the word I'm looking for? Officially, an official mentor I never had that. But I've had people who offered me um, a helping hand. E5

When asked, "Where do you find important information and resources?" the importance of networking on campus seemed to have the biggest impact on participants without mentors. Having a connection with family, peers, and other constituents on campus appeared to be three networks where participants found important information and support.

Family as a Source for Important Information

One African American sophomore, who is an engineer major from the men without mentoring relationship's focus group, explained that he receives his information from networking with people referred to by his parents on campus:

I went to people who my family knew. Like what I get from them is wonderful, but I do my best to give back. My parents went to college too and they have a whole lot of knowledge and wisdom even though they're not on campus with me. I plan to join more organizations than I do now. F3

Another African American participant, a junior from the women without mentoring relationship's focus group, also explained that parents can be mentors to their college children. She shared that parents can offer advice on whom to network with:

If you don't have a mentor on campus...like your parents could be your mentor or what ever. And they can tell you, you know uh...even if your parents could have gone to this school, the same one that you're at. You know they would be like well go talk to such and such, or just go find out about it, even if they didn't go there. D5

For a number of participants, parents are considered mentors. In a similar vein, older brothers and sisters are also like mentors. The experience that an older sibling has can be shared with a sibling that is in college. For example, an African American man who is a business administration major stated that an older sibling can provide educational and professional important resources. Specifically, older siblings with experiences of preparing for exams and the proper way to apply for jobs.

I believe a mentor is like an older brother or an older sister that has been there and done that before. It's sort of like the experiences that they have been through, they can kind of like tell you and put you up on things. Like how to prepare for a test in certain subjects or how to um...fill out applications to certain jobs that you are applying for in your field. E4

An array of participants felt that a mentor could be a parent, aunt, uncle and even a former teacher. One male participant, a second year graduate student who's major is organizational communication, and who participated in the men and women without mentoring experience's focus group, emphasized that a relative or teacher classified as a

mentor can provide information resources. They can provide resources in educational, professional, personal, and social areas.

I think a mentor is someone who gives you what you need and goes above and beyond of what their typical role is, whether it's a teacher or parent, aunt, uncle where ever it is. E5

Having family members as a source for networking with others on campus was extremely important for some participants. Participants described how a family relative can provide information on how to prepare for an exam. Also, offer resources in other areas, such professional, personal and social. Likewise, peers were another source of important information which will be featured in the next theme.

Peers as a Source of Important Information

Several participants without formal mentors explained that older experienced students on campus were who they networked with and where they received resources and information from. For some participants, students who have been on campus a little longer than the participants were considered peer mentors. Peer mentors were described as people who were the same age or slightly older than the mentee. These peer mentors knew how to find educational resources, for example the writing center, scholarship applications, and websites for purchasing inexpensive course books.

Similarly, another African American man -- a senior and studying education -- had the same response as the woman without a mentoring relationship. He expressed his experience with networking with upper-class students. For example he stated how a person must initiate the first step when gaining information regarding social, professional, personal and educational resources:

So I think that I gained most of my resources from being around people who are older. If you take the first step, then people are going to be willing to help you and embrace you as long as you humble yourself and be willing to accept what they're saying. F3

Some of the resources that participants received were provided by peers on campus. The peers were classified as students who were the same age or slightly older than the participants. Although, peers were a source for important information, other constituents on campus also appeared to inform many of the participants about resources. According to a number of participants, there is a difference between peers and other constituents on campus. Constituents are those more involved in the academia, including academic advisors, academic departments (i.e., school of communication) and student organizations. The only similarities that exist among peers and constituents are the involvement of students who work for student organizations (i.e., student support program).

Constituents as a Source for Important Information

Other participants often spoke about organizations that they were involved in that informed them about resources on campus and who to network with a lot better than an academic advisor could. The majority of the student organizations that some participants discussed were tied to race/ethnicity. An African American participant in the women with out mentoring experience's focus group gave an example of her experience:

I've struggled because I really didn't know anybody before I came here. So like my freshmen year I was like ok I already failed to sign up on time. I was coming in late. Doing everything late was real hard. Then I had got into an organization called YBBW *You Beautiful Black Woman* and so they really helped me out. So that's how I got better at it. Because my advisor, I didn't even know how to find

my advisor. That was so hard. You would not believe how hard it was trying to find my advisor. I was like ok, "he can't call or email me or nothing!" Wow. D5

One African American male, a sophomore shared that he receives his information from an organization on campus:

One organization that I get information from, and that I'm really a part of is collegiate black and Christian. I have a leadership role in it now and it's really like the supporting friends I have there are really encouraging. The fact that I actually have a role to play makes me feel more part of what's going on. F3

Networking through a specific department, such as the education department was another alternative where students received important information. One African American man, a senior and an education major who participated in the men without mentoring relationship's focus group described his motive for seeking information:

I looked into the other organization, such as education. I knew I was going to be an education major, so why not talk to some people who have been in the education school for some years. Why not find out um what their struggles were. That's where I kind of found resources. As a result, you know I built a lot of friendships too. So you know building up resources doesn't necessarily mean you're just taking from someone all the time and never giving back. F3

Similarly, one African American woman who is a senior studying Africana studies also sought important information through another department on campus called, the student support program:

Well I found out a lot of resources here on campus through um being a part of the student support program here in Moore Hall. And they helped me find a lot of stuff. D5

One African American woman -- a junior who was a part of the women with out mentoring relationship's focus group -- expounded on the fact that a person with a major

needs to know people to receive important information, such as educational resources and registering for classes:

I think they call it networking or more so just having the connection with the world. Because I think a lot of people who have majors need to know people. With careers, you need to know people in order to get jobs, and to stay in a job. And even with school! When you first come here you got to figure out when to register for classes. If you know people, then they will tell you with the answer to everything. D2

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Among Mentoring Experiences

When asked a specific question about what effect race, ethnicity, and gender has on the mentoring experience, many of the remarks from the participants varied. Some were bold enough to tell the truth, some were hesitant to respond, and some seemingly contradicted themselves. In this section, responses from both types of focus groups consisting of participants with and without mentoring relationships were organized by four sub themes that emerged from the transcripts: (1) Positive/ negative experiences; (2) Influence of race, ethnicity, and gender; (3) Not an influence of race, ethnicity, and gender; and (4) Conflicting feelings about race, ethnicity, and gender of a mentor.

Positive / Negative experiences

The participants' responses varied on how they felt about race, ethnicity, and gender of a mentor. In fact, many of the participants spoke about negative and positive experiences they encountered with mentors who were different and similar from them in regards to race and sex. An African American junior, a part of the women with mentor relationship's focus group, shares her experience with two different types of mentors:

Well for me I had an um the experience of having a mentor who was my race and my gender, a female African American woman. And I've also been able to

compare that to a mentor that I had with a male and Caucasian. So I've been able to compare the two. And what I found was that the African American female was easy for me to relate to. She knew above and beyond about resources that would be valuable to me. So they were relevant to her and that's why they were relevant to me. Scholarships and research programs were things she was able to assist me more in those areas. That's not fault of the other academic mentor. He just didn't know. He wouldn't go searching for those so he didn't know about them. Because they are particular to minorities. So she knew about the minority...this minority program. So she was better able to assist me in programs directly towards minorities. Um, she was more personable. She came from similar backgrounds and then we were able to connect on that level and that made the experience way more valuable. He's a good mentor, not anything against him. But just having those things set in place made the relationship with her a little more comfortable. A1

Another African American, a junior, who participated in the women with mentors, stated that both of her mentors were different, yet positive for her. Unlike the other African American participant within the same focus group, this woman had a positive experience with a mentor who was of a different race and sex. She describes the difference between the African American woman mentor and the Caucasian American man mentor:

My African American mentor was able to tell me about the minority scholarships and things like that. My male Caucasian mentor was able to tell me about scholarships that he knew I would get that minorities don't even know about. And so I was here getting inducted in to ceremonies where I was the only African American, because he was providing that information to me. A12

One Hispanic American man, a senior in college, who was a part of the men with mentoring relationship's focus group, described his positive mentoring experience. The type of relationship he described was informal. He wasn't seeking a mentor, but one just developed naturally with a fraternity brother who was the same race as himself.

One of my mentors that I have now is actually a brother in the fraternity and he works here in Kalamazoo. And it didn't really come to about that I was

looking for a mentor. But I kind of um...stopped by and talked to him once in a while. I go by there once in a while and talk to him about stuff that is going on and kind of hang out. Um...he's the same race as I am and he knows stuff that I have gone through. And he's a part of the fraternity in which he can relate that way too. So he's kind of one of the mentors that I can open up and say something to. B1

One African American woman, a senior broadcast and cable production major, who was also apart of the men and women with mentoring relationship's focus group, spoke about her positive experience with a peer mentor who was the same race as herself. She shared examples of personal things they did together and also similarities they had in common compared to other races and ethnicities.

My mentor and I were both female. We were both African American. And we did more things together as personal, personal things opposed to somebody who was of a different race would have probably did with me. We went certain places and we did certain things. I think it was better for me to have a female African American because I can relate to her more opposed to a Caucasian or Asian or what ever other ethnicities. Overall, I think it was better. Also, we were from the same hometown. C1

Even though some participants had peer mentors, many were mentored by faculty in different departments. In addition, these participants had mentors of the opposite sex who bonded with them. One multi-ethnic woman of color, a graduate student pursuing her master's degree in organizational communication took part of the women with mentoring relationship's focus group tells about her positive mentoring experience with a male faculty of color:

I was thinking of my mentor during undergraduate. And that's a lot different because he's a man, he's African American and at the time we were in the same department. I guess because I'm a person of color...that alone would be the bond between us. A1

Similarly, another participant in the women with mentoring relationship's focus group, tells how she is a mentor now who makes an effort to create a positive experience and connect with students who are of a different race, ethnicity and gender. This African American junior stated:

And with me now, I'm in the same position that my mentor was in. And now I am just kind of taking it as you know... as pretty much what not to do. And um even with that um it helped me to try to find that motivation with helping people, especially if their um the same race as me. Even if not, I have students who are males who are Caucasian. So I think that those things are really important. A2

There were many participants who reported being a mentor now. They often described the importance of being a mentor who works with an array of diverse students. However, one African American participant, -- a senior secondary education major from the women with mentoring relationship's focus group -- spoke about being an orientation leader. She shared her positive experience of working with a diverse group of students, as stated below:

I was an orientation leader. And the way that worked out for the incoming freshmen students was they were actually selected to be in my group according to differences. Meaning that the coordinator didn't want anyone who went to the same high school that I did. The group was pretty much diverse. Like in the group of may be 10 students, I would have maybe had 5 females, but I would only have 1 African American. So with the experience in itself, the students were actually grouped according to differences because they wanted us to learn you know about each others differences and to get to the bottom of similarities. Sometimes the way you do that is by attracting these different people together. A11

When asked what effect does race, ethnicity, and gender have on the choice of the mentoring relationship, some participants in the men and women with mentor's focus group responded alike. They spoke about positive and negative experience they had encountered within their mentoring experiences. The positive mentoring experiences

were shared with mentors of the same race, sex and close in age. The negative mentoring experiences happened to involve mentors of a different race and sex.

Some participants reported that race, ethnicity, and gender are important when choosing a mentor. One African American junior in college who participated in the women with mentoring relationship's focus group spoke about her negative experience with her formal mentor. She explained that her mentor was a Caucasian American woman who did not have a huge impact on her overall.

Um for me...like, I think those three things are important when choosing a mentor. It's easy to find that connection, having something to relate to. The mentor I had was...it was a female and she was Caucasian. And I guess it just seemed like it really wasn't that much we connected with. Besides both of us being females. But that really didn't have a big impact on it. And even with her it just seemed like she was just doing it because it was her job. A2

One African American man, a bioscience major who also participated in the men with mentoring relationship's focus group, added that choosing a mentor of a different race, ethnicity, and gender was not an option for him. He stated that the three aspects were not available in his field of work. His body language and the tone of his voice was discussed as negative. However, he notes that if he had a preference it would possibly be important to choose a mentor as the same race and sex as himself:

For me it didn't really play that much of a factor simply because there weren't any options to choose someone who is a female or a minority. You know minorities that wouldn't identify themselves as the same race as me. So that really wasn't an option. It could play a factor into my mentor-mentee relationships on a professional level. But had I been at some place else that had more options, maybe it would have. Probably it would have. B1

One African American woman, a first-year grad student studying development administration, who participated in the men and women with mentor relationship's focus

group, spoke about a negative mentoring experience she came across with a Caucasian male who was close to retirement. She spoke about the difficulties she had communicating with him, as shared here:

In undergrad I had a tough time trying to convey to my counselor, my mentor actually what I wanted to do. Because it really wasn't either his line of work or he wasn't interested at all. So he was a lack of help. He really didn't want to direct me to anybody. So I think sometimes the culture clashes actually hinder the mentor-mentee relationship and that's not really effective. [Facilitator asked, "What race was he?"] He was European American. He was very older. So it could be the age differences as well. I think he was headed towards retirement. So that can play a part as well. C1

The same woman reiterates the differences between her African American woman mentor and Caucasian man mentor. She explicates that she had a different mentor for the last three years of her undergraduate career. However, the last mentor who was an African American woman was easier to relate to compared to the Caucasian man:

I actually went through 3 mentors before I even got one in my undergrad years. I had one every year. And the last one that I had, she just happened to be a woman. Something this small and significant, such as her being a woman. It was something that I could relate to as opposed to somebody being totally opposite so to speak. You know he was a European American male and very old. He was in a fraternity so he was really dedicated to that. And I was an African American woman. I couldn't even have a conversation with him. It really wouldn't go pass "ok so what classes are you taking next semester?" [Facilitator asked, "So nothing personal?"] It didn't even go that route it was just, "what are you taking next semester." Because it got to a point where he would just kind of stick by saying "well I can't be there because I have a fraternity meeting. But, here take these classes." So he really didn't know that the importance was of actually having that relationship. Or he really just didn't want one. C2

While several participants described positive mentoring relationships, others explained that they encountered negative experiences. The positive experiences reflected participants who were paired with mentors of the same race. The insights stated by those

who were paired with mentors of a different sex and race were viewed as negative. However, the following section will explicate the influence that race, ethnicity and gender has on the mentoring relationship.

Influence of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Most of the participants agreed that race, ethnicity, and gender had an influence on their mentoring experiences. One African American woman, a senior secondary education major who took part of the women with mentoring relationship's focus group, explained that those three aspects created a connection with in her mentoring relationship whose mentor was also an African American woman:

Those three aspects um...have influenced my decision, my person to select as my mentor. She is an African American female. So I think we have those two connections right there besides the fact that we are in the same department. And we have similar interest in terms of academic subjects. So those three components did influence my decision. A1

Having a connection with a mentor had a major impact on another participant's mentoring experience. Moreover, race, ethnicity, and gender do matter to this senior college student. He talked about how it depends on whether he can relate to that mentor as a Hispanic American man, as shared here:

I think um... it kind of does matter because you can relate to or your mentor can relate to you. Um... and sometimes it may not. It kind of depends who they are and where they came from. You might have somebody that's not of your race or your gender. And they kind of know what you've been through. Um so it all depends on how you feel about that person. How close you think you can relate to that person. Because there are some mentors you feel that you can talk to about anything. And sometimes they're just like professional mentors where you discuss classes and stuff like that. And it kind of depends on the mentor too. B1

An African American sophomore who participated in the men and women with mentoring relationship's focus group shared a different experience with his mentor. He explained that race is a key component in the mentoring relationship. In addition, he also shared a spiritual relationship with his African American male mentor. For instance, stated here:

No um...with my mentor it's more...actually my mentor and me are more on the spiritual bases as far as religion. But I think the race and culture matters because he has an understanding of the same struggles that I'm going through. He's gone through the same thing. We are only 5 or 6 years a part. So there's a lot of stuff that I can do with him. So it's more like a friendship than a mentee-mentor relationship. At the same time, I look up to him when I need things and advice and whether it's spiritual or just everyday living. So I think that race matters because I never was...um around other races as much. He actually understands. Like I can talk to him and he can relate. So I think race is key for me. C1

Similar to several of the women in the women with mentoring relationship's focus group, two participants from the women with out mentoring relationship's focus group concurred that the three aspects does have an effect on the mentoring relationship. They also described the qualities that a mentor must have. For instance, this African American woman, a senior stated that she preferred an African American woman engineer as a mentor:

Sometimes it matters because it depends on that person's status, such as their career. And how they accomplished the things they went through. For me honestly, I would want a mentor that is a female African American engineer from Michigan. D1

One African American woman, who is a senior studying Africana studies, expressed her opinion of the type of mentor she favored. In her case, she would search

for an African American woman too. She pointed out the fact that an African American woman mentor would understand and be able to relate to the same struggles faced in life:

Yes um...I am looking for someone, such as an African American. It's like she can relate to me more because we've actually gone through a struggle together. And by her and I being of the same race and sex will help because we are considered the minority. D1

Likewise, one African American man, a sophomore, reported that race and sex influences who he picks as a mentor. He expressed that he would be more comfortable with a mentor who is the same sex and race:

I think that sometimes the race and the sex kinda of influences who you pick as your mentor. Because you may not feel um comfortable around someone who is a male or female and you're the opposite. E1

For a number of participants with and without mentoring relationships, the race, ethnicity, and gender had an effect on choice of the mentor. Many of the participants felt that they could relate more to the mentor who was the same race and sex. Nevertheless, others felt that race, ethnicity and gender had no effect on the mentoring relationship.

No Influence Regarding Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Similar to the some women with mentors, one participant in the men with mentor's focus group each had a different opinion about the race, ethnicity, and sex of a mentor. This Hispanic American man who is a senior studying bioscience mentioned that the experience that the mentor had was highly important than race, ethnicity, and sex:

I would say that it didn't have a huge impact. But it was important for me to see someone like myself in high positions. You know doing things to help us out. Because it gave the idea like, "hey I can do that too if they're doing it." And I have that option. But other than that the biggest thing would be how long I knew the person or what experience they had. And what knowledge they had that can be helpful to me. And that was pretty much the biggest impact. B1

Also similar to the Hispanic American man above and one African American male participant from the men with mentoring relationship's focus group, one African American man who participated in the men without mentoring relationship's focus group reported that the experience of a mentor is more important than race, ethnicity, and gender. He is a graduate student studying organizational communication who offered an example of how important experience is:

I think the most important thing that a mentor needs is experience. Um... that is more important than age, race, gender anything. Because um... my friend who works at the car wash can't tell me how to be successful in this program. So, it depends on where you are or what you're seeking advice on as well. E5

Another African American man studying business administration agrees that the experience a mentor has is more important than race and age:

I also say that um, age and race and all that other stuff that can be on the back burner. I just want somebody that has experience and someone who can share their experience with me. E6

One Hispanic American woman pursuing her master's degree in organizational communication who participated in the men and women without mentoring relationship's focus group strongly feels that if a mentor has effective communication and experience, than those two qualities are more significant than race, age, and gender:

I agree with him. I definitely don't think that age, race, gender or anything is at least at the top of the list for me. But with experience I think that the ability to communicate effectively is also really important. E6

Additionally, this Hispanic American participant stated that race, ethnicity, and gender does not have an effect on the mentoring relationship. Consequently, personalities and ideas between her and the mentor are more important, as she explains:

Um, actually it doesn't have any effect on me as long as personalities and ideas agree between my self and the other person. E1

Other participants felt that race, ethnicity, and gender did not have an effect on their mentoring experiences. This African American woman, an Africana studies major and a senior was a participant of the women without mentoring relationship's focus group spoke about the benefit of learning from different races and perspectives of a mentor:

I think race might matter a little. It's not that big of a factor because you have someone who is the same of ethnic background. They, of course, can tell you a struggle in what you're going through. But as far as ah, a person of a different race, I can get a different perspective. There are not that many um African Americans in my major. I would be with someone who is the opposite race anyways. D1

When asked what effect does the race, ethnicity, and sex have on the choice of a mentoring relationship, some of the participants in the all men without mentor's focus group answered similarly. The participants also felt that as long as they were learning something and gaining support from the mentor, race, ethnicity, and sex didn't matter. For instance, this African American man who is a sophomore stated:

Um having a different mentor of a different race and gender, I'll be able to learn... ahh things. But if you have someone of the same of any of those, it's more likely to be able to learn how they will go about things and how they would handle things in their situation. Because they could have probably been in the same situation as you were in. F1

Another African American man participant emphasizes the importance of having a mentor who will support him. He shares his views between having an African American man mentor and a Caucasian woman mentor. As a senior and an education major, he would rather select the Caucasian woman principal who offers support and guidance than the African American man principal that lacks support:

If I found someone it would be a high school principal. If I find a principal who is a black man and he's not supportive whereas a white woman who is, then I'm going to kick it with the white woman. Because she actually cares and she's offering the support, you know what I'm saying. She's offering me the leverage. F6

Conflicting Feelings About Race, Ethnicity, and Gender of a Mentor

When the participants in the men and women without mentor's focus groups were asked what effect does the race, ethnicity and gender have on the choice of the mentoring relationship, a couple of the men seemingly contradicted what they stated. They felt that the three aspects matter, but thought that the mentor's differences would help enhance them professionally. One reason why the men seemed very reluctant to answer boldly may be because there was only one woman participant in this focus group. Every time a question was posed to the group, the woman was the first to respond. The men seem like they didn't want to disagree with the woman.

One African American male, a sophomore a part of the men and women without mentoring relationship's focus group, makes a contradictory statement about the effects of race, ethnicity and gender. He begins by arguing that the three aspects had a great effect on him as a man. Then he states that any one can be his mentor including a woman:

I think that um... the gender or the sex of a mentor is probably has the greatest affect on me as a man...I guess I'm on the same wave link as another man that can you know give me advice...on careers or school. But I also believe that a mentor can rise from the ashes, so it can be anybody. It can be a woman or a Jewish grandmother, it doesn't matter. E1

In the same focus group, another African American man participant who is studying business administration also contradicted himself. At the beginning he mentioned that his mentor could be a woman, but he would rather choose an African

American man. He feels that an African American man could assist him better with difficult challenges verses a woman:

As an African American male, I agree. It could be a woman, but I would rather, pick an African American man. Because he could be some one who has had same challenges that maybe I'm facing. Or maybe I'm headed towards. I would pick an African American male if I had my choice to pick. E1

According to one African American man, an education major, who was a part of the men without mentoring relationship's focus group, if the mentoring relationship was spiritual, and then race, ethnicity, and gender may not have mattered. However, he believed that those three aspects were effective if he was seeking a mentor to help develop him:

I think it depends on whether it's a spiritual kind of mentor. Things like gender, race, and ethnicity may not matter as much. Um but when you start looking in to just a person to help you develop, of course you want to have someone that has the same physical features or anything like yourself. So that way you can kind of learn well what it takes to be a man. And to go even further what your role should be as a black man. F1

The outline of this chapter has shaped the lived experience of students of color with and without mentoring relationships. The three major thematic sections discussed included: (a) Perceptions of success; (b) The search for important information; and (c) Race, ethnicity, and gender among mentoring experiences. These themes are representations of the lived experiences of the participants. The themes focus mainly on the participant's opinions and personalized definitions of success, the importance of academic success, discovering important information and sharing whether or not race, ethnicity, and gender has an effect on the mentoring relationship. Chapter Five will discuss how the different themes relate to another.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The final chapter explicates the connection of the three essential themes developed through the focus group discussions. The three themes that emerged from the focus group discussions were: (a) Perceptions of success; (b) The search for important information; and (c) Race, ethnicity, and gender among mentoring experiences. This section will present a summary of these major themes and show how they interrelate with one another and each research question. Finally, the limitations of this current study and implications for future research will also be discussed.

Mentored Success vs. Un-mentored Success

In accordance with the first research question, “Are students of color who seek formal mentoring more successful than students who do not seek mentoring relationships?” all the participants in each focus group were asked to define what success meant to them. Many of the participants had different views of what success meant to them. In fact there were no significant distinction between students of color with and without mentoring relationships and their outlook of success. Similar comments were made by both types of groups like, “...it’s achieving a goal” (A5), “Achieving them in whatever...” (D1).

There were more women in both groups than men who personalized that managing their time was most important to their academic success. One male, a sophomore from the men and women with mentoring relationship’s focus group reported that, “...learning how to manage my time was most important...” (C3). Impacting others was a key component that attributed to many participants with mentoring experiences. They

explicated that influencing others, such as society and family were significant to their academic success. The vast majority of men with and without formal mentors spoke of how doing their personal best was an important aspect that steered to their academic success. One woman participant, a senior from the men and women with mentoring relationship's focus group commented that, "...most important thing to my academic success would just be doing my best" (C3).

Similarly, more men than women reported that learning something from a class was another key aspect that they identified as most important to their academic success. They felt that it was significant to apply the knowledge they learned from class to their life. The next section will explain how the second theme correlates with the research question, "How do students of color who lack formal mentors get important information?"

Discovering the Information

Participants without formal mentors were asked the open-ended question that emerged through out the discussions, "Where do you find information and resources? One African American woman, who is a junior, discussed how parents can be mentors by telling you who to go talk to for any information regarding school. According to Buell (2004), a mentor is supportive, leads, teaches, and serves as a role model.

The concept of resources was categorized as educational, personal, social, and professional by the participants without mentors. Scholarships and research programs are examples of educational resources. Finding information on how to budget one's money was an example of a personal resource. Social resources involved the discovery of

organizations located on campus. Professional resources referred to advice on how to search for a career.

When referring to resources, participants often mentioned how they networked with people on campus. Several men and women without mentors focused on their first-year experience in college. One African American male, a senior and education major, spoke of how he sought information early during his freshmen year by getting involved with many different types of people. As stated earlier on in this thesis, mentoring is generally viewed as a process involving the transfer of skills and knowledge from the mentor to the mentee (Buell, 2004).

For some participants, family members, such as parents, siblings, and other relatives were considered as a source of important information. Specifically, there were more men than women without mentoring relationships that received personal, educational, social, and professional resources. Both men and women without mentoring relationships explained that their peers provided important information and resources to them. These participants classified peers as “upperclassmen” and “older people on campus.” Existing literature states that a mentor is usually a person with greater experience and seniority in the world (Burks, 1984). Constituents, such as organizations and academic departments on campus, were another major source where students of color found resources and information. Two men without mentoring relationships explicated that student organizations on campus and departments were places where they received information.

Likewise, three women without mentoring relationships also spoke how departments and organizations offered resources to them. One of the women who is a senior and Africana studies major, for example, explained how she received her resources from the student support program at WMU. Results in this section indicated that students of color without mentoring relationships seek important information more from organizations and academic departments on campus. Both men and women sought resources from student organizations, such as *You Beautiful Black Woman* and *Colligate Black and Christian*. In addition, participants have communicated the importance of finding information and resources through others and now they will discuss the influence that certain types of mentoring relationships have.

Similar and Different Mentors

Recent literature found that most mentor-protégé relationships appear to be same-race, rather than cross-race (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). Consequently, students of color have fewer mentors if they request a same-race pairing. In regards to the last research question, “Is there a difference between men of color and women of color and their experience with mentoring?,” participants were asked what effect does race, ethnicity, and gender have on the mentoring relationship? The findings highlight four specific points. First, the participants with mentoring relationships shared positive / negative experiences. Most of the experiences that were positive pertained to several men and women of color who were paired with same-sex and same-race mentors. Nonetheless, one multi-ethnic woman, a graduate student studying organization communication shared her positive experience with a mentor who was an African

American male. Initially, this was an informal (natural) relationship that caused the two to bond.

Some participants who were paired with cross-sex and cross-race mentoring relationships described a negative experience. For example, an African American woman, a junior, who was assigned to a Caucasian woman, simply stated that her mentor did not have an impact on her. As supported by research, informal relationships, which emerge naturally, are more beneficial to newcomers than formal relationships initiated by the institution (Schrodt et al., 2003). Thus, I would conclude that if the mentee is able to connect with the mentor and vice versa, then the relationship is predicted to occur longer and have a positive outcome. According to Ragins and Cotton (1999), informal relationships last between 3 and 6 years, whereas formal relationships are usually contracted to last between 6 months to 1 year. Many of participants who are paired with informal mentors explained that they have been involved in the mentoring relationship for a number of years. Other who were paired with formal mentors by a third party, stated that the relationship didn't last longer than a year. One African American woman recalls having a different mentor for the last three years of her undergraduate program. In her case, she was assigned a formal mentor by the university.

Second, a majority of the participants with and without mentoring relationships concurred that race, ethnicity, and gender does have an effect on the mentor relationship. According to Ragins (1995), when women and people of color overcome the barriers to obtaining a mentor, their gender and race are believed to have an impact on the experience of mentoring and potential outcomes. However, some participants with

mentoring relationships conceptualized that a mentor of the same-race is not an option in their program of study. Even some students of color without mentoring relationships felt that these three aspects had an effect if they were to have a mentoring relationship. Their perceptions of same-sex and same-race mentors indicated that there must be some similarities that exist between the two counterparts.

In contrast, the third point clearly explicates that the race, gender, and ethnicity of a mentor does not matter. A number of participants with and without mentoring relationships declared that the experience that a mentor has is more significant than these three aspects. If a mentor has experience and is willing to share with his or her mentor important information, such as scholarship, then matter of same-race and same-sex is second to none. The participants did not explain whether or not the experience of a mentor has to be similar to the mentee's experience. They were more concerned with how much information the mentor knew about, (i.e., careers, internships, academic scholarships, and other important resources).

Fourth and finally, quite a few men both with, and without, mentoring relationships appeared to contradict themselves. Within this group, there was one Hispanic American woman who initiated a response to the first question, "What effects does the race, ethnicity, and gender have on the mentoring relationship?" After the Hispanic American woman answered the question, each of the men would give a direct answer and then state the opposite. For instance one man, a second year graduate student stated, "the sex of a mentor has a greater effect on me...But I believe that a mentor can rise from the ashes...It can be a woman..." (E1). The findings reveal that both students

of color with, and without, mentoring relationships are more likely to choose a mentor who is the same race, ethnicity and sex as themselves. Recent literature suggested that barriers to the success of people of color and women included exclusion from information sources and the lack of mentors (Smith et al., 2000). The one barrier that these students of color face is the lack of faculty of color. However, many of the students felt that the mentor's qualities, such as experience that he or she has and whether or not they can communicate effectively are more significant than race, ethnicity, and gender.

Limitations

This study has extended what was already stated in the literature. No existing research has focused specifically on students of color with and without mentors in academic settings. I sought to capture the lived experience of the students of color. Many of the students of color are not paired with mentors on campus. However, students of color who are not paired with formal mentors receive their information and resources from organizations and peers on campus. According to some students, there is a lack of faculty of color. It is important to acknowledge some limitations of this thesis. This study focused on students of color consisting of Asian Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. However, there were no Native American and Asian American participants present. During the recruitment process, many Asians were often mistaken for Asian Americans. There is a lack of Asian Americans students at this university. Therefore, this was considered as a limitation.

As a result, African Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans were the two groups who participated within the focus group discussions. Another factor that may have

contributed to the lack of participation of students of color from all racial/ethnic groups may have been the absences of the time and date on the flyer (see Appendix A). Many of the students of color who were interested in participating wanted to know in advance the time and date of a focus group. In addition, the doors of the building where the focus groups were held locked after 5p.m. This constraint forced participants who were late to withhold the focus group from getting started on time. Having only one African American conducting the focus group discussions was also a limitation. If there had been another facilitator of a different descent, then maybe the other underrepresented groups would have participated. He or she would have created a more diverse environment for the comfort level of the other students of color. During the analysis process, I noticed that the question, “What are your reasons for not having a mentor?” was not posed to the students without mentoring relationships.

Future Implications

According to Kalbfleish (2002b), mentor relationships never truly end. There are three stages, *initiation*, *repairing*, and *maintaining*, that explain how mentor relationships are initiated and maintained through communication (Kalbfleish, 2002a). Future research should be conducted on the repairing stage of a mentor relationship. Conflict is most likely to occur in mentoring relationships. Within this study, several of the participants encountered negative experiences in the mentoring relationships. No one discussed solutions to the obstacles that were hindering the formal mentoring relationship. If the obstacles were addressed, then maybe the relationship could have been repaired. Another future implication is the need to expand the size of the focus group

beyond the African American and Hispanic American population. More attention needs to be given to other students of color, (i.e., Asian Americans and Native Americans). Their insights would likely uncover additional themes that were not apparent in these findings.

Moreover, research needs to be conducted on mentoring issues among students of color in the academic setting. It would be interesting to see the benefits of conducting survey research. Survey research would allow me to gather information regarding a larger population. Questionnaires would be a useful measurement for collecting the data.

Conclusion

What is most intriguing about this study is the fact that most of the students of color without mentors receive their information and resources from their peers and organizations that they're involved in. Although they are not paired with formal mentors, (i.e., faculty, academic advisors, or peer mentors at the university), they still seem to find other avenues for gathering information. However, as a graduate student I can honestly say that I didn't just rely on organizations and peers for my information and resources. I initiated several mentoring relationships with faculty who provided educational and professional resources. The success of students who receive information from peers is much different than compared to students who seek information from formal mentors. Students who seek information from peers tend to network with other peers and organizations. According to the findings, they are more prone to be socialized to college life by students who have more college experience. However, the success of students of color who gather information from formal mentors (i.e., faculty or academic advisors)

tend to receive professional and educational (academic) resources. One participant shared an experience she had with a faculty mentor who provided her with information about different scholarships.

In order to gather further information on whether students of color with mentors are more successful than similar students without mentors, this study will have to be expanded using a longitudinal survey. The longitudinal survey will measure the success of the individuals over time. In addition, the race, ethnicity, and gender of a mentor may or may not have influenced the choice of the mentoring relationship, but the similarities, experience and effective communication do have a significant impact. Throughout all the focus group discussions, it appears that having a mentor is important. According to Kalbfleisch and Davies (1993), a mentor provides his or her mentee with advice, support, information and professional sponsorship. I believe that all students should have a mentor to help guide and direct them academically and professionally.

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Appendix A

Mentoring Discussion Flyer

MENTORING DISCUSSION
STUDENTS OF COLOR WITH AND WITHOUT MENTORS

JOIN CANDACE DIXON, GRADUATE STUDENT, FOR A

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ON

“MENTOR – MENTEE RELATIONSHIPS IN AN
ACADEMIC SETTING”

THIS IS A RESEARCH STUDY THAT WILL GATHER ALL
INFORMATION PROVIDED DURING THE FOCUS GROUP

Must be at least a Sophomore in College

*** PIZZA WILL BE PROVIDED ***

219 Sprau Tower

Contact info: Candace Dixon
(269) 324-4051
C9dixon@wmich.edu

Appendix B

Instrumentation

A general conversational style of interviewing was used during the focus group discussions. In order to facilitate the process, the following topical protocol and questions were asked.

Topical protocol (topics covered)

1. Effects of race, ethnicity, and gender of mentor
2. Importance of career and success for mentee
3. Characteristics of a mentor
4. Selection process of a mentor and protégé.

Hypothetical Questions

1. What effect does the race, ethnicity, and gender have on the choice of the protégé and the mentoring relationship?
2. How does protégés life career stage affect the frequency, quality, and importance of mentorship?
3. Define what success means to you.
4. What do you identify as most important to your academic success?
5. What characteristics must individuals have to be effective mentors?
6. How are protégés selected by a mentor or how are mentors selected by protégés?

ⁱ Mentee and protégé have the same meaning. Both terms will be used interchangeably throughout this document.

HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: January 25, 2005

To: Mark Orbe, Principal Investigator
Candace Dixon, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Ph.D., Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Lagerwey".

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 04-12-09

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "The Importance of Mentor-Mentee Relationships: A Qualitative Study that Examines Students of Color in Academic Settings" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: January 25, 2006

HSIRB Informal Consent Form

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



School of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

H. S. I. R. B.

Approved for use for one year from this date:

Informed Consent Form

JAN 25 2005

x May Lagery
HSIRB Chair

Western Michigan University
School of Communication

Principal Investigator: Dr. Mark P. Orbe, Associate Professor of Communication & Diversity, School of Communication, Western Michigan University, 269-387-3132, Orbe@wmich.edu

Student Investigator: Candace Dixon, MA student, School of Communication, Western Michigan University, 269-387-3151, candace.dixon@wmich.edu

I've been invited to participate in a research project entitled, *The Importance of Mentee-Mentor Relationships: A Qualitative Study That Examines Students of Color in Academic Settings*, which will study the lived experiences of people of color regarding mentoring relationships. This study is being conducted by Candace Dixon (MA student, School of Communication) for her master's thesis.

My consent to participate in this project indicates that I agree to participate in the focus group discussion. This process will take approximately 90 minutes to complete. I can terminate the focus group at any time for any reason without prejudice or penalty. My choice of participating or not participating in the study, or my refusal to answer a question or questions for any reason during the focus group, will not affect my status at WMU in any way.

One risk to participate is the 90 minute time commitment needed to complete the focus group. Other risk may include the possibility of discomfort while sharing experiences, topics may be sensitive to respond to, and confidentiality may be breached. By taking part in this focus group, I might learn other's mentoring experiences and "hands on" experience about research.

My identity as well as others within the focus group and information collected from me shall remain confidential. I agree not to identify names of others who I've had mentoring relationships with. In addition, my responses will be audio-taped, transcribed, and later reviewed by the investigator of this project. The audio tapes following transcription, will immediately be destroyed. Written transcripts will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office and at no time be handled by anyone other than the investigators of this study. All materials, including written materials will be retained for

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

H. S. I. R. B.

Approved for use for one year from this date:

JAN 26 2005

x May Lagery
HSIRB Chair

Informed Consent Form (Cont.)

at least three years (as required by university policy) in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will be subsequently destroyed. In short, at no time will any of my responses be linked to me personally.

If I have any question or concerns about this study, or would like a copy of the research reports it generates, I may contact the investigators listed on the top of this form. In addition, I may also contact the Chair of Western Michigan University's Human Subjects Institutional review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice-President for Research at 269-387-8298 with any concerns I may have.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. I should not participate in this interview if the corner does not show a stamped date and signature. My participation indicates that I am aware of the purpose and requirements of the study.

Signature

Date

Consent Obtained by: _____

Initials of researcher

Date

My signature below indicates that I agree not to discuss, outside of this focus group, any comments made by the other participants.

Signature

Date