Impact Of Same-Race Mentoring On Adult Female African-American Students Enrolled At A Regional State College

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IMPACT OF SAME-RACE MENTORING ON ADULT FEMALE
AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS ENROLLED AT A REGIONAL STATE COLLEGE

By

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IMPACT OF SAME-RACE MENTORING ON ADULT FEMALE AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS ENROLLED AT A REGIONAL STATE COLLEGE

Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of adult female African-American students. In addition, this study presents the experiences and obstacles faced by adult female African-American students working one on one with non-minority mentors at Reginal State College. A final purpose of the study was to document students’ perceptions about their levels of academic success with a White mentor or with an African-American mentor. This is a mentoring model in which students are assigned to a mentor from the time they are admitted to the college, and they work one on one with this mentor through graduation.

Regional State College is a predominantly White (about 87% of faculty and staff are White) regional state college in Northeast United States, which historically has struggled with creating an environment that welcomes and appreciates diversity. The study suggests to what extent the race of the mentor matters to student success and development. Eight female African-American students participated in this study. The primary method for data collection was interviews with the selected participants. Data were thoroughly examined through coding techniques to provide a complete analysis of the results. Three major themes emerged from this data providing a strong framework to understand the participants’ perspectives on mentoring relationships. The three themes that emerged from the interpretation of the data provided valuable insights into the educational journeys of eight adult female African-American students and their relationships.
with their mentors. The results from this study demonstrate that, although some adult female African-American students have been successful in their mentoring relationships with mentors outside of their race and gender, they all expressed their preference to have a female African-American mentor.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This study took place at a regional state college in the Northeastern United States, and is presented as Regional State College. This distinctive statewide public institution serves mostly working adults pursuing associate, bachelor’s and/or master’s degrees onsite in in the northeastern United States. Data taken from college’s fact book shows that an overwhelming majority of faculty and staff are White, about 87%. Only two percent (39) of full-time faculty members represent a minority group. The numbers representing minority groups among faculty do not represent the student population at Regional State College. The college serves students from large metropolitan areas, suburbs, small towns, and rural communities. According to the same fact book, 61% of students are White; 14% are African-American; six percent are Hispanic; and two percent are Asian/Pacific Islanders or American Indians.

The Regional State College’s mission is to transform people and communities by providing rigorous programs that connect individuals’ unique and diverse lives to their personal learning goals. Highlights of the college’s mission statement published on their website are: a commitment to promoting social justice and a sustainable world through responsiveness to human and social circumstances; ensuring a healthy democracy that recognizes and respects diversity in all its forms; serving students and the public with a high level of courtesy and effectiveness; and advocating at the regional, state, and national levels for the needs of students and of higher education. According to Opp & Gosetti (2002) it is important to provide a diverse faculty with backgrounds similar to their students. When students see faculty who are members of their own race and ethnicity, it contributes to their sense of self-worth and values (Opp &
Regional State College’s mission includes a commitment to promote social justice and having a diverse faculty that can contribute to that mission.

**Statement of the Problem**

Research shows that African-American women frequently report experiencing difficulties and obstacles at predominantly White institutions, and many of these women describe experiences of overt and subtle forms of racism, sexism, and other sources of chronic oppression on these college campuses (Shavers & Moore, 2014). A large body of research has demonstrated that mentoring plays a significant role in student success and women mentors appear to make a substantial contribution to the academic careers of women students (Schlegel, 2000). Mentoring is an essential element in guiding women through major transitions in life by making a positive or negative impact. The majority of studies on same-race mentoring emphasize its potentially important role in reducing social isolation and warming up the “chilly climate” of predominantly White institutions for minorities (Spalter-Roth, Shin, Mayorova, & White, 2013). However, the majority of these studies on the outcomes of academic mentoring focus mainly on traditional undergraduate or graduate students. Little is known about the effect of mentoring on adult (non-traditional age) undergraduate students. This study explores the importance of race in mentoring and the success of adult female African-American students. This study describes experiences of African-American women students that affect their success and their ability to overcome educational, career, and psychosocial challenges while they work one on one with a White mentor or an African-American female mentor.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to explore the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of female African-American adult students. The researcher seeks
to understand, discover, and expose the experiences and potential obstacles faced by adult female African-American students working one on one with mentors at Regional State College. The study documents how students characterize their experiences with a White mentor or an African-American mentor. The context of the study is a mentoring model in which students are assigned to a mentor when they are admitted to the college and work one on one with this mentor through graduation. While there are studies about same-race mentoring, few focus on adult students’ experiences. This study can add to the research on this topic. This study can increase the evidence reported in the literature about mentoring and same-race matching while it brings attention to adult female students who experience same-race mentoring.

**Research Question**

The following questions guided the researcher in conducting this case study. The overarching research question was: What are the effects of race and gender matching in mentoring adult female African-American students at a regional state college? Sub-questions addressed the following: What are the experiences of adult female African-American students in a predominantly White institution? What were participant perspectives on the process of developing a relationship with their mentors? How did participants describe the role of their mentors during the process of setting realistic goals for their educational and professional plans? Did race, ethnicity or gender influence the participant’s work with a mentor? Did race of the primary mentor influence the participant’s success and progress? How?

**Conceptual Framework**

The researcher has worked at Regional State College for a few years and identified a gap between the mission statement and the practice of mentoring. Although mentoring is recognized as beneficial for students, minority students seeking mentorship often experience a number of
difficulties (Chan, Yeh, & Krumboltz, 2015). Regional State College is dominantly White and therefore minority students do not always have the option to engage with same-race mentors. Research has shown less ease, lower satisfaction, and more difficult communication in mixed-race mentoring dyads as opposed to same-race dyads (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005). There is insufficient research on the mentoring needs of ethnic minority protégés and on cross-racial mentoring relationships (Chan, Yeh, & Krumboltz, 2015). The researcher used Black feminist thought and a womanist theoretical framework to guide the analysis and to understand and expose the experiences of adult female African-American students in mentoring relationships at Regional State College. The mentoring models adopted by Chan, Yeh, & Krumboltz (2015) informed the construct of this study, which confirms the need for “inclusion of multiculturalism in mentoring” (Benishek, Bieschke, Park, & Slattery, 2004; Fassinger, 1997). According to Chan, Yeh, & Krumboltz (2015), Fassinger’s (1997) feminist mentoring model and Benishek et al.’s (2004) multicultural feminist model complement each other. Fassinger’s (1997) feminist mentoring model pinpoints the mentoring processes of power, relational dynamics, collaboration, commitment to diversity, integration of dichotomies, and incorporation of political analysis; Benishek et al.’s (2004) model propose a multicultural feminist model that explicitly infused multicultural considerations into the mentoring dimensions identified by Fassinger.

Using Fassinger’s (1997) and Benishek et al.’s (2004) models, the researcher sought to examine the experiences of adult female African-American students at Regional State College with regard to their relationships with their mentors. To uncover practices and create opportunity for comparison, the researcher chose students who had mentors from both African-American groups and dominant White groups. According to Crenshaw (1991), women of color have experienced intersectional disempowerment that men of color and White women seldom
confront. Crenshaw shows that their specific raced and gendered experiences, although intersectional, often define as well as confine the interests of the entire group.

**Assumptions, Limitations, Scope**

One of the limitations of this case study was the time frame. In-depth interviews were conducted over a short period of time; this was not a longitudinal study. As a case study, the researcher explored a snapshot in time and provided a fairly narrow analysis for that reason. Secondly, the scope of the study was limited to a eight participants and might not be generalizable to a wider population. The study was necessarily limited in part because of the very few number of mentors of color working at Regional State College. Third, another possible limitation was the potential researcher’s bias due to familiarity with the workplace. Asselin (2003) has suggested that it is best for the insider researcher to gather data with her or his “eyes open” but assuming that she or he knows nothing about the phenomenon being studied. Asselin (2003) pointed out that although the researcher might be part of the culture under study, he or she might not understand the subculture. However, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a nonnative researcher. Thus, what might be a limitation might ultimately be a strength in this case study.

A final limitation of this study relates to the contradiction that exists in the literature review. The researcher acknowledges that the literature review discusses and supports same-race and gender mentoring; however, there is literature in support of multicultural mentoring as well. The researcher did not attempt to resolve this contradiction in the context of this study.
**Significance**

The researcher anticipated that the findings from this case study could address the importance, value, and contribution of same-race mentoring in an educational system that is entirely based on mentoring. Additionally, this case study might support the hiring of greater numbers of faculty members of color, and could help facilitate channels to provide a culturally diverse learning environment that supports equity and diversity. This study can potentially be useful to Regional State College in examining current hiring practices and providing rigorous training to improve the quality of searches by moving away from the legacy of exclusion of racial and ethnic groups.

**Definition of Terms**

**Regional State College.** Pseudonym for a public institution of higher education in the northeastern United States.

**African-American.** An ethnic group of Americans with total or partial ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of Africa; also referred to as Black Americans or Afro-Americans.

**Intersectionality.** The theory of how different types of discrimination interact. An intersectional approach takes into account the historical, social, and political context and recognizes the unique experience of the individual based on the intersection of all relevant grounds. In many cases, women in a racial minority experience discrimination in a completely different way than men in a racial minority or even women as a gender. That is to say, discrimination experienced because of gender, for example against women, can be directly related, encouraged, and shaped by someone’s race or ethnicity as well.
**Mentoring.** A process in which an experienced person (the mentor) guides another person (the mentee or protégé) in the development of her or his own ideas, learning, and personal/professional competence.

**Macroaggression.** Everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

**Predominantly White Institution (PWI).** This is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment or faculty and staff.

**White.** This refers to a racial classification; belonging to or denoting a human group having light-colored skin (chiefly used of peoples of European extraction). The contemporary usage of “White people” or the “White race” as a large group of (mainly European) populations.

**Conclusion**

Regional State College occupies a peculiar position, as several of its offices are located in proximity to large metropolitan areas, which are among the most diverse cities in the country. However, faculty demographics, particularly race, do not represent the demographics of the student population at Regional State College or the demographics of the northeastern region where it is located. By focusing on the importance of matching mentors with their female African-American adult mentees based on race, the researcher anticipated that this study could highlight the need for a more diverse faculty. The literature provided supports the idea that ethnic minority students tend to prefer and report more satisfaction with racially homogeneous mentor relationships and more likely to be successful. Lack of faculty of color at Regional State College, in which students rely heavily on mentoring, makes it difficult to match students of
color to mentors of the same race. This lack of diversity on the faculty can potentially harm the well-being, self-esteem, and academic success of students who do not share the norms of White culture. This study can add to the existing research by exploring female African-American adult students’ experiences within the context of a PWI public college for adults. Findings from the study provide knowledge about mentees’ experiences that might inform administrators and faculty about ways to strengthen Regional State College’s mentorship program, with attention to development of specific cultural mentoring skills, recruitment of a diverse faculty, and recognition of those challenges faced specifically by adult students of color.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the mentoring experiences of African-American female students enrolled at Regional State College and to explore how their experiences have contributed to their educational and career success. The focus of this study is on the role of race in mentoring relationships as a support system for female African-American adult students facing racial, gender, and power issues in society.

This chapter includes a review of the literature that will attempt to describe the challenges facing African-American women in higher education, existing research done on gender, race, and power struggles in society, mentoring and its different aspects, and the role of race matching in mentoring.

Theoretical Framework

Major themes of womanism and Black feminist thought served as the underlying theoretical framework of this study. Lindsay-Dennis (2015) explains that Black feminist and womanist theories are culturally based perspectives that take into consideration the contextual and interactive effects of herstory culture, race, class, gender, and other forms of oppression. These frameworks provide a contextualized understanding of African-American girls’ experiences and perspectives. Collins (1996) points to Alice Walker’s 1983 book In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens and explains that Walker introduced the term “womanist.” Walker defined a “womanist” as “a Black feminist or feminist of color”; thus, on some basic level, Walker herself sees it as being virtually interchangeable with “feminist.” Collins (1996) believes that, like Walker, many African-American women see little difference between the two since both support a common agenda of Black women’s self-definition and self-determination.
Collins (2000) defined Black feminist theory as a critical social theory that aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions. The core themes within the theoretical framework include oppression, the image of the Black woman, self-definition, sexuality, motherhood, and political activism, and love relationships. According to Collins, oppression is an unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. She (2000) also noted that race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity constitute major forms of oppression. According to Collins (2006), Black feminist thought came from the ideology that no matter what age, social status, sexual orientation, or profession, all African-American women share like culture and experiences.

Lindsay-Dennis (2015) suggests that Black feminist thought and womanism situate African-American girls’ development, attitudes, and behaviors in a cultural context; although Black feminist thought and womanism are different theoretical frameworks, both theories allow for examination of the Black female psyche and social experiences, providing a means to contextualize Black girlhood. Many scholars view womanism as another term for, extension of, or form of Black feminism (Collins, 2000). However, Lindsay-Dennis (2015) defines womanism as a separate concept with its own goals, characteristics, and methods that are not equivalent to Black feminism. She (2015) believes the central principle of womanism is the absolute necessity of speaking from and about one’s own experiential location; womanism is a social change methodology that stems from everyday experiences of Black women and their modes of solving practical problems. She says that the goals of womanism include using everyday people to solve problems, ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and nature, and reconnecting humans with the spirit realm.
The Black feminist-womanist research paradigm acknowledges that only within the context of the community does the individual appear and, through dialogue, continue to emerge (Dillard, 2000). Black feminist-womanist research encourages active engagement and passion to guide the research process because a passionate, engaged approach to research forces the individual to explore the meaning of one’s lived experience and research training (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Research designs that facilitate dialogue, accompanied by reflection of ideas or theories generated throughout this process, may enhance participants’ ability to speak for themselves, name their own experiences, and make decisions about their lives. Lindsay-Dennis (2015) emphasizes that the Black feminist-womanist research paradigm addresses the research gap—because African-American girls are an understudied group—by providing researchers with a culturally responsive perspective and research strategies to advance the state of Black girlhood scholarship.

In *The Womanist Reader*, Phillips (2006) traces the roots of the term “womanist” to Alice Walker’s 1979 short story “Coming Apart.” Phillips discusses the absence of any systematic treatment of the womanist idea and, notably, the absence of any definitive compendium of womanist scholarship documenting what has now been more than a quarter century of womanist scholarly and creative work (p. xix). Phillips (2006) includes an essay by Sheared to represent womanism in education. Sheared (1994) asks the question, “How are we to deliver course content in such a way that classroom discourse acknowledges all voices—the multiple ways in which people interpret and reflect their understandings of the world?” (p. 269) Sheared (1994) argues that: “The womanist perspective acknowledges the intertwining realities that human beings experience within society” (p. 271). Phillips and McCaskill (1995) discuss a false interpretation that the academy has nothing to gain from everyday Black women and their
experiences and that everyday Black women have everything to gain from the academy. They add that this unspoken assumption has permitted—even tacitly encouraged—a dismissal of everyday Black women’s experiences as material worthy of scholarly investigation, and of everyday Black women themselves as capable generators, interpreters, or validators of knowledge, even when that knowledge pertains to their own experiences. Phillips and McCaskill (1995) argue when Black women enter the academy, they bring with them different kinds of lives—lives shaped by the ubiquitous and historically inescapable fact of triple oppression of race, class, and gender. They also bring with them their African origin, and as Phillips and McCaskill (1995) point out, these two facts (triple oppression and African origins) generate unique thematic concerns and interpretive frameworks that, when brought in by Black women, enrich the academy, further humanize it, and make it more accessible to a wider segment of humanity, including, but not limited to, Black women. They (1995) explain that the essential purpose of their publication was to help Black women who are trying to bring the everyday into the academy as well as to help the academy by presenting the everyday in a format that academicians could understand. The idea was to disrupt the traditional notion that Black women are merely the beneficiaries of academia in favor of the notion that the academy, particularly in this era of anxiety about “changing demographics,” is in fact the beneficiary of Black women’s presence. Phillips and McCaskill (1995) argue that Black women open the door for other marginalized and excluded groups and for the inclusion and institutional validation of their experiences and concerns; and for this reason Black feminism and womanism are a crucial aspect of the reformulation of the academy as a whole. The shift in reformulating perspectives has begun.
Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) uses examples of Black womanist teachers to help teachers reflect on their own pedagogy. She finds these teachers being guided by a humility and a philosophy of caring that is much needed in educational system today. She (2002) argues that womanists recognize that because so many Black women have experienced the convergence of racism, sexism, and classism, they often have a particular vantage point on what constitutes evidence, valid action, and morality. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) describes three central points that support womanism. First, she argues that womanists understand that oppression is an interlocking system, providing all people with varying degrees of penalty and privilege. Second, they believe that individual empowerment combined with collective action is key to lasting social transformation. Last, they embody a humanism that seeks the liberation of all, not simply themselves. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) explains how Black women teachers were raised in households in which their identity as African-Americans, as people treated as second-class citizens in a democracy, was discussed. Furthermore, in conceptualizing their own agency, these Black women did not believe that their view of maternal responsibility implicated them in a patriarchal family structure. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) believes that by drawing on the cultural norms of West Africa and the oppressive realities that people of African descent have faced in this country, these women viewed the maternal as a profound commitment to the well-being and survival of Black children and Black people. The maternal lens they brought to their teaching practice powerfully connected their personal relationships with students to an active engagement with social reality.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) points out that womanist teachers see racism and other systemic injustices as simultaneously social and educational problems. Consequently, they demonstrate a keen awareness of their power and responsibility as adults to contest social
stereotypes. She (2002) explains that historically, in segregated schools, teachers believed that they were both ethically and ethnically responsible for preparing these youth for future leadership and for contributing to this unique mission, namely the liberation and enhancement of the quality of life for Black people. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) describes womanist teachers as readily demonstrating their political clarity: With their students, both in deed and in word, they share their understanding of society, an understanding that does not shy away from the reality of domination nor from the existence of resistance struggles against oppression. In essence, loving students means discussing such insights with them, not withholding knowledge from them. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) suggests that womanism, in positing our fundamental interdependence, regardless of the social divisions of class, race, and gender, offers heartening, yet sobering, information about the nature of social activism. Thus, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) concludes that womanist teachers see themselves as dynamic agents for social justice precisely because they define themselves as having a sense of connection with and responsibility to the human struggle for freedom and justice.

Race, Gender, and Power

Race and Gender in America

The second paragraph of the United States Declaration of Independence (1776) starts as follows: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” However, the preamble not only neglected to include women, who comprised half the population, it also failed to address slavery. America has always struggled with the concept of equality in connection with race and racial issues. Race is a classification of people that is not based on biological or scientific facts. Race is a political architecture created
by people as a classification of human beings with the purpose of giving power to one group of people and to legitimize the dominance of that group over other groups of people. Wise (2015) explains that race is a political project in America, and racial categories largely attached to a compendium of beliefs that serve either to enforce existing relations of political, economic, and social power, or to challenge them.

Race and ethnicity play an important role in our lives, instructing how people see themselves and the world. Communities are built around racial and ethnic identity, which can be empowering to community members. However, these parts of our identity may also have adverse social implications, influencing our chances of receiving quality medical care, getting a job offer or a mortgage loan, or being wrongly stopped by the police (Psychology Today Website). Studies support the fact that people of color frequently experience microaggressions, which Wing Sue (2010) defines as everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. This is a continuing reality in day-to-day interactions with friends, neighbors, co-workers, teachers, and employers in academic, social, and public settings. He explains that people of color are often made to feel excluded, untrustworthy, second-class citizens, and abnormal. The burden of constant vigilance drains and saps the psychological and spiritual energies of targets and contributes to chronic fatigue and feelings of racial frustration and anger (Wing Sue, 2010).

Gutierrez, Flores, Gonzalez & Harris (2012) discuss discrimination against women of all races and ethnicities, which is amply and repeatedly demonstrated in the history of the United States. Gutierrez, et. al (2012) point out that women were denied access to higher education, law schools, and medical schools until the middle of twentieth century. Although undoubtedly much
has changed, women today still face complex and multifaceted obstacles. Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt (2009) explain that we are socialized—and face normative pressures—to conform to gender stereotypes. It is clear that many of the invisible barriers that obstruct the progress of women are intrapersonal whereas others are interpersonal. Experiences of African-American women are very different from White women even though they are the same gender. Button, Moore & Rienzo (2006) explain double-disadvantage theories that African-American women suffer disproportionately to other groups because of the dual stigma of being both African-American and a woman.

**African-American Women in America**

Higginbotham (1992) explains that race, like gender and class, must be seen as a social construction predicated upon the recognition of difference and signifying the simultaneous distinguishing and positioning of groups vis-a-vis one another. She explains that race is a highly contested representation of relations of power between social categories by which individuals are identified and identify themselves. Higginbotham (1992) also states that the recognition of racial distinctions emanates from and adapts to multiple uses of power in society. Higginbotham (1992) emphasizes that race not only tends to subsume other sets of social relations, namely, gender and class, but it blurs and disguises, suppresses, and negates its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelops. Spelman (1988) observes a double standard on the part of many feminists, who fail to separate their whiteness from their womanness. She argues that White feminists typically discern two separate identities for Black women, the racial and the gender, and conclude that the gender identity of Black women is the same as their own.

History books typically portray the story of male and female slaves as one, making no distinction of the struggles and challenges women faced as slaves. For Black men and women,
slavery was an equally devastating experience. Hallam (2004) explains how, despite common factors, the circumstances of enslavement were different for Black women and Black men. Hallam (2004) believes that the slave owner’s exploitation of the Black woman’s sexuality was one of the most significant factors differentiating the experience of slavery for males and females. For the most part, masters made young, single slaves the objects of their sexual pursuits. However, they did on occasion rape married women. Hallam explains that the inability of the slave husband to protect his wife from such violation points to another fundamental aspect of the relationship between enslaved men and women. A master’s control over both spouses reduced the Black male’s potential for dominance over his wife. For the slave woman, faced with the double onus of being Black and female and having the added burden of dependent children, womanhood and personhood were easier gained within the slave community. Studies of Black women in slavery show the role of race in shaping class relations and constructing gender’s power. Higginbotham (1992) explains the racialized configuration of gender under a system of class rule that compelled and expropriated women’s physical labor and denied them legal right to their own bodies and sexuality, much less to the bodies to which they gave birth. While law and public opinion idealized motherhood and enforced the protection of White women’s bodies, the opposite held true for the bodies of Black women. Higginbotham (1992) states that Black women experienced the vicissitudes of slavery through gendered lives and thus differently from slave men. They bore and nursed children and performed domestic duties, all on top of doing fieldwork. Unlike slave men, slave women fell victim to rape precisely because of their gender. Yet gender itself was both constructed and fragmented by race. Gender, so colored by race, remained from birth until death inextricably linked to one’s personal identity.
and social status (Higginbotham, 1992). For Black and White women, gendered identity was 
reconstructed and represented in very different, indeed antagonistic, racialized contexts.

During the late nineteenth century, the United States was going through many political 
changes. According to the U.S. Constitution, non-White Americans had no rights. As African-
American men and women were fighting for human rights, women were also fighting for civil 
rights (Giddings, 1984). According to National Women’s History Museum Website, many 
African-American women were highly active in the woman suffrage movement. Many Black 
women became active abolitionists and supporters of women’s rights. Sojourner Truth, a former 
slave, became famous as both an abolitionist and an advocate of woman suffrage. In 1851, she 
delivered her famous speech, “Ain’t I A Woman,” at a convention in Akron, Ohio. Both groups, 
African-Americans and all women, were denied access to public education and voting rights. In 
the wake of the defeat of the Confederacy, the U.S. Congress, in 1868, passed the Fourteenth 
Amendment to the Constitution, which granted citizenship to all (men) “born or naturalized” in 
the United States (with the exception of Native Americans). The amendment did not include 
women. Two years later, the Fifteenth Amendment was passed, granting the right to vote to all 
men, no matter race or color; however, women were still excluded.

According to National Women’s History Museum Website, despite the strong support for 
woman’s suffrage, Black women sometimes faced discrimination within the suffrage movement 
itself. From the end of the Civil War onwards, some White suffragists argued that enfranchising 
women would serve to cancel out the “Negro” vote, as there would be more White women voters 
than Black men and women voters combined. Although some Black clubwomen participated 
actively in the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), the NAWSA did not 
always welcome them with open arms. In the twentieth century, the NAWSA leadership
sometimes discouraged Black women’s clubs from attempting to affiliate with them. Some Southern members of NAWSA argued for the enfranchisement of White women only. In addition, in the suffrage parade of 1913 organized by Alice Paul’s Congressional Union, Black women were asked to march in a segregated unit. When the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1920, it legally enfranchised all women, White and Black. However, within a decade, state laws and vigilante practices effectively disenfranchised most Black women in the South. It would take another major movement for voting rights—the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s—before Black women in the South would be effectively enfranchised.

**Education of African-American Women**

The promise of a quality education is an important civil and human right that has yet to be fully realized in the American public education system. According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), African-Americans are more likely to attend high-poverty schools—that is, public schools where more than 75% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—and are less likely to graduate from high school and subsequently attend college at rates lower than any other racial group. Guerra (2013) points out that African-American women, who make up 13% of the female population in the United States, are making significant strides in education, participation, health, and other areas but there is a long way to go to fully close the racial and ethnic disparities they face.

Guerra (2013) argues that the level of educational attainment for African-American women has risen very slowly and still sits at a significantly lower level than that of White women. In 2012, African-American women held only 8.5% of the bachelor degrees earned by women in the United States (Guerra, 2013). This data supports the fact that while African-American women’s participation in higher education is growing, it is not yet representative of the overall population
Bartman (2015) points to the existence of a serious lack of African-American women faculty and staff members working in institutions of higher education, and this also impacts the experiences of Black female college students.

The ongoing clash between Black culture and White educational systems has been the focus of pedagogical research for the last century (Tuitt, 2010). Howard-Hamilton (2003) noted that Black women college students face the additional stressors of racism and sexism to a degree unmatched by any other student group, as double oppression (racism and sexism) is borne by African-American women when their subordinate status is assumed and enforced by White and Black men as well as White women. Bartman (2015) argued that, given the complex intersection of race and gender, more attention should be paid to the educational, social, and political positions of African-American women in post-secondary education. Bartman (2015) concludes that a sense of community and acceptance, so essential to the continued success of Black women in higher education, has not been achieved because there is little recognized shared cultural experience with the dominant group.

**Mentoring**

According to Dahlvig (2010) mentoring can be a multifaceted relationship that contributes to career advancement, personal support, role modeling, and advocacy. Mentors provide guidance, support, and direction to mentees who may lack the foresight, exposure, or intuition needed to ascertain goals (Spence, 2005). The role of a mentor is to guide and help mentees to choose the right direction. Klinge (2015) points out that mentoring is a process in which an experienced person (the mentor) guides another person (the mentee or protégé) in the development of her or his own ideas, learning and personal/professional competence. Bohannon
and Bohannon (2015) state that a mentor should initiate questions and dialogue that challenge the mentee, while providing guidance and encouragement.

Bohannon and Bohannon (2015) address the very important issue that often mentors rely upon having had similar experiences to gain an empathy with mentees and an understanding of their experiences. Where the mentor and mentee come from different racial or ethnic backgrounds, empathy might be difficult to establish. This study examines whether or not Bohannon and Bohannon’s theory always holds true; that is, is it possible for mentors and mentees who have had different life experiences to develop a successful, empathic relationship? Or can it potentially create an obstacle for a student of color who does not have similar experiences to that of the mentor? Smith (2007) points out that race, gender, and power dynamics have influence on establishing and sustaining close mentoring relationships and explains that layers of societal oppression influence the selection of mentors and mentees, and the outcomes associated with the relationship. Race can be a confounding factor in developing trust and establishing a mentoring relationship (Dahlvig, 2010).

**Multicultural Mentoring**

This study explores the significance of same-race mentoring for female African-American adult students; however, having a mentor of color is beneficial to White students, as well as the entire institution and society. Mentoring connects mentees to personal growth and development, and prepares them for social and economic opportunities that ultimately contribute to social cohesion. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines social cohesion eloquently: “... a cohesive society works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility. ...” (OECD website, p. 1). According
to Novy (2011), social cohesion is about a sense of belonging and identity as well as citizenship, even as it dwells on contradictions of equality and diversity, unity and autonomy. Young (1990) suggests the assumption of a homogeneous public is oppressive because the dominant group’s experiences and culture are established as norm, thus diminishing or immobilizing other social groups. Ruggs and Hebl (2012) explain that inclusiveness in classrooms can help boost students’ self-confidence and self-efficacy about their performance. In addition, it helps create what Gurin (2002) has referred to as two types of positive outcomes: learning outcomes and democracy outcomes. Having faculty of color can provide opportunity for students to interact with diverse backgrounds and create a sense of belonging, trust, and cohesion.

A study conducted by Chan et al. (2015) showed the importance of mentors being multiculturally aware and competent, as well as skilled in negotiating cross-racial relationships. Mentors must be aware of how cultural values shape the behaviors, thoughts, beliefs, and expectations of minority group members (Park-Saltzman et al., 2012), and how these values relate to mentoring practices. Spalter-Roth et al. (2013) point out that White faculty who lack the skills and desire to recognize and deal with cultural differences may exacerbate the state of isolation and marginalization common in the experiences of minority students. Chan et al. (2015) also found that mentors must be conversant with the unique personal, professional, and societal challenges confronting minorities in the workplace, such as discrimination, exclusion from formal and informal networks, lack of role models, language and cultural barriers, and isolation. Mentoring minority protégés must be tailored with these considerations in mind because career strategies that are helpful for majority protégés may not be appropriate for minority protégés (Ragins, 1997). The key variable is how well trained and aware White mentors are about these sensitive issues. Syed, Azmitia, and Cooper (2011) discuss research that
identifies mentors from similar backgrounds as particularly important to students of color because they represent prototypes that enable students to gain a sense of academic self-efficacy.

For students to be able to compete in a global workforce they must be exposed to diverse people, ideas, cultures, and viewpoints. This exposure must happen in colleges and universities to prepare students for a cohesive society. According to Hurtado (2010), a diverse student body, faculty, and staff benefits joint missions of teaching and research by increasing creativity, innovation, and problem solving. A diverse faculty enhances the educational quality and outcome for all students, not just minorities, since graduates will be entering a diverse world, they will be well served if they are exposed to faculty of diverse cultures using varying research perspectives and teaching methods within varying or diverse curricula (Piercy, Giddings., Allen, Dixon, Meszaros, & Joest, 2005).

Cultural diversity in higher education is essential to the intellectual health of every campus. According to Freire (1993), dominant elites use manipulation to attempt to make the masses conform to their objectives. Two of the buzzwords most often used in higher education institutions for underserved populations are access and success. These words can be found in almost every mission statement throughout institutions of higher education but in reality, the gap is widening. Scott and Quinn (2014) believe that there are four major developments that contribute to the gap in educational opportunities: a) White policy makers’ resistance to diversifying education, b) a shift from equality of opportunity to “excellence,” with emphasis on the racial achievement gap, c) legislative initiatives emphasizing “color-blindness,” d) changing schools to resemble markets that have collectively limited our ability to sustain diverse and high-quality schooling.
For many White students, college is the first time they have opportunities to establish friendships with people who are different than themselves in terms of race, ethnicity, and social class (Neville et al., 2014). Numerous research studies have examined the impact of diversity on students and higher education outcomes. According to Neville, et al. (2014), research overwhelmingly indicates that students who participate in a specific educational intervention, or complete a general diversity course, report a significant decrease in colorblind racial ideology and that this decrease is stable over time. Hurtado (2010) explains that institutional policies fostering diversity of the campus community had positive effects on students’ cognitive development, satisfaction with the college experience, and leadership abilities. These policies encouraged faculty to include themes relating to diversity in their research and teaching, and provided students with opportunities to confront racial and multicultural issues in the classroom and in extracurricular settings.

Siegel-Hawley (2012) notes that the presence of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in a classroom is closely connected to heightened dialogue and debate. Exposure to diversity prepares students for future success. Addressing this importance of this, Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell wrote, “The nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth ‘out of a multitude of tongues’” (PBS website, p. 4). Siegel-Hawley (2012) points out that diverse perspectives provide multiple lenses through which to view and understand problems and events.

Lack of diversity among faculty and staff not only influences students’ performance and success, it also affects employees, who represent a minority group at the college in various forms and intensities. Nichols and Tanksley (2004) revealed that 32% of the women participating in their study acknowledged they had encountered racism, sexism, and ageism from a wide range of
people including friends, colleagues, and past employees. Gusa (2010) argues that although these messages remain subtle, they potentially harm the well-being, self-esteem, and academic success of those who do not share the norms of White culture. “Given the fear of being misunderstood, it has been difficult for Black women and women in exploited or oppressed ethnic groups to give expression to their interest in feminist concerns” (hooks, 1984, p. 32). It is important to create a campus climate where the minority faculty and staff feel valued and comfortable and are successful in order to reduce the high rate of faculty and staff of color turnover (Piercy et al., 2005).

**Same-Race Mentoring**

Spalter-Roth, Shin, Mayorova, & White (2013) explain that majority of studies on same-race mentoring emphasize its potentially important role in reducing social isolation and warming up the “chilly climate” of predominantly White institutions (PWI) for minorities. Spalter-Roth et al. (2013) point out that inadequate cross-cultural mentoring may lead to detrimental effects on the academic and long-term career success of minority students. According to Chan, Yeh, and Krumboltz (2015) even though mentorship has been identified as the most critical variable related to the academic and career development of students, ethnic minority students seeking mentorship often experience a number of difficulties. Chan et al. (2015) note two major obstacles facing ethnic minority students: first, ethnic minority students tend to prefer and report more satisfaction with racially homogeneous mentor relationships but are less likely to find same-race mentors due to the lack of ethnic minority faculty in their programs and second, ethnic minority students paired with European American mentors have been found to receive fewer overall mentoring benefits and psychosocial support than protégés in same-race dyads. Hayes (1998) investigated the relationship between nurse practitioner students’ perceptions
of mentoring by their clinical preceptors and student self-efficacy. She found a positive correlation between mentoring and student self-efficacy. Bang and Reio (2016) also found that positive mentoring experiences and self-judgment of personal accomplishment appeared to be important factors in building the confidence and mastery associated with being creatively efficacious, which corresponded in turn with increases in creative work involvement.

Gusa (2010) explains that the presence of whiteness and privilege within policies and practices may go unseen; nevertheless, it detrimentally shapes students’ social and academic experiences. Racial discrimination takes various forms and intensities. In a study of one southern PWI and one midwestern PWI, 75% of African-American students reported, over a year’s time, at least one racial discriminatory experience associated with questioning their academic competency (Cooke, 2002). Another study’s participants articulated that issues of racism and prejudice are “frequently embedded in the culture of the university, whether it is in the school newspaper, in classes, or at social and Greek affiliated functions” (Gusa, 2010). Further, it has been shown that many academically successful Blacks drop out of college because of feelings of disconnection or lack of support from their institution (Gusa, 2010).

Chan et al. (2015) explain that a barrier to effective multiculturally sensitive mentoring might be inadequate knowledge about culture-specific challenges for ethnic minority students, such as lack of role models, racism, family obligations, and a disconnect between cultural and professional identities. Multiculturally sensitive mentoring that offers support and guidance around these issues can be beneficial and even critical to ethnic minority student success (Thomas, 2001). Pope (2002) explains that minority students feel more comfortable approaching someone who “looks like me,” and therefore having faculty and staff of color demonstrates a college’s commitment to student success. Research has shown less ease, lower satisfaction, and
more difficult communication in mixed-race mentoring dyads as opposed to same-race dyads (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005). According to Kosoko-Lasaki, Sonnino and Voytko (2006), mentoring is an important element in promoting academic excellence for both minority faculty and students.

The idea of having a mentor of a similar racial background is deemed important (Dumas-Hines, Cochran, and Williams, 2001). These mentoring relationships can encourage minority students to get more involved in the larger college environment. Gusa (2010) highlights the salience of race by scrutinizing the culture of whiteness within predominantly White institutions of higher education. Using existing research in higher education retention literature, Gusa (2010) examines embedded White cultural ideology in the cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge that are taken for granted as the norm at institutions of higher education. Drawing on marginalization and discrimination experiences of African-American undergraduates to illustrate the performance of White mainstream ideology, Gusa (2010) names this embedded ideology “White Institutional Presence (WIP) and assigns it four attributes: White ascendancy, monoculturalism, White estrangement, and White blindness.” He further describes the four attributes as follows: White ascendancy as the thinking and behavior that arise from White mainstream authority and advantage, which in turn are generated from whiteness’s historical position of power and domination. Monoculturalism as the expectation that all individuals conform to one “scholarly” worldview, which stems from the aforementioned beliefs in the superiority and normalcy of White culture. White estrangement as the distancing of whites physically and socially from people of color. And White blindness as a racial ideology that obscures and protects White identity and White privilege based on the principle of color blindness, which positions equality in an ideology wherein the race of a person is and ought to be
immaterial to any decision-making process. Gusa (2010) believes tackling a non-inclusive chilly campus climate is not simply about developing a checklist of embellishments. Rather, it requires rigorous work of informed critical introspection that sees one’s performance of whiteness, as well as sees the performance of whiteness in the practice of others. As core assumptions of WIP are uncovered and critically examined through multiple worldviews, viable solutions can be determined and implemented, fostering emotional safety, trust, belonging, empowerment, and integration.

**Mentoring and Gender**

Women mentors appear to make all the difference in the academic careers of women students (Schlegel, 2000). Women mentors are able to provide advice not only professionally, but also socially, mentally, and with better understanding. Chandler (1996) argues that research on women’s mentorship experience in academia has critical limitations. She points out that even though women are slowly closing the gender gap in business and management, in academia women continue to be severely underrepresented in the higher-ranking faculty positions, especially in fields such as science and engineering. Assigned gender roles and stereotypes, as well as the power disparity between men and women, interfere with the development and progression of typical male mentor–male protégé relationships when women are involved (Nevill and Schlecker 1988).

Cullen and Luna (1993) believe the significance of women mentoring women is a powerful concept. Bolton (1980) suggested that the scarcity of women administrators and absence of the mentoring relationship is potentially one reason women experience difficulty with career progression beyond the mid-management level. Cullen and Luna (1993) argue that senior women in higher education, by virtue of their experience and knowledge, are in a position to
assist their junior women colleagues. Through sharing important knowledge and advising on professional issues, junior women learn strategies for success. One would expect that these relationships would be naturally occurring, since senior women represent a rich resource for their junior counterparts. Yet, the quality and quantity of mentoring among women in academe remains largely undetermined (Cullen and Luna, 1993).

This study attempts to explore the mentoring experiences of African-American women and the significance and availability of having an African American woman as a mentor in relation to their academic and professional success. Race, ethnicity, and gender influence the mentoring of and by African-American women in academia (Simon, Perry, & Roff, 2008). Patton (2009) points out that the process of mentoring may feel more natural when the mentee and mentor share cultural experiences, language, or similar interests. As African-American women seek role models and mentors in the college setting they must often look outside of their cultural group due to the minute number of Black female faculty and staff. In a qualitative study conducted by Louis, Russell, Jackson, Blanchard and Louis (2014), the participants noted that self-confidence in their success as students was directly related to their relationship with their African-American mentors. However, the statistics show there are not enough African-American women faculty members to mentor these students; and the few women faculty of color within the higher education system face many obstacles and challenges that affect their professional and personal well-being.

The circumstances that all women face in professional academic careers are compounded for some women by factors such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and age (Chandler, 1996). Female faculty of color are a minority within a minority. They face both race and gender-based discrimination within their classrooms and within their universities in general.
According to ADVANCE Center at Texas A&M University, this is particularly evident in research universities, which have historically been structured to serve the interests of dominant groups and which even today show a marked underrepresentation of women and faculty of color among senior ranks despite sufficient numbers of women doctorates across many disciplines.

According to Molina (2008), women of color within systems of higher education fear voicing their concerns and therefore do not confront dominant ideologies. Molina (2008) points out that frustration and annoyance, as well as fear of being singled out, of being tokenized, or of being the speaker for a whole group are common experiences that occur more often than not and that comes with significant consequences for the psyche of the women of color. Gutierrez, Flores, Gonzalez, & Harris (2012) compiled a collection of stories told by faculty women of color about their experiences in American higher education institutions and there is a presumption of incompetence that underlies issues such as climate, student/faculty relationship, class, promotion, and other issues these women face in academia.

Turner, Gonzalez, and Wong (2011) examined the experiences of faculty women of color at predominately-White public research extensive universities. They uncovered issues that are critically important in the wake of legal challenges to affirmative action, such as Gratz and Grutter. Turner, Gonzalez, and Wong (2011) applied Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) to guide their analysis, which helped them identify that faculty women of color across three disciplinary areas (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics [STEM], Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences [SBE], and Humanities/Arts) experience a knowledge gap on the impact of public policies on their everyday lives. Faculty women of color, along with experiencing the typically documented conditions of tokenism, also report that
communication about diversity initiatives and resources on their own campuses were extremely uneven and idiosyncratic.

Murphy-Brown (2007) focuses on the nature of the relationship between racial identity and academic culture. She analyzed data from the Racial Identity and Academic Culture survey (RIACS), which was sent to all African-American faculty in the state of North Carolina employed in four-year, degree-granting institutions. Findings reveal that racial identity is central to the overall self-concept of Black faculty yet a majority of respondents believe that “race” should change (in some manner) and become less important than it is today.

Sulé (2011) explored how Black and Latina women faculty alter the teaching and learning environment at PWIs by employing CRT because it provides a mechanism for elevating social identity in the examination of macro- and micro-positioning. Her key findings were that participants navigate and contribute in two key ways: enacting legitimacy and employing equity-based pedagogy, which reflect an awareness of being part of a socially marginalized group. Sulé (2011) notes that Black women and Latinas are not culturally imagined as intellectuals. In Sulé’s study, the participants were operating in spaces where their professionalism—their ability to enact the professorial role—was heavily questioned by some colleagues and students. In anticipation and in response to the behaviors perceived to undermine their capabilities, the women were deliberate about establishing their legitimacy in the classroom. Self-presentation, for instance, was one method of debunking the belief that Black and Latina are synonymous with non-intellectual. Some of the participants used clothing to enact legitimacy by wearing corporate attire rather than the more casual styles popular among academics. They also manifested a commitment to pedagogical practices that encouraged critical dialogue while safeguarding their professional integrity. Through awareness, one can strategize about the best way to exist within
and move through contested terrain. Together, embodying traditional ways of being and masking allows the women to assert their legitimacy within the academy and divorce themselves from institutional intolerance.

According to Evans (2007), African-American women are only one demographic that has been excluded or marginalized in academia, but they offer an intriguing entry point into the discussion of faculty diversity. Evans (2007) provides a brief historical overview of African-American women faculty in the United States and examines tenure requirements with respect to women and faculty of color. The study, conducted in Florida, is often used as an example of the continued lack of gender and racial diversity. The author offers anecdotal solutions based on her personal experiences as a Black woman faculty member. She believes by better understanding the institutional phenomena that led to the current paucity of minority and women professors, we might increase success rates of current and future efforts. Navarro, Williams, and Ahmad (2013) discuss faculty women of color in the field of anthropology, who have problems in teaching and tenure evaluations in the face of difficult, if not hostile, classroom and department environments. They believe that the stories of these women is a step to paving the way for other women of color in academia.

**Significant Studies on Mentoring African-American Women**

The majority of the literature suggests that when African-American women obtain positions of power, it takes a role model or a mentor to support them and help them be successful. Mentoring helps to build confidence and provides needed support. Four major research studies examined how mentors contribute to the success of African-American women. Grant and Ghee (2015) conducted a study with the purpose of operationalizing the concept of mentoring as a nuanced approach and attempt to promote the upward trajectories of African-American women
in PWIs. Their study explored the effectiveness of traditional and non-traditional mentoring functions for an African-American woman doctoral student aspiring for the professoriate, and the professional advancement of an African-American woman professor, who matriculate in the same PWI. They found that in the absence of formal mentoring for African-American women in PWIs has a direct impact on their doctoral preparation, successful entry into the professoriate, as well as their advancement therein. They also found that an informal mentoring relationship may assist African-American women in PWIs in becoming better adjusted socially and institutionally, and more productive in their scholarship and practice.

Zellers, Howard, and Barcic (2008) conducted a study in which they critically reviewed mentoring programs to see how mentoring has evolved in philosophy and practice in the United States in both business and academe, and to provide insight on the challenges associated with the study of mentoring. They also attempted to identify effective faculty mentoring program models for institutions of higher education seeking to foster academic cultures responsive to the diverse professional development needs of both current and future faculty members. They found that there are dual dimensions in mentoring and the holistic learning that occurs within its context is evident.

Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) conducted a similar study in cross-cultural mentoring relationships that can be sites of struggle around the issues of race, class, and gender. In addition, they studied the mentor/protégé relationship for microcosmic insight into power relations within Western society. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero used the example of their mentoring relationship to illustrate six common issues facing academicians involved in these relationships: 1) trust between mentor and protégé; 2) acknowledged and unacknowledged racism; 3) visibility and risks pertinent to minority faculty; 4) power and paternalism; 5) benefits
to mentor and protégé; and 6) the double-edged sword of “otherness” in the academy. They analyzed the various factors that influence the psychosocial and developmental components of mentoring. In sum, they thought it was clear that successful mentoring relationships benefit African-American women in PWIs.

Davis (2008) conducted a study to examine the mentoring component of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation’s (CIC) Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP). Results from interviews with former and current undergraduate student participants in this study suggested that mentorship influences the individual, interpersonal, extra-programmatic, and to a lesser extent, collective realms of protégé experiences. Study results emphasized the importance of faculty-directed mentorship in preparing students of color for both graduate education and entrance into the professoriate. This study noted that the influence of mentorship went beyond the academic outcomes of novices and expanded the strict confines of the mentor-protégé relationship. This study revealed additional impacts of mentorship, specifically in the collective realm, i.e., the mutual benefits of mentoring amongst group members, and the extra-programmatic realm, i.e., how modeling of positive mentorship influences interactions with family members.

Crenshaw (2015) explains racial and gender discrimination overlapped not only in the workplace but also in other arenas of life; equally significant, these burdens were almost completely absent from feminist and antiracist advocacy. Intersectionality, then, was Crenshaw’s attempt to make feminism, antiracist activism, and anti-discrimination law do what she thought they should, and highlight the multiple avenues through which racial and gender oppression were experienced so that the problems would be easier to discuss and understand. According to Crenshaw (2014), in every generation and in every intellectual sphere and in every
political moment, there have been African-American women who have articulated the need to think and talk about race through a lens that looks at gender, or think and talk about feminism through a lens that looks at race. She believes that intersectionality draws attention to invisibilities that exist in feminism, in antiracism, in class politics, so obviously it takes a lot of work to consistently challenge ourselves to be attentive to aspects of power that we do not ourselves experience. She stresses, however, this has been the project of Black feminism since its very inception: drawing attention to the erasures, to the ways that “women of color are invisible in plain sight.”

Crenshaw (1991) argues that race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination, that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different. According to this understanding, Crenshaw points out, our liberatory objective should be to empty such categories of any social significance. She further argues that feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Crenshaw (1991) also points out that contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider intersectional identities, such as those of women of color. Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both.

Crenshaw (1991) explains that because systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women, who because of race and class, face different obstacles. The problem is not simply that both discourses fail women of color, by
not acknowledging the “additional” issue of race or of patriarchy but that the discourses are often inadequate even to the discrete tasks of articulating the full dimensions of racism and sexism Crenshaw (1991). She explains that because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of White women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms. Crenshaw suggests intersectionality provides a basis for reconceptualizing race as a coalition between men and women of color. Crenshaw’s intersectionality theory is a guiding light in the construct of this study and reaffirms the choice of womanist thought.

**Conclusion**

The majority of studies of the outcomes of academic mentoring focus on traditional undergraduate or graduate students. Little is known about the effect of mentoring on adult female undergraduate students. Regional State College prides itself on having a strong mentoring program. Every student at Regional State College is assigned to a mentor, a faculty member who serves as their own personal guide and resource. This faculty mentor provides guidance from orientation through graduation. This case study attempts to explore the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of female African-American adult students. Also, to understand, discover, and expose the experiences and obstacles faced by adult female African-American students working one on one with mentors at Regional State College. The White majority in an increasingly diverse region must be exposed to different ethnic backgrounds in order to maintain social cohesion, and one place to receive this exposure is in higher education (Neville, Poteat, Lewis, and Spanierman, 2014).
CHAPTER 3

METHODODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to explore the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of female African-American adult students. The researcher seeks to understand, discover, and expose the experiences and potential obstacles faced by adult female African-American students working one on one with mentors at Regional State College. The study documents how students characterize their experiences with a White mentor or an African-American mentor. There have not been enough studies about same-race mentoring of adult students and this study can add to the research in this area. This study can potentially increase the empirical evidence reported in the literature about mentoring and same-race matching while it shifts the attention to adult female students in same-race mentoring field.

Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, and Muller (2011) explain that students who have mentors will experience the greatest successes when they match with mentors on the basis of race and/or gender. Lack of faculty of color at Regional State College, which relies heavily on mentoring, makes it difficult to match students of color to mentors of the same race. Although mentoring is recognized as beneficial for students, minority students seeking mentorship often experience a number of difficulties (Chan, Yeh, & Krumboltz, 2015). Research has shown less ease, lower satisfaction, and more difficult communication in mixed-race mentoring dyads than same-race dyads (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005). The overarching research question was: What are the effects of race and gender matching in mentoring adult female African-American female students at a four year regional university? The sub-questions addressed were: What were participant perspectives on the process of developing a relationship with their mentors? How did participants describe the role of their mentors during the process of setting realistic goals for
their educational and professional plans? Did race, ethnicity or gender influence the participant’s work with a mentor? Did race of the primary mentor influence the participant’s success and progress? How?

This study applies major themes of womanism and Black feminist thought to serve as the underlying theoretical framework of the study to guide the analysis and to understand and expose the experiences of adult female African-American students enrolled at Regional State College in terms of mentoring relationships. Through interviews, the researcher attempted to describe the experiences of female African-American adult students at Regional State College. Mullings (2000) suggests that research practices must operationalize Black feminist theoretical perspectives that seek to bring African-American women to the center of analysis. Mullings (2000) argues that even though most Black feminists, particularly those concerned with the interaction of class, race, and gender, consciously attempt to reflect the voices of the working-class majority in their work, much of contemporary writing on the lives of African-American women represents the views of Black feminist academics, writers, independent scholars, and activists. This study attempted to involve everyday, working-class African-American women and bring their everyday experiences and their voice to the forefront.

Mullings (2000) emphasizes that gaining insight into the everyday lives of African-American women and how to interpret it requires conscious methodological approaches and research practices. Lindsay-Dennis (2015) suggests Black feminist-womanist research is a culturally congruent model that allows for consideration of intersectionality and metaphysical aspects of African-American women’s cultural perspectives, and demonstrates a commitment to social change and community building. Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett (2003) point out that Black feminists see research as being for Black women, rather than simply about Black women.
Mullings (2000) discusses feminist researchers’ emphasis on the value of oral history, ethnography, and other qualitative methods in uncovering women’s perspectives. Therefore, the effort to bring women into analysis has involved important methodological interventions, foremost of which is work with the personal testimony of individual women and oral interviews (Mullings, 2000). Few, et al. (2003) also point to the use of qualitative methods—particularly interviews or narrative documents—which has been instrumental in informing researchers of the various dynamics that shape sexuality, race, and gender interactions. For Black women, their opinions, values, and resources (e.g., journals, writings, music, and other culturally expressive materials) become the frameworks of analyses (Few, et al., 2003). Sharing these resources of knowledge within a safe, informant-defined space is empowering and useful in providing Black women a space to process their experience in a systemic manner. Research designs that facilitate dialogue, accompanied by reflection of ideas/theories generated throughout this process, may enhance participants’ ability to speak for themselves, name their own experiences, and make decisions about their lives (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Creating a dialogue and sharing stories in the research context can provide opportunities for healing because it might allow some African-American girls to share experiences, knowledge, and/or to exchange wisdom that is often devalued in other settings (Lindsay-Dennis, Cummings, & McClendon, 2011).

Lindsay-Dennis (2015) believes researchers do not assume that conducting qualitative research with African-American women is a simple task; in fact, individuals who conduct research with this population must be prepared to engage in participatory witnessing. Lindsay-Dennis (2015) mentions Taylor’s (1998) description of participatory witnessing as including active engagement of the self in the research, which includes being physically present and actively involved in all aspects of the steps of a research plan. Lindsay-Dennis (2015) also
emphasizes the importance of collaborating with participants to analyze the data, through member checking, which will not only increase content validity but also will demonstrate an ethic of caring. Reciprocal dialogue with the research community is a critical aspect of Black feminist-womanist research (Collins, 2000). Dialogue that communicates the importance of “telling our stories” and acknowledges the wholeness of African-American girls’ experiences adds to the richness of the data (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015).

The researcher used extensive interviews in order to allow adult female African-American students at Regional State College to “tell stories” and detail their educational experiences. The purpose for choosing this methodology was to capture personal stories of adult female African-American students at Regional State College and to bring their voices to the center of the findings. The researcher attempted to add the views and reflect the voices of everyday African-American women, to gain insight into the everyday lives of adult female African-American students at Regional State College, and to uncover their perspectives. The researcher attempted to provide a space that would empower the participants by facilitating dialogue and reflecting on ideas and allow participants to share their stories.

**Setting**

Regional State College is a distinctive statewide institution focused on nontraditional teaching and learning, where college faculty mentors guide learners through their educational journey. The college serves mostly working adults pursuing associate, bachelor’s and/or master’s degrees. Regional State College faculty come from a variety of backgrounds, from business to the arts. Ninety-six percent of the full-time faculty hold doctoral or other terminal degrees. College faculty are called mentors because they are partners and guides in adult students’ education. They respect the years of experience and knowledge that adults bring to an
academic program, and with whom they share their expertise. Learners confer with their mentors on a regular basis to receive advice, develop their degree plans, and carry out learning activities. Learners maintain contact with their mentors in face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations, in online course discussion areas, and through e-mail or mail. The college’s fact book states that most students value the relationship with their mentors and the level of personal attention to their academic goals they receive because of that relationship. Regional State College students represent a diverse community of learners. Most of the college’s students range from 25 to 55 years old, with a median age of 36, and are in the prime of their working lives. They are employed as professionals, managers, or skilled workers.

During the time this research was conducted, the researcher worked as a full-time employee at one of the regional locations of Regional State College. However, the researcher does not supervise any of the faculty or students participating in this study, even though the researcher is familiar with both groups.

Participants/Sample

There are very few women faculty of color working at Regional State College. The researcher sent out a request for volunteers through the “Minority Students’ Club” at Regional State College to identify student participants. An invitation was also posted on a student connection Website. An e-mail was also sent to faculty for their recommendations. Eight students volunteered to participate in the study. They were placed into two groups of students, with four students in each group. One group consisted of four adult female African-American students who are working with a female African-American mentor. The second group consisted of four adult female African-American students who are working with a White mentor or previously worked with a White mentor prior to switching to a female African-American mentor.
**Instrumentation**

The participants were asked to self-identify their race before starting the interview questions (see Appendix A). This self-identification allowed the researcher to avoid generalizations and assumptions. It is important to remember that not all members of minority groups identify with the same beliefs and cultural affiliations. Some biracial students prefer not to identify with a particular race. Therefore, the researcher asked students to self-identify as African-American. Some of the questions also helped the researcher gather data about the participants’ educational background, career choices, and types of mentors they have had throughout their lives. Seven of the eight participants were interviewed on the phone. One participant chose to meet in person. Two of the fifteen interview questions aimed to get information about participants’ personal concept of race and education and how they saw them intersect. This allowed the researcher to understand the participants’ background in order to tell their stories. Some of the questions were used as prompts for the participants to share their lived experiences. Some of the questions allowed each participant to share information about their formal education and career backgrounds, and about their successes and obstacles. Other questions focused on the dynamics of mentoring relationships, and each participant was able to share their experiences with their mentors. The final interview questions served as a guide to spark conversation about their view of the meaning of mentoring, overcoming challenges, and betterment.

**Data**

The primary method for data collection was interviews with the selected groups. This included interviews and note taking. The approach appropriate for this research project was case study because, according to Creswell (2012), a case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide in-depth understanding of the
Case study also allows investigating social justice by telling stories of individuals. Telling personal stories can bridge the gap between the oppressed and the privileged and provides details about individual’s experiences that are unnoticed regularly (Gutierrez, Flores, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012). This study focused on a small group of adult female African-American students within a PWI of higher education to detail their professional experiences.

Choosing a within-site case study allowed the researcher to detail the stories of these women. Cresswell (2012) defined within-site case study as one that explores an issue or issues within a bounded system of a single program. Creswell (2012) explains that when an individual studies many participants, the depth of the study and the overall analysis will be diluted. Therefore, this study chose a small sample to study to provide rich details of each participant’s experiences. Secondly, there are very limited numbers of mentors representing minority groups who are employed by the college and therefore the chance of having a larger number of participants was limited.

Merriam (2009) points out that if the researcher is interested in the process of changing the organizational culture or practices of the workplace, s/he could select a particular instance of organizational change to study in-depth. Choosing case study enabled the researcher to conduct this study within a bounded system and to collect finite data from a limited number of people over a finite time period. Merriam (2009) supports this choice for researchers who are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing. This study concentrated on a phenomenon and aimed to uncover the significant factors in this phenomenon. The choice of case study is reaffirmed by what Merriam (2009) describes as a good choice for particular problems because of their specificity of the focus. Merriam (2009) believes interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around
them; it is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate. Merriam (2009) points out that interviewing is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals.

In describing qualitative research, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that researchers look at context (structure) and process (action/interaction) and go beyond description to develop a theoretical explanation. Similar to Dahlvig’s (2010) explanation, the context of a public PWI, along with the interaction of African-American students with White mentors, formed the substance of this project and provided a base for proposing a theory of same-race mentoring. Ninety-minute, in-depth interviews provided the primary data sources for this study. The researcher took notes during interviews.

Upon receiving clearance from the University of New England and Regional State College’s Institutional Review Boards (IRB), the researcher began recruiting participants and scheduling interviews with volunteer participants. Due to the use of human subjects in the study, informed consent of the participants was required, as was ensuring their confidentiality. The researcher contacted participants via e-mail and through telephone calls. Each participant received an e-mail (see Appendix B) containing detailed information about the study, its purpose and importance, the benefits of the study, potential risks to the participants, and a consent form (see Appendix C). After the researcher received the signed consent forms, the researcher and the participant scheduled an interview time. A ninety-minute, semi-structured, in-depth individual interview was conducted with each of the eight identified participants. Seven of the interviews were conducted over the phone and one participant requested to meet in person at the researcher’s office. Each participant was asked to self-identify their race before the start of the interview. Prior to the interview, the researcher informed the participants of their responsibility.
by reviewing the informed consent form. The researcher took notes during the conversation. Fifteen questions were used during each interview (see Appendix A). The researcher was able to gain knowledge about the participants’ mentoring experiences through these interviews.

**Analysis**

The researcher took notes during interviews and the notes were transferred into a chart. A member check was conducted. During this process, the participants had an opportunity to review the transcription prior to data analysis and provide clarification if needed. The researcher attempted to analyze the collected data through embedded analysis, which is described by Creswell (2012) as providing a detailed description of the case that will focus on aspects such as the history of the case, the chronology of events, or a day-by-day rendering of the activities of the case. The researcher also attempted to focus on a few key issues that emerged through within-case-analysis by providing a detailed description of each individual’s experiences, identifying themes, and then conducting a thematic analysis across the cases that Creswell (2012) refers to as cross-case-analysis. The analysis consisted of making a detailed description of the case and its setting followed by analyzing the collected data to determine evidence for each step or phase in the evolution of the case. The process included creating and organizing charts, followed by general reading and memoing of information to develop a sense of the data, and to begin making sense of them.

The phenomenon the researcher studied was within a context and the intention was to connect the topic to the larger context. Flyvbjerg (2006) points out that, in the study of human affairs, there appears to exist only context-dependent knowledge, which is at the very heart of expert activity and such knowledge and expertise also lie at the center of the case study as a research and teaching method or learning method. Baxter and Jack (2008) also support the
choice of case study when a researcher wants to cover contextual conditions because they believe them to be relevant to the phenomenon under study. The larger context in this case study was the lack of mentors of color at Regional State College and a lack of training on race issues.

As Merriam (2012) noted, it is the much-preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study simultaneously with data collection. Merriam (2009) believes data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating. Therefore, in this study the researcher began data analysis during data collection. The researcher created a chart that listed students by their assigned numbers to eight rows, and their responses to columns for each question. This visual chart helped the researcher to maintain a coherent process in data collection, data analysis, and report writing, the three steps that Creswell (2013) believes to be interrelated and often go simultaneously in a research project. It was helpful with coding and data reduction to make sense out of the data and to develop themes in the study. Merriam (2012) described data analysis as the process used to answer the research questions and points out the importance of having categories that are aligned with the purpose of research. So having codes and themes that align with the questions the researcher is asking and trying to find answers to is beneficial in deriving abstractions. Visual tools also seem to be very helpful in making sense out of data by effectively keeping track of the process and findings. Merriam’s list making and creating charts were techniques used in this study. The researcher used constant comparative analysis by concurrently analyzing the interview transcripts, comparing themes between interviews, and making comparisons with existing literature. The researcher highlighted themes from all the interviews and reflected on these themes in collaboration with expert colleagues.
Participant Rights

It is a matter of utmost importance to protect participants’ rights and to maintain anonymity. The researcher obtained consent from Regional State College; a copy of the proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) at UNE and Regional State College to ensure the study complied with ethical boundaries. The researcher provided all participants a copy of informed consent document that outlined their rights, including their voluntary status and the right to withdraw at any time; the procedures for data collection and anonymity; the risks and benefits involved; and measures to protect their identities. All the participants in this study signed a copy of the informed consent form.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study was the researcher’s familiarity with the institution. Researchers advise against studying one’s own group because as a member of the group one may be too close to that group to be fair and accurate in their reporting. Throughout this study, the researcher tried to maintain an open-minded approach and developed a critical perspective through continuous self-evaluation. Researchers have a responsibility to analyze their observer role. The inside knowledge one has of a site is extremely valuable and will affect the outcome of the study. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) point out that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a non-native researcher and this might give them a certain amount of legitimacy or stigma. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) refer to this as a paradox because we encourage researchers to be tuned in to the experiences of the groups they research and at the same time to be aware of how one’s own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand.
Another limitation was the researcher’s lack of insider status due to not being African-American. Few, et al. (2003) discuss conversations with seasoned Black women researchers and Black female faculty about interviewing Black women; they reveal that they surmised that their foremost challenge in conducting interviews on sensitive topics with Black women would be gaining some measure of insider status with their informants. Despite the fact that these researchers were all Black women studying Black women, they never assumed that they would be granted unmitigated “insider” status. Issues of race, color, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and power were at work from the moment they engaged them. These Black researchers pointed out that barriers are possible because of differences in class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or nationality. In other words, the “isms” of daily life—racism, sexism, and classism, for instance—must be negotiated with informants throughout the research process. Sharing certain identities is not enough to presume an insider status (Few, et al., 2003). Lindsay-Dennis (2015) argues that it is necessary to monitor personal biases and assumptions. She suggests one strategy a researcher can use to monitor bias is to keep extensive field notes and journal about the entire process. Awareness of bias can lessen the likelihood of inaccurately interpreting the data, silencing the participants, or ignoring the diverse experiences and perceptions of participants (Few et al., 2003).

Another limitation of this case study was the time frame. In-depth interviews were conducted over a short period of time; this was not a longitudinal study. As a case study, the researcher explored a snapshot in time and provided a fairly narrow analysis for that reason. Secondly, the scope of the study was limited to a few participants and might not be generalizable to a wider population. The study was necessarily limited in part because of the very few number of mentors of color working at Regional State College. This made it harder to find participants,
compared with students who are assigned to White mentors. It took longer and more effort to recruit participants who work with mentors of color.

A final limitation of this study relates to the contradiction that exists in the literature review. The researcher acknowledges that the literature review discusses and supports same-race and same-gender mentoring; however, there is literature in support of multicultural mentoring as well. The researcher did not attempt to resolve this contradiction in the literature.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Historically, qualitative research has been viewed as “soft” science and criticized for lacking scientific rigor compared to quantitative research, which uses experimental, objective methods (Cope, 2014). Cope (2014) suggests that a major challenge for researchers is striving for the highest possible quality when conducting and reporting research. The researcher in this study addressed the four criteria that Lincoln and Guba (1985) delimited to evaluate qualitative research in order to develop trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Cope (2014) describes credibility as the truth of the data or the participant views and the interpretation and representation of them by the researcher. Cope (2014) explains that credibility is enhanced by the researcher describing his or her experiences as a researcher and verifying research findings with participants. This increases credibility when reporting a qualitative study; the researcher should demonstrate engagement, methods of observation, and audit trails. The researcher in this study consulted with an expert in the field of ethnography to validate the interview questions and the research questions. Purposeful sampling was applied in this study and the researcher allowed participants to self-identify their race.
**Dependability**

Cope (2014) describes dependability as the constancy of the data over similar conditions. In addition, Cope (2014) notes that a study would be deemed dependable if the study findings were replicated with similar participants in similar conditions, using the researcher’s process and descriptions. The researcher in this study wrote the findings in a manner that can be replicated by precisely and consistently documenting and reporting. The researcher attempted to collect and manage data systematically.

**Confirmability**

Cope (2014) explains confirmability as the researcher’s ability to demonstrate that the data represent the participants’ responses and not the researcher’s biases or viewpoints. The researcher in this study explained in detail how conclusions were established. Reflecting on the study through using field notes, memos, and providing rich quotes from the participants helped in accomplishing confirmability.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to findings that can be applied to other settings or groups, in that the results have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and readers can associate the results with their own experiences (Cope, 2014). The researcher in this study believes the findings will allow readers of this case study to make connections between elements of this study and their own experience. For example, mentors can reflect on their relationships with their adult female African-American students and might apply some of these strategies in their practice.
Conclusion

The researcher explored the mentoring experiences of a select sample of female African-American adult students at Regional State College. This study is a qualitative interview study designed to collect data about the participants’ mentoring experiences. Purposeful sampling was used to select eight participants. The data were collected through interviews. Data were analyzed and coded to find similar patterns and common themes.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to explore the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of female African-American adult students. The researcher sought to understand, discover, and expose the experiences and potential obstacles faced by adult female African-American students working one on one with mentors at Regional State College. The study documents how students characterize their experiences with a White mentor or an African-American mentor. This chapter presents the findings of the study, which are categorized into themes that were identified during the data analysis process. A review of the methodology employed in this study is provided below.

Brief Review of Methodology

Eight students were identified and selected to participate in this study. Some of these students responded to the invitation to participate in the case study that was posted on the student connection Website while others were recommended by faculty members. The primary method for data collection was interviews with the selected participants. Fifteen questions were developed (see Appendix A), to be used during each interview. Two of the fifteen interview questions aimed to get information about participants’ personal concepts of race and education and how they saw them intersect. This allowed the researcher to understand the participants’ background in order to tell their stories. Some of the questions were used as prompts for the participants to share their lived experiences. Some of the questions allowed each participant to share information about their formal education and career backgrounds, and about their successes and obstacles. Other questions focused on the dynamics of mentoring relationships, and each participant was able to share their experiences with their mentors. The final interview
questions served as a guide to spark conversation about their view on the meaning of mentoring, overcoming challenges, and betterment.

This study applied major themes of womanism and Black feminist thought to serve as the underlying theoretical framework of the study to guide the analysis and to understand and expose the experiences of adult female African-American students enrolled at Regional State College in terms of mentoring relationships. Through interviews, the researcher attempted to describe the experiences of adult female African-American students at Regional State College. The purpose for choosing this methodology was to tell personal stories of adult female African-American adult students at Regional State College and to bring them to the center of analysis. In addition, the purpose was to add their views, to reflect their voices, and to gain insight into the everyday lives of adult female African-American students at Regional State College, and their perspectives on mentoring.

The overarching research questions were: What are the experiences of female African-American adult students in a predominantly White institution in relation to mentoring? What have their experiences been in developing a relationship with their mentors? What were some obstacles in setting realistic goals for their educational and professional plans? Did working with a White mentor affect their success and progress? How?

As the data was collected and analyzed, patterns evolved that became themes. Each participant had the opportunity to conduct a member check of her own transcript. Once member checks were completed, each transcript was entered into the chart for coding, organization, and interpretation. Open and descriptive coding was used in the first round of analysis. Merriam (2009) describes open coding as a process for identifying useful data. During the first round, the researcher highlighted prominent words and phrases in an attempt to see if any patterns emerged.
The researcher created a chart (fig. 1) to organize the data for each student and each interview question. After the researcher completed one data set, analytical memo writing was used to help synthesize the information and keep biases in check. Saldana (2013) recommends analytic memos as a way to contribute to the quality of the data due to the rigorous reflection involved. For the second round of analysis, the author used axial coding. Axial coding helps to sort the words and phrases into categories (Saldana, 2013). These words were grouped into three different sections: Positive relationship, negative relationship, and general attitudes and perceptions of participants (fig. 2). These in turn led to three major categories that emerged from the data (fig. 3). Once the three categories were established, the third phase of coding (selective coding) was used to identify themes in relation to the corresponding research questions.

Analysis of the themes in relation to the research questions and the literature review led to the findings of this study. The findings from the data analysis were organized to correspond with the research questions. For the purpose of this study, data collection occurred during the months of September to November 2017. According to Creswell (2012), when an individual studies multiple participants, the depth of the study and the overall analysis will be diluted. Merriam (2009) points out that interviewing is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals. The participants shared their personal stories through mostly phone calls and one face-to-face interview. All these students self-identified their race as African-American. Each student was assigned a number 1 through 8.

**Analysis Method**

As Merriam (2012) noted, it is much-preferred to analyze data in a qualitative study simultaneously with data collection. Merriam (2009) believes data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating. Therefore, in this study the
researcher began data analysis during data collection. Each participant had the opportunity to conduct a member check of her own transcript. Once member checks were completed, each transcript was entered into the chart for coding, organization, and interpretation. The researcher created a chart that listed students by their assigned numbers to eight rows, and their responses in the corresponding columns for each question. This visual chart helped the researcher to maintain a coherent process in data collection, data analysis, and report writing, the three steps that Creswell (2013) believes to be interrelated and often go simultaneously in a research project. Parts of this chart are displayed in figure 1, below (due to lack of space to include the entire chart). The researcher made notes of prominent words and phrases on this chart in attempt to see if any patterns emerged. A second chart was created that included the prominent words and phrases which is displayed in figure 2 below. These patterns were then listed for all participants and in relation to each question. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) recommend data summary tables to help examine and present the findings from the data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions →</th>
<th>Students ↓</th>
<th>Question # 1</th>
<th>Question # 2</th>
<th>Question # 3</th>
<th>Question # 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student # 1</td>
<td>White Mentor/Switched from White</td>
<td>My integrity is important to me. It is important to trust and respect. All Lives Matter. A person should be judged based on the content of their character not the color of skin.</td>
<td>It is very important. You need education to succeed in society.</td>
<td>Race matters in education. As an African-American woman I have experienced microaggression. My race plays a role. I felt more comfortable with the same race mentor. The white mentor didn’t care.</td>
<td>I started with a white mentor. This mentor gave me a scenario about a lazy student. She asked me to tell her what I wanted to do and did not offer any guidance. She was condescending, dismissive. We couldn’t connect. I felt she could not understand me. She was not available, non-responsive. I felt she didn’t like me. She wasn’t a mentor. I switched my major because of her. She exemplified microaggression, even though it might have been unintentional. But my current mentor has become a lifelong friend. She’s been very encouraging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student # 2</td>
<td>White Mentor/Switched from White</td>
<td>Race has nothing to do with intelligence. Some one can culturally be African-American without being black.</td>
<td>Education is a tool in assisting one in achieving their goals and self-betterment.</td>
<td>It depends on what is going on politically socially or economically, it can become a major factor or it may not.</td>
<td>The first mentor (white) didn’t go well. We went different directions. The second one (white) was very condescending, and was not helpful. The third one (white) again I recently started so not quite sure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student # 3</td>
<td>White Mentor/Switched from White</td>
<td>Race identifies us, Segregates us, a unique identifier, plays a major role socially, economically, a big divider, yet it can white, we try to go beyond it but it can not be denied.</td>
<td>It’s necessary, it’s key, it’s important but the system is failing. It’s divided along socioeconomic lines, if not for lower success, it’s important to educate the mind.</td>
<td>Race in education, it shouldn’t. It is for the privileged, we are in the lower end of financial scale. You are not part of the majority that can afford education, not too many options available. If you are in the middle you don’t win, having some opportunities doesn’t change much, you’re still a minority on campus. Social factors are present that are not necessary.</td>
<td>It has been excellent. He communicates clearly and openly, provides guidance, he took time to get to know me as an individual. It’s been outstanding, a great mentor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student # 4</td>
<td>White Mentor/Switched from White</td>
<td>Race is another description. It’s not an issue. I’m extremely proud of my race.</td>
<td>It’s an equalizer. The only thing you can take away from you.</td>
<td>Race in education, it shouldn’t. It is for the privileged, we are in the lower end of financial scale. You are not part of the majority that can afford education, not too many options available. If you are in the middle you don’t win, having some opportunities doesn’t change much, you’re still a minority on campus. Social factors are present that are not necessary.</td>
<td>A wonderful experience. At first I was intimidated. But he got it. He cares, he is encouraging, motivates you, he’s a great mentor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student # 5</td>
<td>African-American Mentor</td>
<td>Race and your color doesn’t matter. It’s the individual that’s important. I don’t understand why we have a problem. Respected Dignity is my philosophy.</td>
<td>Race is very important. People see the color of your skin before you open your mouth.</td>
<td>It shouldn’t be a factor but it is. In a predominantly white town or school, you see that they have more economic, social and educational privileges.</td>
<td>My relationship with my mentor has been awesome. We have conversations, we can relate to each other. I took a class about race and I noticed that my views were different from those of the white students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student # 6</td>
<td>African-American Mentor</td>
<td>Race and your color doesn’t matter. It’s the individual that’s important. I don’t understand why we have a problem. Respected Dignity is my philosophy.</td>
<td>Race is very important. People see the color of your skin before you open your mouth.</td>
<td>It shouldn’t be a factor but it is. In a predominantly white town or school, you see that they have more economic, social and educational privileges.</td>
<td>It has been excellent. He communicates clearly and openly, provides guidance, he took time to get to know me as an individual. It’s been outstanding, a great mentor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** Partial sections of the chart used in data analysis

![Image of a chart](chart.png)

**Figure 2.** Prominent words and phrases
Analysis Results

The participants shared their personal stories through phone calls and one face-to-face interview. All eight women who participated in this study attended one or more colleges prior to coming to Regional State College. All of them attended a community college at some point, with only two of them earning their associate’s degrees at those community colleges. So attending college and obtaining a degree had been challenging for all these women. The most common issue that led to dropping out of college were getting jobs and financial difficulties. Other common issues were not having focus, being immature, not knowing what they wanted to study, and not realizing how important education was. Not all these women had mentors throughout their lives to encourage, inspire, or empower them to try hard to accomplish their goals. Adding financial, social, and personal issues to the situation, it was difficult for them to
accomplish their goals earlier. All these women have high self-esteem and are determined to succeed, and to overcome the obstacles in their path. They all have families, children, jobs, mortgages, community involvement, limited time and resources, and in some cases, tremendously challenging personal issues. All these women expressed being fearful, intimidated, and overwhelmed by going back to school as an adult after a long gap in their educational journey.

Responses to the specific interview questions ranged from the personal issues of marriage and motherhood to institutional issues to societal issues of racism and sexism. The first words and phrases that could be identified were: balancing career, family, and community involvement, and school, mentoring, networking, being a role model, being able to relate, empathy, discrimination, sexism, racism, confidence, and respect. The participants in this study might not have used the exact expressions but the underlying message is present. Concerns about balancing family and career and school were frequently mentioned by the participants, which was described as one of the key challenges they faced. They all expressed a struggle to maintain a balance between professional and personal life. All these participants wanted to improve their careers, spend time with their family, and be involved in the community. All of the women felt that family was a very important. Careers and community involvement were also important for these women.

The challenges of experiencing racism and gender oppression were also widely expressed by all these participants. All the women in this study believed that they face both racism and sexism in their workplace. They indicated that they learned the reality of racism and sexism through experiences they faced on daily basis and developed mechanisms to cope. The participants also spoke of negative stereotypes of African-American women. They felt that they were being
judged based on the color of their skin and their gender. All these participants mentioned the importance of respect and believed that mentors should respect them as individuals. They expressed that their race and gender should not have any bearing on their treatment and their relationship with their mentors. Some of these participants expressed experiences where they did not get the respect they deserved.

Mentoring and networking were identified as a crucial factor in their success. The majority of these participants indicated their mentors were role models for them and they wished to be like their mentors. All these participants noted that having African-American female mentors is important and necessary to their success. Certainly one of the challenges identified by these participants is underrepresentation. The obstacle they face is not having enough African-American female mentors to look out for their best interests. They all pointed out that there are too few female African-American mentors available at the college. There is no one with whom to share experiences or with whom to identify. Many of these participants believed their competency was questioned because of their race and gender.

The common themes obtained from the data collection and analysis were listed under the following three major categories:

I) Perspectives on developing a relationship with mentors

II) Perspectives on White mentors

III) Perspectives on African-American women as mentors

**Theme I: Perspectives on Developing a Relationship with Mentors**

In this first theme, participants described what they thought a mentor should be like. All the participants in this study expressed similar definitions of mentoring. Their definitions were consistent with the literature review. All direct quotes were captured via notetaking during
interviews and show, below, a common language used by participants. One participant shared, “I think mentoring should be more like life coaching; they need to have empathy and know how to inspire students so we can believe in ourselves.”

All these participants believe mentors should be like friends who provide guidance, supports, and direction to them. They see their mentors as role models. One participant shared, “I want to be like my mentor.”

They all believe that mentors are important in helping them with networking. All the participants in this study shared that their mentors had referred them to workshops, clubs, organizations, or residencies, which they thought were very helpful to them.

Despite using different words to describe their perspectives on mentoring and developing a relationship with their mentors, most of these participants used the same words in describing characteristics of mentors. All these participants frequently used the words “empathy,” “respect,” “understanding,” “relating,” and “supportive” to describe qualities in an ideal mentor. Their mentors provided moral support by keeping them focused and keeping them on task. Participant number 4 shared, “Every time I started losing focus or motivation, he would bring me back to refocus.”

These participants all agreed that mentors were experienced and they could rely on their advice and guidance. Participant number 4 shared:

My mentor grew up in a different country and he shared with me his fears and challenges when he came to this country, so he could understand my fear and lack of confidence.

His experience and his guidance helped me overcome my doubts and fears.

These participants also expressed that it was important to have a respectful and trusting relationship. Participant number 8 shared:
My mentor helped me through academic, professional, and personal issues I was going through. She understood me, she wrote recommendation letters for me, she referred me to organizations, if I was behind in my work she would call me to remind me. She called me and supported me when I was going through a personal crisis. She has been instrumental in my success.

Mentors provided other opportunities for these students as well. Some of these participants shared that their mentors were the reason they received scholarships or learned about research projects or student conferences.

The participants in this study all expressed the importance of having a mentor for all students and particularly for African-American students and other students of color. All the participants unanimously expressed that they preferred a female African-American mentor. However, they all agreed that there were very few female African-American mentors available at the college. Participants number 2 said, “I prefer an African-American mentor because I can relate to them and they can relate to me, we have the same culture.”

**Theme II: Perspectives on African-American Women as Mentors**

Eight female African-American adult students participated in this study. Four of the eight had had a female African-American mentor, while the other four had White mentors. One of the students in the latter group started with a female African-American mentor but switched to a White mentor. All these participants unanimously expressed that they preferred a female African-American mentor. Participant number 4, who has a White mentor shared, “I have had a good experience so I can’t think of any major suggestions. But I think it’s best to match African-American students with African-American mentors, it is important (not critical) to see someone with your background.”
All participants in this study shared similar opinions regarding the importance of having a female African-American mentor, whether they had a female African-American mentor or a White male mentor. They all believe that female African-American mentors have a better understanding of their struggles and issues and therefore can relate to each other better and they can be role models for them. Participant number 1 shared:

We talked about a lot issues at times. I expressed my fears and reservations. My mentor encouraged me and supported me to excel. I always felt I was not good enough or smart enough but my mentor changed that. We talked about a male-dominated society. There is no support for women of color at the college. There are very few women of color mentors. I want to be like my mentor.

Some participants believed they were being judged based on the color of their skin. Participant number 5 shared, “My mentor pushed me, pushed for no excuses, she told me as a person of color I had to work harder to strive, I felt I had to do it.”

Participant number 8, who switched from an African-American mentor to a White mentor, shared:

I have an exceptional mentor, so I may be an anomaly. However, I know what the issues are. I suggest mentors not assume that we are all on public assistance, do not make assumptions. Communication is key, respect your mentees.

**Theme III: Perspectives on White Mentors**

As explained in the previous section, four of the eight female African-American adult students participating in the study had White mentors. Four of the eight had a female African-American mentor. One of the participants started with an African-American mentor but switched to a White mentor. Some of the participants with African-American mentors had
worked with White mentors prior to switching to an African-American mentor. Those participants who had worked with White mentors shared their experiences—describing both positive and negative experiences. Two of the participants had a White male mentor. Participants number 3 and 4 both have had a White male mentor whom they described as an “excellent” and “outstanding” mentor who communicates clearly and openly. Participant number 3 shared:

He took time to get to know me as an individual. He understands my background so he sets realistic goals based on my knowledge and experience. Mentors do not need to be concerned about race, it is important for mentors to understand the student because we do not represent a race; my race has nothing to do with how I need to get academic guidance. Mentors should have an understanding of race issues; otherwise, they would be ignorant. Respect me as an individual; the color of my skin has no bearing on my education.

Participant number 4 had very similar experiences and described her mentor as having:

A great impact on my life. He really helped me see management in a different perspective. He gave me good advice and insight. He is flexible, and allows me to change my approach and supported my academic decisions regarding my degree. He brings me back to refocus.

However, both participants agreed that this mentor has a different culture and background and that might play a role in how he mentors African-American students. Participant number 4 shared:
It is important to know about race. My mentor did not grow up in this country and he does not have our cultural biases. He does not understand why we have these issues. It may be different if he was a White American mentor, he does not have implicit biases.

Participant number 3 shared:

My race hurt me as a younger person, the treatment destroyed my self-esteem, and there was prejudice for my color and my language. I was considered a third-world-country citizen; the world told me everything was wrong with me. My mentor shared what it was like for him when he moved to this country. His fears and concerns, it made me comfortable. He understood how I felt as an African-American woman getting a job in management, so he helped me pick the right courses.

Not every participant had such positive experiences. The main concerns from participants with a negative experience were their mentors’ lack of understanding of their backgrounds, their condescending manners, and not being able to connect. Participant number 1 described her relationship with her White mentor as a “terrible experience.” She shared:

This mentor gave me a scenario about a lazy student. She asked me to tell her what I wanted to do and did not offer any guidance. She was condescending and dismissive. We could not connect. I felt she could not understand me. She was not available and was non-responsive. I felt she didn’t like me. She wasn’t a mentor. She exemplified microaggression, even though it might have been unintentional.

Participant number 2 has switched mentors three times as a result not being to establish a relationship with her mentors. She shared:

The first mentor could have been more forthcoming to hear me out. She only saw things her way. The second one was condescending and had very poor communication skills.
Prejudice became obvious in conversations. When I mentioned graduate school, she asked me if I knew someone in my family who has been to graduate school, and then asked me if I thought I could do it. This made me very upset because she obviously judged me. My mother went to a graduate school so why did she assume I come from an uneducated family?

Contrary to these participants, one participant had a very different experience concerning her African-American mentor and White mentor. Participant number 8 started with an African-American mentor and later switched to a White female mentor. She described her experience with her African-American mentor as “not a very positive relationship.” She said she switched to another mentor because of a “personality conflict.” She shared:

My experience was not very positive, even though my mentor was female and African-American. We had personality conflicts. I participated in a workshop where we had to make a video. I didn’t know the video would go on YouTube. She did not give me the information. I felt I was being bullied. In another incident, she gave me an incomplete without explaining to me what it meant. I thought it was an F. I escalated the issue. We could not connect even though she was African-American. Just because you are a minority doesn't mean you are the right fit.

Participant number 8 was later assigned to a White female mentor. She described this mentor as “exceptional.” She shared:

This mentor has had a huge role in my life. I wouldn’t be successful without this mentor. She did everything for me. She wrote reference letters for me, she referred me to organizations and clubs. I learned a lot from her. She keeps me in the loop. When I’m behind in work, she calls me. For a personal crisis in my life, she called and supported
me. She has been supportive. She didn’t push me but guided me. My mentor took me seriously, and changed me. She encouraged me to participate in leadership clubs. She is a true mentor. She’s been instrumental in my success. She is tough but supportive. It’s important to know about race even for Black mentors. She has always stood up for me, through my entire academic, professional, and personal, challenges, there is nothing she could have done more.

Regardless of the positive or negative aspects of the relationships with mentors of either race, all these participants expressed that it would be ideally the best scenarios if they have a female African-American mentor because that is when they feel most comfortable. They felt they could share struggles with an African-American mentor that were not necessarily academic struggles, but were common experiences outside of college. All the participants in this study expressed that they had faced discrimination and racism in workplace. They thought this was an issue that an African-American mentor could understand and relate to easier than a White mentor. Once these three categories were established, the third phase of coding was used to identify themes in relation to the corresponding research questions.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of female African-American adult students. Also, to understand, discover, and expose the experiences and obstacles faced by adult female African-American students working one on one with non-minority mentors at Regional State College. The purpose was also to find out if these students had more success with a White mentor or an African-American mentor, and to understand how these students can succeed in an educational system that is solely based on mentoring. This chapter is a compilation of the data collected from the
participants through interviews. Data were thoroughly examined through coding techniques to provide a complete analysis of the results. Three major themes emerged from this data providing a strong framework to understand the participants’ perspectives on mentoring relationships. The three themes were listed under the following categories:

I) Perspectives on developing a relationship with mentors

II) Perspectives on White mentors

III) Perspectives on African-American women as mentors

Based on the data collected, there was evidence throughout this study to support that female African-American adult students prefer to have an African-American female mentor.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of adult female African-American students. The purpose was also to understand, discover and expose the experiences and obstacles faced by adult female African-American students working one on one with White mentors at Regional State College. The purpose was also to find out if these students had more success with a White mentor or with an African-American mentor, and to understand how these students can succeed in an educational system that is solely based on mentoring. This chapter presents the interpretation of findings of the study; It will then will discuss and interface the research questions and dominant themes that emerged from this case study, with the literature and theoretical framework that guided this study.

The following questions guided the researcher to conduct this case study.

What are the effects of race and gender matching in mentoring of adult female African-American students in a predominantly White institution? The sub-questions addressed in this chapter are: What were participant perspectives on the process of developing a relationship with their mentors? How did participants describe the role of their mentors during the process of setting realistic goals for their educational and professional plans? Did race, ethnicity or gender influence the participant’s work with a mentor? Did race of the primary mentor influence the participant’s success and progress? How?

Interpretation of Findings

The findings in this study were consistent with the literature, for the most part. One of the eight participants in this study could not work with her female African-American mentor and had
a better relationship with her White mentor. This was not consistent with the literature review.

This section will discuss and interface the research questions and dominant themes that emerged from this case study, with the literature and theoretical framework that guided this study. It will then explores the implications of these findings, and ends with recommendations for further studies.

Findings on Research Questions

I: What were participant perspectives on the process of developing a relationship with their mentors?

As noted in the literature review, mentoring can be a multifaceted relationship that contributes to career advancement, personal support, role modeling, and advocacy (Dahlvig, 2010). Mentors provide guidance, support, and direction to mentees who may lack the foresight, exposure, or intuition needed to ascertain goals (Spence, 2005). The role of a mentor is to guide and help mentees to choose the right direction. Klinge (2015) points out that mentoring is a process in which an experienced person (the mentor) guides another person (mentee or protégé) in the development of her or his own ideas, learning, and personal/professional competence. The findings in this study support the literature with regard to perspectives of adult female African-American Students on mentoring. All the participants in this study described a mentor as a guide and role model who provides support for the advancement of personal, academic, and professional growth. The majority of the participants in this study emphasized the importance of a mentor having “empathy” and “understanding” and “being able to relate” to each other.

They also expressed similar concerns on the process of developing a relationship with a mentor as found in the literature review. As discussed, Chan et al. (2015) note two major obstacles facing ethnic minority students: first, ethnic minority students tend to prefer and report
more satisfaction with racially homogeneous mentor relationships but are less likely to find same-race mentors due to the lack of ethnic minority faculty in their programs. All participants in this study expressed the same concern. They all expressed their preference to have a female African-American mentor; however, they all mentioned the difficulty of finding such mentors due to the lack of ethnic minority mentors employed by the college. This directly correlates with the research done on self-efficacy as Syed, Azmitia, and Cooper (2011) and other researchers have discussed. The outcomes shows direct correlation with research that identifies mentors from similar backgrounds as particularly important to students of color because they represent prototypes that enable students to gain a sense of academic self-efficacy. The second obstacle that Chan et al. (2015) described was that ethnic minority students paired with European American mentors have been found to receive fewer overall mentoring benefits and psychosocial support than mentees in same-race dyads. Seven of the eight participants in this study described the same obstacle. Five of the eight participants raised concerns that their White mentors could not understand them or they were not as helpful as they should have been.

There were two different insights that emerged in this study, in relation to mentors outside of one’s own race. The first noteworthy insight that emerged in this study was having a successful mentoring relationship with a White male mentor. Two of the participants in this study had a White male mentor that they described as “outstanding” and “excellent.” Both these women expressed that this mentor had been instrumental in their success. However, they both felt that it would have been best if they had a female African-American mentor. They thought the mentor they had was excellent, on a professional and academic level, but they did not feel comfortable discussing personal issues. They said they could not discuss certain things with them and did not have a sense of deep personal connection. This sense of support and
empowerment has been one of the key elements of their personal mentor relationships. This is not to say that mentors of other races cannot guide, support and encourage female African-American mentees, but African-American mentors have a unique and personal insight to offer their mentees, which can be instrumental in developing self-efficacy as was noted in the literature review.

Through a womanist paradigm, the women in this study understand the subjective realities of being African-American women within a dominant ideological culture. Crenshaw (1991) explains that where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women, who because of race and class face different obstacles. In this study, one participant explained that as an immigrant she faced discrimination within her own African-American community. She could not rely on support from family and friends because she faced class oppression, and at school, she faced discrimination as a woman and as an African-American woman. Women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups, two sometimes opposing groups, which is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and White women seldom confront. The problem is not simply that both discourses fail women of color, for example, by not acknowledging the “additional” issue of race or of patriarchy, but that the discourses are often inadequate even to the discrete tasks of articulating the full dimensions of racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1991). In this study, one participant shared that she had an abusive relationship background. She felt that her White female mentor would not be able to understand or relate to that, therefore, she did not share that information with her mentor. Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to
experiences of White women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms (Crenshaw, 1991).

The second new insight that emerged in this study was not having a successful relationship with a same-race mentor. One of the participants in this study, contrary to the other participants, had a very different experience concerning her African-American mentor and White mentor. Participant number 8 started with an African-American mentor and later switched to a White female mentor. She described her experience with her African-American mentor as “not a very positive relationship.” She said she switched to another mentor because of a “personality conflict.” Participant number 3 also discussed her negative experiences within the African-American community. She said she not only faced prejudice for her color in the larger society, she also faced prejudice from the African-American community. She comes from a Caribbean island and therefore she has a different dialect. She felt that the African-American community in the United States considered her a low-class citizen from a third-world country. Johnson (2014) points out that the construct of racism is efficiently designed to politically and socially subjugate a segment of the population; however, for the oppressed, a natural response is to advocate for conformity with the dominant culture as an appeal for equal treatment. This is what Freire (1993) described as the duality in which to be is to be like, and to be like is to be like the oppressor.

II: How did participants describe the role of their mentors during the process of setting realistic goals for their educational and professional plans?

As noted in the literature review, mentoring is a process in which an experienced person (the mentor) guides another person (mentee or protégé) in the development of her or his own ideas, learning, and personal/professional competence (Klinge, 2015). The findings in this study
support the research concerning the perspectives of adult female African-American students in setting realistic goals for their educational and professional plans with their mentors. All the participants in this study explained that once they established a relationship with their mentors, they were helpful in setting realistic academic and professional goals. In many cases, they expressed that they would not have been able to accomplish their goals without their mentors. It is noteworthy that these participants had trouble with some mentors and they were not able to communicate with their mentors, which resulted in switching to another mentor. This finding will be discussed further in the next sections.

The obstacles that the participants faced consisted of a variety of barriers throughout their lives which include racism, sexism, socioeconomic, discrimination at school, work, and within the community. It was evident that having a strong and positive support system, such as having a mentor, can help the participants in conquering their challenges. The participants in this study felt that their mentoring relationships helped them with their careers and professional networking. Participant number 8 said that her mentor was instrumental in her success. Her mentor wrote reference letters and recommendations for her and introduced her to different organizations.

The womanist-CRT lens applied in this study brings to the forefront the effects of relationships and empowerment on the lived experiences of adult female African-American students at a PWI. Collins (2000) defined this theory as a critical social theory that aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions. The core themes within the theoretical framework include oppression, the image of the Black woman, self-definition, sexuality, motherhood, political activism, and love relationships. Lindsay-Dennis (2015) believes the central principle of womanism is the
absolute necessity of speaking from and about one’s own experiential location; womanism is a social change methodology that stems from everyday experiences of Black women and their modes of solving practical problems. Similarly, the women in this study identified the challenges in their mentoring relationships, and by seeking support and validation from family, faith, and other means of support to continue and overcome. Some of the participants in this study faced discrimination and felt their mentors were condescending or dismissive. They identified the oppression and sought support to change the situation.

A new insight emerged in this case study, via three participants who had mentors outside of their race and gender. They believed that mentoring does not need to be facilitated through African-American women in order to result in professional success. All participants in this study acknowledged, in accordance with the literature, that it is a challenge to match female African-American students with African-American mentors, due to the lack of African-American mentors. As discussed in the literature, mentoring can be a beneficial to the mentee, mentor, institution, and society; however, as identified by the women in this study, they have been able to benefit professionally from mentors of each gender and from other racial groups. The three participants in this study who had mentors outside of their race and gender acknowledged that they were placed in a unique situation and they thought they were anomalies. They understood that they could benefit more from having a female African-American mentor because of shared background and experiences. They noted that a female African-American mentor could understand their obstacles and problems better than anyone else could. Furthermore, the mentors in their cases came from unique backgrounds and they thought this made a difference. The White male mentor in this study grew up in a different country with a completely different culture. These participants felt that he was not conditioned and exposed to racial issues in the
United States and therefore his views were different from those of an average White male
American mentor. The White female mentor in this study that had a very successful mentoring
relationship with participant number 8 was also considered a minority within her White
community. She had had extensive training and teachings on the subject of racism and sexism.
This mentor had a long history of advocacy for female African-American students. For these
reasons, these participants felt their mentoring relationship outside of their race and gender were
successful. However, they understood that it could be beneficial to them to get the information
they needed from the people who traditionally hold the power. This could be a way of
understanding power, negotiating power, and trying to empower themselves to succeed.

III: Did race, ethnicity or gender influence the participant’s work with a mentor? Did
race of the primary mentor influence the participant’s success and progress? How?

All the participants in this study agreed that as an African-American adult student having a
female African-American mentor, someone that was similar to them, was important or ideal.
However, the participants had different experiences and views on race and gender as a factor
concerning mentors. Some of the participants never had a White mentor and did not believe they
should have one. Some participants had very negative experiences with their White mentors and
had to switch to a different mentor. On the other hand, some participants had positive
relationships with non-African-American mentors. For example, participants number 3 and 4 had
a positive and successful relationship with a White male mentor and viewed him as an
outstanding mentor but the relationship had not moved towards friendship. On the other hand,
participant number 8 had a negative relationship with her female African-American mentor,
which she described as personality conflict. However, she had a positive and engaging
relationship with her White female mentor, that was not only successful professionally and
academically, it had moved towards a lifetime friendship. Despite her positive relationship with a White mentor, she felt it would be best to work with an African-American female mentor because she could understand and relate to their unique situations, experiences, and struggles. She acknowledged that racism and discrimination are real. She pointed out that she had faced discrimination at work, and continues to face these struggles and challenges today. The findings in this case study place African-American women at the center of their own realities as adult students in a PWI and support the importance of mentoring.

The voices expressed in this study produced a great deal of data pertaining to mentoring experience, challenges with having White mentors (male and female), and experiences with African-American female mentors. In the findings, participants’ statements and experiences referred to commonalities between their perspectives. All the participants in this study agreed that having an African-American female mentor could make a difference in their college experiences and their professional success. They all agreed that a female African-American mentor would be able to understand and relate to them in a unique way. The advice they could get from her, based on her own personal experiences, could help them avoid mistakes and drawbacks. This supports Collins’s (2006) description that Black feminist thought came from the ideology that no matter what age, social status, sexual orientation or profession, all African-American women share like culture and experiences.

The findings also show that despite race and gender, mentoring is a crucial part of the academic experience for female African-American adult students. Those participants who had female African-American mentors saw significant value in their relationships, describing them as fulfilling. Those participants who did not have an African-American female mentor thought that having a female African-American mentor would have been beneficial to them, even though they
had successful mentoring experiences with other mentors. They believed so because they thought having the same race and similar backgrounds are particularly important to students of color because they can enable them to gain a sense of academic self-efficacy and the success they are seeking. Those participants who had a negative experience with their mentors believed that the experience made them stronger and taught them how to recognize difficult situations and how to use resources and connections to find solutions. These findings are consistent with how Lindsay-Dennis (2015) described the central principle of womanism as the absolute necessity of speaking from and about one’s own experiential location; womanism is a social change methodology that stems from everyday experiences of Black women and their modes of solving practical problems. She notes that a key tenet of womanism is using everyday people to solve problems.

**Implications**

The findings of this study suggest several practical implications for institutions of higher education who believe in diversity and are committed to student success. Colleges and universities might be stronger, more successful, and more inclusive if they aligned their institutional practices with strategies to enhance the hiring of African-American women as mentors and faculty. Given the lack of African-American women in faculty or leadership positions at institutions of higher education, specifically PWIs, it is important for these institutions to develop strategies to advance their institutional mission and strategic priorities with regards to diversity, inclusion, and advancement of traditionally underrepresented groups who serve as faculty mentors. Recruitment strategies need to be reviewed and improved to include a more diverse pool of candidates. There is a tremendous impact on students of color who get support from mentors whom they view as aspirational role models. There should be
deliberate effort by institutions to advertise and recruit potential African-American women faculty mentors. Additionally, those institutions that do not participate in nationwide professional conferences on diversity issues, where a large number of African-American women also participate and present, could potentially benefit from these activities. Even though the institution in this study participates in these conferences, there are typically one or two representatives from the institution. The findings of this study recommend extending participation to a larger group of faculty and administrators. This can be a learning opportunity and at the same time a networking opportunity to find highly qualified African-American women faculty mentors who might be interested in Regional college. These efforts can lead to student success and help with retention and the graduation goals of institutions.

**Practical Implications**

The purpose of this study was to gain better insight into the perceptions and experiences of female African-American adult students enrolled at Regional State College and from the collected data, recommendations for practice related to this study emerged. As discussed in the literature review, mentoring is a process in which an experienced person (the mentor) guides another person (mentee or protégé) in the development of her or his own ideas, learning, and personal/professional competence (Klinge, 2015). Mentoring has shown to be beneficial for students in higher education. The data from this study outlined the challenges and obstacles that female African-American adult students enrolled at Regional State College face. It is important for the college to continue to not only improve and advance the existing mentoring program, but also to seek ways to meet the needs of these students. The main obstacle these students faced was not having access to female African-American mentors and they expressed throughout the study the need for more female African-American mentors at the college. Therefore, it is
recommended that the institution look into its current hiring practices and implement strategies to increase the number of female African-American mentors, given the value these faculty members bring to the college. The availability of female African-American mentors will enhance academic success for these students.

Additionally, the institution can benefit from creating strategic guidelines for mentors in regards to mentoring skills, ethical guidelines, and establishing and maintaining a healthy relationship with their mentees. The college can reexamine the current diversity efforts and consider hiring more African-American women and other women of color. It is important to have female African-American mentors to take an active role in advocating for African-American students.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study has provided some insight into the challenges of female African-American adult students in higher education. Mentoring is extremely beneficial to these students. It will be helpful to conduct further research utilizing qualitative methods and womanist or Black feminist thought to further supplement the research on female African-American adult students. Future research might possibly address: 1) the process of mentor assignments to students; 2) the barriers to the success of African-American students in mentoring relationships; and 3) the lack of female African-American mentors in higher education. It would also be beneficial to conduct additional research to identify the differences between mentoring skills of female African-American mentors with those of White female mentors.

The literature review shows that having a mentor of color is beneficial to White students as well as the entire institution. This study did not attempt to explore this concept; however, future researchers can explore this phenomenon further.
Limitations

There were some limitations to this study. One limitation was the assumption that African-American women could only benefit from African-American women as mentors. African-American women have had successful mentoring relationships with male mentors and mentors of another race. Another limitation to the study was the small sample size. This qualitative study focused on eight women; although the number of participants is adequate for a case study, they do not represent opinions of all female African-American adult students at the college. Their voices will not speak to or represent the experience of every female African-American adult student in higher education. The third limitation was the lack of African-American female mentors at the college, which made it difficult to find participants easily. Finally, the selection of the college was another limitation. The college selected for this study was chosen based on proximity to the researcher; therefore, a convenience sample, not a random sample was used. Another possible limitation was the researcher’s employment at the college and familiarity with mentors and students. To address this bias, analytical memos were written to better understand the data and to ensure that the data was being examined from many different angles.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to explore the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of female African-American adult students. The purpose was also to find out if these students have more success with a White mentor or with a female African-American mentor, and to understand how these students can succeed in an educational system that is solely based on mentoring. Literature shows that female African-American adult students face barriers due to their race and gender and having mentors that they can relate to can help them face
challenges and achieve success. Previous literature has focused on the experiences of traditional age female African-American students and their experiences working with mentors outside of their race. This study represents an important contribution to knowledge on the topic by focusing on adult female African-American students who work one-on-one with mentors. This study’s insights regarding the positive experiences of some adult female African-American students who successfully navigated college while working with a mentor outside of their race and gender, and lack of success for one adult female African-American students who had a same-race mentor can contribute to future policies and programs.

A conceptual framework guided the development of the study and the interpretation of data from participants’ transcripts. The three themes that emerged from the interpretation of the data provided valuable insights into the educational journeys of eight adult female African-American students and their relationships with their mentors. The results from this study demonstrate that although some adult female African-American students have been successful in their mentoring relationships with mentors outside of their race and gender, they all expressed their preference to have a female African-American mentor. It is vitally important that institutions of higher education to increases the number of female African-American mentors in order to meet the needs to these students and help them succeed.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

In your own words, how would you describe your race or ethnicity? Which of the following best represents your racial or ethnic heritage? Choose all that apply.

Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American
Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American
Latino or Hispanic American
East Asian or Asian American
South Asian or Indian American
Middle Eastern or Arab American
Native American or Alaskan Native
Other

1. What is your personal concept of race?
2. What is your personal concept of education?
3. How does race intersect with education in your view? Does race matter in education?
4. What have your experiences been in developing a relationship with your mentors?
5. What role has your mentor played in your academic and professional life? How has your mentor affected and/or changed you? What more could it have done?
6. What should education be about in your life? What were some obstacles in setting realistic goals for your educational and professional plans?
7. What has college been like for you? What have your experiences with other professors been like?
8. Tell me about the places you’ve been to school. How much education have you had?
9. What is/was your relationship with your mentor like? How often did you meet with your mentor? What new people have you met through your mentor? Do you think it’s important, particularly for a White mentor, to know about race? Or to think about race? Why?
10. Tell me about a time when your mentor stood up for you. Is there a time when you wish they had stood up for you? Tell me about any times that have been difficult with your mentor.
11 Did you ever change mentors, have you ever wanted to? What happened with that? How was your experience in working with a non-minority mentor, if you had any?

12 My race has had an effect on my life; how do you think your race affects your life? What do you want out of life? (Probes: family, friends, work, values, education). How has the mentoring relationship helped with these?

13 How has race, ethnicity, class, gender, and language affected your relationship with your mentor? Have you ever discussed race, ethnicity, gender, class, or language with your mentor? What happened?

14 What would you change about mentoring? Are there any messages (without telling who said them, of course) you would like the researcher to share with the college administration, mentors, or others?

15 What should I have asked that I did not? Is there anything else you would like to tell me? Any final thoughts on the program and/or on the interview itself?

Thank you for sharing so much with me. We will use what you have told me to help improve our mentoring practices.
Dear Students,

I am conducting a qualitative case study on the impact of same-race matching in one-on-one mentoring on adult female African-American students enrolled at the college between September 2017 and November 2017. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. I have outlined the details of this study in the attached document and explained what would be expected of you as a participant.

After reading the invitation letter, kindly respond to this email to let me know your decision. If you choose to participate, I will send the informed consent letter to you for your review. At the commencement of the study in January, I will plan to read the informed consent letter with you and we will both sign it.

If you have any questions at this time, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Zohreh Aminian
###-###-####
zohreh.aminian@###.edu
Email Attachment: Participant Invitation Letter

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
PARTCIPATION IN RESEARCH INVITATION

September 1, 2017

Project Title: Impact of Same-Race Mentoring on Adult Female African-American Students Enrolled at Regional State College

Principal Investigator(s): Zohreh Aminian, Doctoral Student, University of New England (###-###-#### zohreh.aminian@###.edu); Dr. Grania Holman, Faculty Advisor, (gholman@une.edu; 678-234-2414).

Dear Potential Study Participant:

As a doctoral student completing her dissertation research through the University of New England, I am inviting you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this invitation is to provide you with information about this research study and, if you choose to participate, document your decision. You have expressed interest in voluntarily participating in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions about this study, now, during, or after the project is complete.

Study’s Purpose
The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of female African-American adult students. Also, to understand, discover, and expose the experiences and obstacles faced by adult female African-American students working one on one with non-minority mentors at Regional State College. The purpose is also to find out if these students have more success with a White mentor or an African-American mentor, and to understand how these students can succeed in an educational system that is solely based on mentoring. Not enough has been written about same-race mentoring of adult students and this study can add to the research in this area. This study can potentially increase the empirical evidence reported in the literature about mentoring and same-race matching while it shifts the attention to adult female students in same-race mentoring field.

Research Questions
The following questions will guide the researcher to conduct this case study. The main question is: What are the effects of race and gender matching in mentoring female African-American students at Regional State College? In other words, does race matter with regard to the mentoring relationships African-American female students have with their primary mentors at Regional State College? This question can be explored by examining these questions, which are part of the central inquiry:

• What were their perspectives on the process of developing a relationship with their mentors?
• Were there and what were the obstacles in setting realistic goals for their educational and professional plans with their mentors?
• Did race, ethnicity or gender play any role in working with a mentor? Did race of the mentor have an impact on success and progress? How?

Procedures
The procedure will be a single case study that occurs from September to November 2017, with results/findings published by January 2018. Data collection will include interviews. Individuals involved in the data collection will be the researcher and student. I do not foresee this study presenting any risks or hardship on you, other than the time invested in participating. However, your investment of time will contribute to the current discourse on mentoring adult students of color that can enhance students’ experience and success.

Confidentiality
Your identity will be protected throughout the study and thereafter. Only I, the researcher, will have access to your information. Follow-up verbal, signed, and written reports, and discussions will identify you only as a number (i.e. Participant #2). Your name and location will not be shared with anyone else. Your confidentiality will be protected in compliance with the Empire State College and University of New England’s research with human participants’ policies and procedures.

Compensation
No monetary or non-monetary compensation will be provided for your input or time.

Questions
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and your participation, you may contact me, the researcher, via e-mail at zohreh.aminian@###.edu, or via my phone at (###) ###-####. You may also contact Dr. Grania Holman at the University of New England at gholman@une.edu or by phone at (678) 234-2414.

Thank you for your willingness to consider participating in this research study and possibly providing your valuable insights as a student. Your contribution will not only support my dissertation study, but it will also inform the current research on mentoring students of color in institutions of higher education.

Sincerely,
Zohreh Aminian
Doctoral Student
University of New England’s Transformative Leadership Program
APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Impact of Same-Race Mentoring on Adult Female African-American Students at Regional State College
Principal Investigator: Zohreh Aminian
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Holman

Introduction
General requirement language: Please read this form, you may also request to have the form read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.

You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the importance and role of race in mentoring relationships of female African-American adult students.

Who will be in this study?
The researcher is trying to see if there is a link between same-race mentoring and student success at ####### College. (The pseudonym Regional State College will be used in the study.) There will be eight African-American female students in this study.

What will I be asked to do?
There will be one or two interviews, conducted over the phone, via skype, or in person (which ever is the most convenient for participants) at a convenient time for the participants.

Interviews will last approximately 90 minutes each. The interview notes will be collected and analyzed. After an analysis is written, you will be allowed to read it and respond to it before the final draft.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?
The risks involved during our interactions with the participants will be minimal. Interviewing may involve such mild discomfort as boredom and irritation at the questions or interviewers.

These are rarely strong enough to interrupt the interview, however, if the participant objects, the interview will immediately cease. You may discontinue the study at any time, and if any discomfort should arise, the interview will immediately cease.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?
There will be no direct benefit to you as the participant. You will have the opportunity to tell your stories to outsiders unfamiliar with them. The findings from this case study can emphasize the importance, value, and contribution of diversity to students, faculty, staff and college as a
whole to the higher administration at the college. This could potentially bring awareness to the need for having more faculty members that represent a minority group and help facilitate channels to provide a culturally diverse learning environment that supports equity and diversity.

**What will it cost me?**
There will be no financial costs to you.

**How will my privacy be protected?**
Pseudonyms will be used for the college and the participants. It is not necessary for this study to link names to responses.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**
No individually identifiable information will be collected. Similar data is collected for each of the participants. Audio recordings of the interview and the consent forms will be kept on a password-protected computer. A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the researcher for the duration of the study and after the project is complete it will be destroyed.

**What are my rights as a research participant?**
Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the college. Your refusal to participate or discontinue participation will not affect your relationship to the college, or your mentor or any student groups. You may refuse to answer any questions you choose not to answer. If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty to you. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.

**What other options do I have?**
You may choose not to participate.

**Whom may you contact with questions?**
The researcher conducting this study is Zohreh Aminian. She can be reached through the contact information listed above. You may also contact Dr. Grania Holman at gholman@une.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu.

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**
Yes, you will be given a copy of this consent form.
Participant’s Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

Participant’s signature  Date
or Legally authorized representative

Printed name

Researcher’s Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher’s signature  Date

Printed name
Zohreh Aminian