

IMPACT OF DEEP-LEVEL SIMILARITIES ON MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Approved: __Dr Damira Grady_____ Date: _12/21/2017_____

IMPACT OF DEEP-LEVEL SIMILARITIES ON MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

Adult Education

By

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2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“My work is to give you
what I know of my own path
while allowing you to
walk your own.”

(Ta-Nehisi Coates, 2017)

First and foremost, I would like to thank god for creating me in his image and instilling the strength to complete this research seminar paper. I would like to thank Joan Riedle, Ph.D. and Damira Grady, Ph.D. for their wisdom, guidance, and support in the writing of this paper. I send my gratitude for the patience provided by my campus support system.

The completion of this paper could not have been accomplished without the unwavering support of my advisor; Ann Krebs Byrne Ph.D. and my dynamic colleagues who have served as great listeners and at times primary motivators. To Emalydia – thank you for providing feedback for enhancement of this paper. Thank you to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Karen Blackman. The countless times you have sacrificed to provide the best quality of life for me was more than enough. This milestone in my life represents your investment.

Finally, to my compassionate, patient, loving wife, Bethany: I send my deepest gratitude. Your inspiration and willingness to care for me through the high-pressure moments will never be forgotten. It was reassuring to know the person I met nine years ago continues to provide spiritual and mental support through significant moments. Thank you.

Abstract

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Master of Education

Researchers understand mentoring done well has the best possibility to positively impact mentees. However, there is no seamless scheme for matching mentors and mentees, particularly when referencing African American men in higher education. The literature describes the impact of same racial/ethnic and gender mentor pairings and satisfaction of the relationship, but predominately-White mentor-mentee sample groups dominate this field of study. This is due to low enrollment of African American men in higher education. A review of the literature related to the history of mentoring and identifying issues impacting African American men in higher education is presented. Additionally, strategies for structured mentoring programs are proposed. An examination of pairing mentors and mentees is reviewed. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for pairing undergraduate African American men with mentors are provided.

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Chapter I: Introduction

There are many programs and services offered to address the issue of retention and graduation rates among students of color in higher education. Mentoring has certainly been a practice to influence positive outcomes among African American men. Not only has mentoring served to keep undergraduate African American men on the path for success, but it has also helped to make students feel welcomed and affirmed on predominately-White campuses and avoid college pitfalls. Veering is the tendency to deviate from an intended route while progressing under conditions of restricted environmental cues (Consolo, Holanda, & Fukusima, 2014, p. 269). Without external cues provided by vision, for example, maintaining a straight-ahead direction is almost impossible while walking. Respectable mentors have helped decrease the chances of veering among undergraduate African American men. Mentoring in these spaces serve as a process utilized to navigate a sometimes-challenging world. African American men who navigate this world must be able to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to realize their potential and not internalize a national narrative of disparities and inequities in college achievement.

The University of Wisconsin-Platteville (UW-Platteville) has established the Directive for Retention Initiatives and Valuing Education Network (DRIVEN) Scholars Program in order to address this issue and the students it serves. The DRIVEN Scholars Program is available to provide leadership opportunities and assist students with advocacy in various social, cultural, and academic advising needs (Driven Scholars Program, 2017). DRIVEN Scholars will transition through their first year of college with the support of advisors provided through the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA). OMSA advisors will challenge and support students to reach their personal and academic goals (Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, 2017). A

review of the literature was completed to advise OMSA on recommendations for pairing mentors with mentees within this structured program.

Ortiz-Walters and Gilson (2005) explored the mentoring experience of African American, Hispanic, and Native-American protégés in an academic setting. They wanted to determine if there was a connection between perceived similarities and satisfaction and support with mentoring relationships. Similarity based on outlook, perspective, and values can be termed “perceived similarity” (Ensher & Murphy, 1997). Specifically, their focus was on protégés of color paired with mentors who were also of color or not, and who had perceived similar values or not (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005). They predicted protégés of color would report more psychosocial and instrumental support, relationship satisfaction, and interpersonal comfort with mentors of color than with mentors who were dissimilar with regards to race/ethnicity. They found student protégés of color with mentors of color perceived significantly more psychosocial and instrumental support, and marginally more satisfaction and interpersonal comfort.

These findings are contrary to those of Turban, Dougherty, and Lee (2002) who did not find that racial/ethnic similarity influenced protégés perception of mentoring. Turban et al. (2002) did find that perceived similarity was positively related to mentoring received. Turban et al's. (2002) sample was predominantly Caucasian (70%), while Ortiz-Walters and Gilson's (2005) sample was comprised primarily of African American, Hispanic, and Native Americans. According to Ortiz-Walter and Gilson (2005), "These findings may suggest for White protégés racial/ethnic similarity is not important, but for people of color, surface-level similarity does matter" (p. 471). Researchers continue to explore and use findings to employ high impact practices among undergraduate African American men.

Statement of the Problem

OMSA staff at UW-Platteville has worked diligently to employ high impact practices to increase retention, graduation rates and overall success among students of color (Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, 2017). Much of the recent success can be attributed to the introduction of pairing students of color with an auxiliary advisor and peer mentor offered through a structured mentoring program. In lieu of recent success, however, African American men still struggle to persist and thrive at the rate of White students nationally (Jeria & Roth, 2011). Additionally, enrollment is mostly down among low-income and minority students (Brownstein, 2011). The academic performance of black men compared to black women in higher education has also caused alarm (Cross & Slater, 2000). A unique opportunity to explore intentional pairings and its impact is presented. An exploration of the literature may warrant OMSA to critically examine its pairing methods to further improve the likeliness of student success among a vulnerable population. Although systemic research on best methods of pairing mentees and mentors are limited, one could expect less satisfaction for all involved in the mentoring process if no system of pairing is implemented (Hale, 2000).

Significance of the Study

This study focused on the DRIVEN Program at the UW-Platteville campus through an examination of the history of mentoring so the results can be directly applicable to that program. Review of the literature will help guide recommendations for pairing mentees with mentors as the DRIVEN Scholars Program addresses department goals. It is essential to have successful mentor-mentee pairings because mentors have the important role of helping to increase student comfort with campus, address cultural concerns, and providing holistic student support.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to build upon the research of Ortiz-Walters and Gilson (2005) by exploring the impact of deep-level similarity on the mentoring relationship. Similarity based on values and problem-solving style can be termed "deep-level similarity". Findings will guide Systemic mentor-mentee pairings that has the capacity to yield positive outcomes.

Definition of Terms

Mentor and Mentoring

Occurs when a senior person (mentor) in terms of age and experience undertakes to provide information, advice, and emotional support to a junior person (the protégé) in a relationship set formally by the constraints of the program and lasts for a period of time (Ensher & Murphy, 1997).

Deep-Level Similarity

Similarity based on values and problem-solving style can be termed "deep-level similarity" (Ensher & Murphy, 1997).

Perceived Similarity

Similarity based on outlook, perspective, and values can be termed "perceived similarity" (Ensher & Murphy, 1997).

Actual Similarity

Matching by social-identities such as race, gender, and age can be termed "actual similarity" (Ensher & Murphy, 1997).

Psychosocial Support

A mentor conveys feelings of respect for students as they grow into their professional roles, empathizes with the students' feelings and concerns, and openly shares personal experiences on how to balance work and/or family demands (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005).

Psychosocial

Of or relating to the interaction between social and psychological factors (Dictionary, 2017).

Instrumental Support

Student protégés learn the necessary career-related skills, such as how to write and review papers, develop hypotheses, analyze data, and teach more effectively (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005).

Non-Cognitive Skills

Cover a range of abilities that are critical to student achievement both in and beyond the classroom. Such abilities include conscientiousness, perseverance, and teamwork (Non-cognitive skills: What are they and why should we care? 2017).

High-Impact Practices (HIPs)

Undergraduate opportunities that are positively associated with student learning and retention. (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005). HIPs share several traits: They demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, and encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback (High-Impact Practices, 2017).

Emotional Intelligence

The capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically. (Oxford Dictionary, 2017).

Ethnic and Racial Identity

Ethnic and racial identity encompasses one's sense of self and may instill feelings of belonging to a particular group or groups and/or sharing identification with a group (Ethnic and Racial Identity Development, 2017).

Limitations of Research

I conducted research through the Elton S. Karmann Library. In addition, I conducted primary searches through the Internet using EBSCO. A limitation of the study was the predominately-White student, faculty, and staff population of the Midwest University. For this reason, suggestions on best practices cannot be generalized to the broader community based on the review of the literature alone.

Method of Approach

I completed a review of the literature on the history of mentoring to provide a context for evaluation. I completed a review of the literature on issues impacting African American men in higher education to raise awareness and advance purposeful intervention when working with this vulnerable population. I completed a review of the literature on strategies for structured mentoring programming, which suggests best practices for implementation. I completed a review of perspectives on pairing mentors and mentees to reflect on a range of criterion. Key search topics included mentoring, interpersonal comfort, perceived similarity, race similarity, and representation.

Chapter Summary and Forecast

Mentoring has the capacity to influence positive outcomes among mentees. Mentorship fosters academic success, professional development, and builds bonds. Consistent interaction with undergraduate African American men aid in maintaining these bonds (Cuyjet, 1997). While some research supports the notion surface-level similarities such as race, gender, and age positively impact the mentoring relationship, there is a case to be made for deep-level similarities such as values and problem solving. Further exploration of these topics may have implications for mentoring comfortability and satisfaction. Ultimately, deep-level similarities may be an essential predictor of comfort and satisfaction for both White and non-White mentees. This is a significant concept with consideration to the lack of minority faculty and staff in the Midwest and the undergraduate African American men in need of mentors. An exploration of mentoring history and identifying issues affecting African American men in higher education will provide contextual information to consider when paring mentors and mentees.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Contextualizing mentoring requires an analysis of mentoring history. Mentoring researchers have traced the concept of mentoring as far back as Greek Mythology. Today, we see the term used often within the educational setting. Professionals interchangeably use the terms: coach, adviser, and counselor to describe a person who enables others and help them realize their potential. Coupled topics provide an overview of relevant information aiding African American men of realizing their potential. A review of the literature on the history of mentoring, identify issues impacting African American men in higher education, strategies for structured mentoring programming, and perspective on pairing mentors and mentees are reviewed to advance the field of research on mentoring.

A History of Mentoring

Homer first coined the term mentor when he introduced the character Mentor in *The Odyssey*. Mentor was very wise and many people referred to him for protection in ancient Greece. His guidance and willingness to serve others represents common understanding of an ideal role model. Mentor was well respected by many because of his ability to build sincere relationships with others. Building personal relationships was not only one of Mentor's best trait, but was something he truly valued. Personal relationships usually consist of an experienced person who serves as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a younger less experienced person (Johnson, 2002, p. 88). Therefore, mentoring is the guidance process that takes place between a mentor and protégé (Friday & Friday, 2002). Other characteristics of Mentor would go on to become key functions of contemporary mentoring.

Mentor Functionality

One of the earliest functions of a mentor is to serve as a role model to mentees. Role models encourage mentees to believe “they can do it too”, primarily by modeling the way (Slavet, 2006, p. 60). Role models may openly express their passion and encourage mentees to explore new interests through one to one encounters. Engaging mentees in this environment requires mutual celebration of discipline and passion (Slavet, 2006, p. 60). It can also encourage exploration of new perspectives, experiences, and bridge newfound potential (Blake-Beard, 2009). This makes the role and characteristics of a mentor critical to the effectiveness of the overall relationship.

The role and characteristics of an ideal mentor varies based on the context of the relationship between a mentor and mentee. An effective mentor encourages the mentee to expand their own knowledge and take on opportunities that encourage growth (Hale, 2000). In terms of personality, desirable mentors are intelligent, caring, and appropriately humorous (Johnson, 2002). This allows mentors to be relatable and allow mentees to build trust. Building trust helps establish communication for building realistic expectations of all involved in mentoring.

Psychosocial and instrumental development of the mentee helps guide what is expected of the mentor in the higher education setting. Psychosocial functions include role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling and friendship. Instrumental functions include “learning the ropes” and preparing for advancement in personal and professional spaces (Johnson, 2002, p. 89). Addressing the two functions appropriately allows the mentees the opportunity to grow personally and professionally because of a quality mentoring experience. Psychosocial and instrumental development continues to be a high priority in the development of mentees in the 21st century.

Mentoring in the 21st Century

Mentoring in the 21st century prompts both mentors and mentees to become active advocates for addressing psychosocial and instrumental deficiencies. Identifying a student peer mentor, staff, faculty, and surrounding community member can alleviate the responsibility of one mentor to address all support concerns. The ongoing change of careers will require students to become competent in both social and leadership skills. Helping students to develop their own developmental relationships early in their professional career will be essential to gain an edge in a competitive work industry that is always changing (Murphy, 2011).

Shifting demographics including workplace diversity, globalization, and technological advances, requires mentoring to serve as a cross-cultural support process (Blake-Bread, 2009). Research on mentoring has increased over time, but mutual knowledge of the mentor and mentee's similarities and differences has created gaps in cultural understanding. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is one of the most effective competencies to enable suitable mentoring during changing demographics (Blake-Bread, 2009, p. 17). Individuals are able to empathetically respond to differences and increase the likeliness for effective mentoring to occur through self-awareness and self-regulation. Cultural intelligence also positively enables good mentoring. Mentors are able to better recognize and understand cultural norms and traditions by becoming more culturally competent (Blake-Beard 2009). This is especially important for White mentors working with African American men from diverse backgrounds who face pervasive issues.

Identifying Issues Impacting African American Men in Higher Education

Unsettling National Narrative

Literature suggests there are many issues that affect African American men in various stages of their life. *The New York Times* published a survey that highlighted employment and educational disparities among African American men in 2006. The survey served to capture the experience and perception of African American men. Staggering statistics suggests African American men are becoming more disconnected from the mainstream environment. Boyd's (2007) noted the following from the survey:

A black man is more than six times as likely as a white man to be slain. The trend is most stark among black men fourteen to twenty-four years old: They were implicated in a quarter of the nation's homicides and accounted for 15 percent of the homicide victims in 2002, although they were just 1.2 percent of the population, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. More than half of the nation's 5.6 million black boys live in fatherless households, 40 percent of which are impoverished. The suicide rate among young black men has doubled since 1980. One in four black men has not worked for at least a year, twice the proportion of male non-Hispanic whites or Latinos. And trends suggest a third of black males born today will spend time in prison. More black men earn their high school equivalency diplomas in prison each year than graduate from college. (p. 2)

The reduced pursuit of college by black students has increased the gap between black and white college participation and has affected black students' ability to complete degrees (Jeria & Roth, 2011, p. 40-41). These statistics only reinforce what many knew, but have not appropriately engaged due to lack of complete understanding. Moreover, the influx in incarceration rates, unemployment crisis, and police brutality create for a wide range of

challenges before African American men arrive to college. Faculty and staff can assist to alter the future of at risk African American men if they get involved and take responsibility before and during college (Long, 2012).

College Readiness

For those who do make it to college, they face a different set of challenges in lieu of social factors that affect pre-postsecondary experiences. Poor college readiness is a burden many African American men encounter due to the poor conditions of elementary and secondary educational settings. Cuyjet (1997) asserted the following conditions have a negative impact while attending college; lowered expectations from peers and adults toward academic achievement, peer pressure to downplay academic achievement, lack of financial resources, lack of role models, and other items associated with racism (p. 7). In addition to this list, inhibited development in social, cultural, and economic growth make for challenges when pursuing careers that require optimal development in these areas prior to employment. Seeking support to address these concerns in college has also warranted concern, specifically in the area of counseling.

Cultural Mistrust

Research studies show that African American male undergraduate students have negative feelings towards counseling. Literature on the use of mental health services used by ethnic racial population revealed only a small number of African Americans utilize counseling services (Lee, 1997). Concerns ranging from negative stigmas, signs of weakness, and embarrassment have all contributed to African American men's decision to not utilize mental health services. Terrell and Terrell (1984) also assert African American men possess a trait called "healthy cultural paranoia," commonly known as cultural mistrust (as cited in Williams & Justice, 2010 p. 159).

Historically, oppression has created a dynamic in which African American men have to overcome internalized wariness to feel comfortable with seeking mental health services and building a rapport with counseling professionals. This is particularly concerning because African American students who attend predominately White institutions encounter challenges in the areas of academic/extra curricular concerns, acceptance, and social support that may warrant professional counseling services to address these challenges (as cited in Williams & Justice, 2010, p. 160).

Mistrust between African American men and support systems are a concern. Linnehan et al. (2005) found that both structural assurance beliefs and youth dispositions toward trust were positive, significant predictors of the belief in an adult mentor's benevolence, honesty, competence, and predictability. According to Linnehan et al. (2005) structural assurance (SA) is defined as the degree to which consumers believe institutional structures "like guarantees, regulations, promises, legal recourse, or other procedures are in place to promote success" (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002, as cited in Linnehan et al., 2005, p. 510). An intentional mentoring pairing allow African American men to develop a sense of comfortability and trust that may help them access resources to overcome challenges throughout their college careers. This is significant because although predominately White colleges may cause African Americans to build community among each other as a direct result of the low enrollment of students of color, it does not guarantee this community formation will occur (Littleton , 2003).

Many issues affect African American men, which makes it challenging to transition through early childhood, primary, secondary, and post secondary education. Many of these issues African American men face are interconnected and have consequences if unaddressed. Feelings

of inferiority, lack of confidence, lowered self-assurance, and lack of sense of direction may persist if special attention is not given to undergraduate African American men.

Strategies for Structured Mentoring Programming Formalized Mentoring Strategy

Literature supports the position that formal mentoring programming has positively contributed to the success of mentees and mentors involved with the mentoring process. One of the missing links that could help enhance the mentoring process is having a mentoring strategy (Friday & Friday, 2002). Program planners are able to improve opportunities to realize intended outcomes and goals of programs by having a formalized mentor strategy in place. Exploring characteristics, processes, and strategies of structured mentoring programming will help to improve both implementation and mentoring effectiveness (Friday & Friday, 2002).

Implementing effective strategies for executing a mentoring program will require a critical review of the process. According to Veale and Wachtel (1996), a typical mentoring process should include numerous areas of attention. Determining the specific target audience will help to better focus resources and personnel? Identifying a specific criterion to select mentees and mentors will help make programs more personalized to meet the unique needs of all involved in the mentoring process. Recruiting and interviewing mentors who meet the qualifications of a program will help create the best opportunity for all to feel satisfied with one's abilities. The same could be considered when selecting mentees. Matching mentees and mentors based on a criterion will create the space for openness to the idea of working with unacquainted program participants. Finally, evaluating the mentee-mentor experience will help to make constant improvements as mentee-mentor dynamics change over time (as cited by Friday & Friday, 2002, p. 155-156). Flexibility will be key to adapting programs to address mentees' changes in behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions that reflect what is current to their reality.

Cultural Adaption

While the mentoring process should remain consistent to ensure success, the program should also be flexible enough to customize practices to meet the needs of the individual mentees involved in the program. This will allow mentees to develop specific skills, enhance development, improve capabilities, improve mentee engagement, and cultivate an inclusive team-based culture (Friday & Friday, 2002). Additionally, program planners may consider noncognitive factors to understand psychosocial factors to determine African American men achievement. These include positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, and availability of strong social support person, just to name a few (Powell, Cecil, Arriola, & Jacob, 2003). Positive representation in the form of same ethnic mentor-mentee matching may assist development in these psychosocial factors.

Program planners should consider same ethnic matching of mentors. Frierson, Hargrove, and Lewis (1994) assert ethnic matching of mentors benefit minority students (as cited in Ulloa & Herrera, 2006, p. 361). This would allow minority undergraduate students who attend predominately-White institutions who lose time for ethnic, cultural, and family communities, to establish new associations and lasting relationships while still pursuing academics. Unfortunately, some of the same factors that negatively affect the retention rate of students of color at universities also affect faculty of color renewal at predominantly White colleges, thus making it challenging to match mentors and mentees by same gender and race.

While minority faculty and staff are underrepresented in most academic fields, it is essential for nonminority faculty and staff to actively recruit and purposely mentor ethnic minority students (Johnson, 2011). Support personnel working with students of color should have genuine concern for the experience and welfare of mentees, be diligent when pursuing

cultural sensitivity training which includes committing time to learning about cultural heritage, and developing an appreciation for individuality (Johnson, 2002). Additionally, support personnel who work with African American men in college should help them adjust and adapt to the college community (Cuyjet, 1997). This is important because Eurocentric curricular and instructional practice does not always work for minority students, thus these students will require close monitoring (Johnson, 2002).

A formal mentoring program should clearly identify and align processes with organizational capabilities to help meet the various needs of undergraduate African American men. A program process should also align well with the long-term strategic plan of the organization. This method will ensure program longevity and effectiveness. According to Raigins, (2000), participants of formal mentoring programs that effectively implement strategic processes experience greater career satisfaction, commitment, and mobility (as cited in Friday & Friday, 2002, p. 156). Additionally, program leaders should be diligent in matching mentors and mentees by utilizing a personalized system.

Perspectives on Pairing Mentors and Mentees

Ensher and Murphy (1997) examined the effects of actual similarity (race and gender), perceived similarity, and amount of contact between mentor and protégé on the quality of mentoring relationships. Their results suggested similarity, both perceived and actual, affected the amount of liking between the mentor and protégé. Protégés assigned to same-race mentors reported more instrumental support than protégés assigned to different race mentors. Nonetheless, protégés with same-race mentors did not report significantly more psychosocial support. Furthermore, protégés reported neither more contact with their mentors nor more satisfaction with their mentor, overall, if they were of the same race. Perceived similarity,

however, was moderately related to protégés' report of the amount of contact they had with their mentor but was not related to racial similarity. Overall, Ensher and Murphy (1997) revealed liking, perceived similarity, and psychosocial and instrumental support all significantly contributed to protégés' satisfaction with their mentor. Hu et al. (2008) also found race similarity had a significant effect, such that students are more likely to initiate same-race mentoring than cross-race mentoring. This indicates each are important contributors to successful mentoring relationships.

Turban, Dougherty, and Lee (2002) investigated how gender, race, and perceived similarity are related to the perceptions of doctoral students' (mentees') mentoring experience. A total of 706 surveys were distributed to the doctoral students. The doctoral students were of various disciplines from a large Midwest public research university. The doctorate students indicated on the survey the person who he or she considered their primary advisor in their individual doctoral program. From the survey, perceived similarity was found to positively relate to mentoring received.

Duration of Mentoring Relationship

Students with same-gender mentors were not affected by the relationship duration in regards to the mentoring received. However, the duration of the relationship moderated or determined the degree of effect of gender and perceived similarity on mentoring received. While gender dissimilarity was initially detrimental to the perception of mentoring, Turban et al. (2002) found students in gender-dissimilar pairings who received greater relationship durations reported receiving more mentoring than those in gender-similar pairings. The relationship interaction duration with gender similar pairings were significant for psychosocial mentoring, exposure/visibility and sponsorship, and protection and assistance. Overall, gender and racial

similarity had less influence than perceived similarity. Thus, Ensher and Murphy (1997) and Turban et al. (2002) both indicated perceived similarity is related to mentoring success and more attention should be given to the willingness to initiate mentoring.

Hu, Thomas, and Lance (2008) examined the following influences on intentions to initiate informal mentorship: race similarity (RS), proactivity, feelings of race-related fraternal relative deprivation (RD), and roles in the potential mentoring pairings (roles). When individuals feel entitled to an outcome, do not experience the outcome, and observe someone else who experiences the outcome, this can be termed “relative deprivation” (Crosby, 1984, as cited in Hu et al., 2008). Hu, et al. (2008) instructed 126 White participants to assume the role of either an upperclassmen mentor or a freshman protégé. They were then provided with the 12 potential protégés or mentor profiles and asked to indicate their intentions to initiate mentorship. Hu et al. (2008) found race similarity had a significant effect on mentoring satisfaction for example; participants were more likely to initiate same-race mentoring than cross-race mentoring. Overall, proactivity and race similarity had positive effects on intentions to initiate informal mentoring. Hu et al. (2008) findings suggest more focus should be given to mentorship relationships prior to their initiation.

Major findings

Linnehan, Weer, and Uhl (2005) investigated the determinants of students’ initial trust beliefs about adult mentors. Surveys were distributed to participating students of a summer work program, administered by a not-for-profit agency. Linnehan et al. (2005) found both structural assurance beliefs and youth dispositions toward trust were positive and significant predictors of belief in an adult mentor’s compassion, honesty, competence, and predictability. Additionally, ethnic identity was shown to moderate the relationship between the racial similarity/dissimilarity

of the adult-student pairing and the student's initial beliefs in the adult's competence and predictability. For students with strong ethnic identities, race of the adult was not related to student's belief in the adult's competency and predictability. However, low ethnic identity students believed White adults would be more competent and predictable than high ethnic identifying students. These findings are consistent with racial identity development models (Cross, 1991; Vandiver, Cross, Worrell & Fhagen-Smith, 2002, as cited by Linnehan et al., 2005). The internalized trust disposition may serve as determinant for undergraduate African American men to not seek same race/ethnicity mentorship, based on a surface-level similarity, or to compromise to a mentoring relationship that is not comfortable and/or satisfying. Nonetheless, African American men still need to be embraced by a welcoming environment.

Dawson-Threat (1997) found there were numerous factors to enhance the academic climate and experience for African American men. In addition to providing peer and family support, Dawson found it important for faculty to build relationships with African American men to support a welcoming institutional environment. The author does suggest different types of institutions will have a different affect, but student-faculty relationships have shown to positively impact African American men regardless of environment. Incorporating racial identity development activities for those students can contribute to positive outcomes (Dawson-Threat, 1997). Providing the platform of free expression, facilitating learning on understanding differences and similarities, and exploring black manhood issues will allow African American men to become more assured in their identity development. Positive student-faculty, student affairs administration relationships, and social settings are key for increased academic integration. One may also need to consider nontraditional student development theory to integrate African American men into the academic arena.

Cuyjet (1997) found traditional student development theories might not be very effective when applied to African American male students. The author suggest student affair practitioners should utilize Afrocentric philosophies to learn how to improve self-efficacy of the students. This will maximize how professional support personnel assist African American male students in their personal development (Cuyjet, 1997). In addition to this, African American male students benefit as much, if not more, from mentoring compared to other students (Cuyjet, 1997). Black students with mentors' complete college at higher rates, express higher satisfaction, and are more engaged in various leadership roles on campus to enhance interpersonal leadership skills. Finally, the author suggests the observation and documentation of positive African American male college experiences that will aid in improving future college students' success. Successful program planners have used this practice to counter negative narratives, stereotypes and myths about black men to enrich campus communities (Cuyjet, 1997).

A program named "Call me MISTER" is being administered at many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). The acronym stands for Men Instructing Students Toward Effective Role models. This collaboration forges strategic relationships between South Carolina colleges –both public and small private colleges coupled with local secondary institutions. The program provides African American men full tuition and resources needed to succeed while in college. The program was designed in 1999 to help African American men reach their full potential. The model has received national acclaim and is highly suggested to be replicated to increase black male representation in professional areas (Norton, 2005). The MISTER program has assisted in the development of building African American men leadership skills, value systems, and sense of manhood. The program has been integral in addressing societal issues and gender gaps in college participation between black men and women. According to Norton (2005)

“a recent executive summary of outcomes for the program reflect the overall retention rate for students in the program is 71 percent, exceeding the rate of other students at the three HBCUs and the average grade point average (GPA) also exceeds the average GPA at three HBSUs” (Norton, 2005). Additionally, 90 percent of participants believe they are being prepared for professional aspirations and 81.6 percent of participants felt the program gave purpose to their lives. The program attributes its success of increasing African American men representation in education to supporting the “whole” development of program participants and pairing them with other African American male mentors who have successfully completed the program. This program continues to serve as a model that contributes to African American men’s success.

Scholars have attempted to design programs, services, and initiatives at universities to increase success rates of African American men. The successful conditions where African American men experience success varies, but there are common themes to reference. Building identity, sense of belonging, and pairing African American men with like-minded individuals has been proven to increase success (Schmidt, 2008). An example has been seen with the Student African American Brotherhood Initiative established in 1990 at Georgia Southwestern State University. Participants in the program are expected to meet academic requirements, engage their community, and develop life plans post undergraduate and graduate careers. According to Schmidt (2008) “the national organization’s executive director, Tyrone Bledsoe boasts that 80 percent of students who participate in the program as college freshman persist into their sophomore year, and about 69 percent go on to graduate” (p.22). Additionally, The City University of New York’s Black Male Initiative was established in 2004 to match highly talented urban youth with faculty members, mentors, and volunteers to increase minority representation in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math fields (STEM).

Chapter Summary and Forecast

The foremost purpose of this research seminar paper was to explore the impact of deep-level similarity on the mentoring relationship among undergraduate African American men. Critical to the matching process of mentor and mentee is finding a good pairing (Hale, 2000). Good mentoring looks different for various African American men in higher education, thus making it difficult to pinpoint a perfect system for matching mentors and mentees. Nevertheless, literature asserts randomly pairing may result in smaller possibilities of a successful match. Matching by similar values and belief systems can encourage a lasting relationship. In addition, appropriate self-disclosure between mentors and mentees will help to avoid superficial relationships. Age is less of an issue when pairing mentors and mentees. Mentees are more concerned with experience and achievement to affirm confidence in mentor abilities. When considering similarities, literature supports the notion in which representation has major implications for students of color at predominately-White colleges. However, too much similarity can lead to over comfort that hinders the focus of teaching and knowledge sharing (Hale, 2000). On the other hand, too much dissimilarity can lead to relationships that fade over time. Overall, it is imperative to pair mentors and mentees across numerous considerations. Determining deep-level and perceived similarities such as mentor and mentees' level of comfort, behavior, developmental needs, interest, background can all positively impact the mentoring outcomes such as comfortability and satisfaction (Hale, 2000).

Chapter III: Conclusions and Recommendations

African American men in higher education face issues that warrant further consideration into the best methods for pairing mentors and mentees (Burrell, 2001). The degree of importance of the research seminar paper was determined by limited research on pairing undergraduate African American men and the numerous issues that prevail. These issues extend beyond academic settings, thus warranting “holistic” support to address the whole student. The results were envisioning, designing, and implementing strategic practices to positively influence the quality of life among undergraduate African American men. Based on the existing literature, the following conclusions and recommendations were drawn.

Although there are limited minority mentors at Midwestern Universities, intentionally fostering same race and gender mentoring relationships should be considered. Positive representation among undergraduate African American men, faculty, staff, and administration matters. Meaningful relationships are maintained with mentors who are perceived as both similar and competent (Turban et al., 2002). Additionally, research suggests mentees reported being more comfortable, satisfied, and received more psychosocial and instrumental support from mentors who were also of color (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005). This is important because as with many undergraduate African American men at predominately-White colleges, conceding to needing support and initiating faculty and staff interactions can be psychologically challenging. In this case, comfortability should serve as a crucial variable in considering best environments for prompting and maintaining guidance and support among undergraduate African American men. Unfortunately, African American men with less sensitivity to their ethnic and racial background struggle to find confidence in African American mentors. Institutions should foster programs and services that help undergraduate African American men build racial consciousness and expose students to high-level professionals to begin building trust in the abilities of same

race mentors. Increasing minority faculty and staff have proven to be challenging in the Midwest, thus attention should also be given to White mentors and undergraduate African American male's relationship.

Recommendations for Research

Given the low representation of minority faculty and staff at predominately-White colleges, serious attention should be given to the successful relationships among white mentors and African American male mentees, for the stakes are high for all involved. Program leaders should conduct longitudinal studies to document success stories and increase the potential for better mentor-mentee pairings. The truth is minority men are far more likely to be in cross race relationships due to the vast availability of White male mentors. Surface level similarities are not the only key factors to the mentor-mentee relationship. Some studies suggest for mentors, race and ethnicity has little to no effect on mentor's satisfaction in the relationship. Nevertheless, this does not absolve mentors from the responsibility of building sincere relationships with mentees and exploring cultural norms. Keeping with the research of counseling, developing cultural competence is critical to the process of understanding and responding well to cultural differences and similarities (Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005). This will be important for mentors who are working with African American men navigating higher education with a range of potential barriers that will take time to comprehend and address throughout a students' undergraduate career. Being strategic early in the mentoring relationship will be key.

It may be beneficial to create a survey that measures deep level similarities of both mentors and mentees. Program leaders could use the instrument to match mentors and mentees based on the findings. The effect of finding deep level similarities before working together can positively influence the mentoring relationship. Exploring whether the mentor and mentee share

values, beliefs, attitudes, and outlook on life prior to fully engaging the mentoring process will help ease the initial meetings and make relationships more lasting. In spite of the limitations of traditional mentor relationships, program planners should foster relationships where mentees and mentors get to be open and honest (Bennion, 2004). This will be important for White mentors and undergraduate African American men. The unequal power dynamics of the relationship can make it challenging to connect, but connecting beyond surface level will allow true relationship building to occur.

Finally, measuring and adjusting programs based on the quality of the mentor and mentee relationship should be one of the top priorities when determining the impact of deep-level similarities on the mentor relationship of undergraduate African American men. Lasting and substantiated mentor-mentee relationships should be built on the basic principles of mutual respect, willingness to learn from each other and interactive engagement (Salinitri, 2005). Both mentor and mentees should approach the mentoring process knowing they mutually serve as teachers and learners. The mentor and mentee are responsible for sharing insights into their personal life and disclosing appropriately sensitive subjects. Through this sharing, all involved have the potential to broaden their perspectives and consider new outlooks on life that is different from their own understanding. This sharing also allows all involved to feel more comfortable to develop sincere relationships.

Conclusion

Strategic mentoring will significantly benefit undergraduate African American men. Leveraging resources among staff, faculty, students, campus administration, and community members will aid in addressing complex issues among these students. Mentors serve not only as resources, but also as advocates for equitable living and learning experiences. Maintaining

IMPACT OF DLS ON MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

spaces to critically examine mentoring dynamics in which undergraduate African American men experience success is essential to the advancement of mentoring research. Moreover, it is a fundamental practice to dismiss harmful stereotypes of African American men achievement.

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