MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS FOR BLACK WOMEN PURSUING UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES AT PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

Alydia Rose Thomas

B.A., The Pennsylvania State University, 2012

M.S.ED., Duquesne University, 2014

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This dissertation was presented

by

Alydia Rose Thomas

It was defended on

July 19, 2018

and approved by

Dr. Lori Delale-O’Connor, Assistant Professor, Center for Urban Education

Dr. Anthony Mitchell, Associate Teaching Professor, The Pennsylvania State University at Greater Allegheny

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Linda DeAngelo, Associate Professor, Administrative and Policy Studies

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Alydia Rose Thomas, Ed.D.

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This hermeneutic phenomenological study used a black feminist framework to explore mentoring relationships for black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). The purpose of this study was to help to uncover the mentoring needs and wants of black women undergraduate students at PWIs. This study provides valuable insight into the complex experiences of black women on white campuses and the ways that mentoring relationships are beneficial; yet, challenging for those students.

Eight black women from Uptown College (pseudonym) were selected to participate in this study using criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and analyzed through hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 2014). Primary findings suggest that 1. Black women had specific definitions and perceptions of mentoring that influenced their interactions in mentoring relationships, 2. Interactions among black women students and campus administrators were many times strained or non-existent due to a lack of understanding of the challenges black women face at PWIs, and 3. Black women students encountered barriers to developing mentoring relationships due to the campus and political climate, campus support for black men and not black women, and classroom isolation.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to any black woman who has ever felt overlooked, unworthy, or unheard. Your voice is important. Your life matters. You are worthy!

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1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Mentoring, a factor deemed important for all students, can be more beneficial for black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at predominately white institutions (PWIs) due, in part, to disparities they face in their academic and personal experiences (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Even with several strides to ensure equality and equity for all (Howard-Hamilton, 2003), being a black woman in America still comes with stigma on at least two fronts: race and gender. Howard-Hamilton (2003), suggested that black women face "double oppression – racism and sexism" due to their "subordinate status [that] was enforced by white and black men as well as white women" (p. 19). The oppression faced by black women in society translates into the education system – a system initially built without black women in mind. As more black women are becoming students in higher education (Bartman, 2015; Reddick & Pritchett, 2015; Sullivan, 2015; Vickers 2004), the need for support and mentoring opportunities for these students increases as well. Scholars pinpoint two major factors that contribute to the lack of relatable mentors for black women undergraduate students: 1. not enough black faculty and staff are employed at PWIs (Johnson, 2015; Reddick & Pritchett, 2015) and 2. Many white faculty and staff do not understand the challenges specifically related to being a black women student at a PWI (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford & Pifer, 2017; Reddick & Pritchett, 2015). The lack of mentoring opportunities for these students presents significant implications, as mentorship is recognized for having positive educational outcomes. As indicated by Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford and Pifer (2017), "mentoring efforts can be effective in addressing key issues . . . including the need to increase degree completion rates, reduce inequities in outcomes for marginalized and underrepresented groups," (p. 7) and more. The purpose of this study is to help to uncover the mentoring needs and wants of black women undergraduate students at PWIs.

1.1 CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

1.1.1 Definitions

To better understand the context of this study, the following terms have been defined as they relate to the mentoring experiences of black women.

Black Student: In an era of "political correctness", ethnically and racially identifying terms can be difficult to choose and use (Newport, 2007). While black and African American are terms often used interchangeably, they actually have different meanings. An African American is "a Black person born in the United States to at least one generation of a U.S. born Black parent or more, the descendant of enslaved Africans brought to colonial American soil" (Blake, 2014, p. 548). While the term African American assumes that a person is born in America, this is not always the case. Though Newport (2007) indicated that more black people prefer to be called African American, for purposes of this study, I will identify students as *black*. This is in part due to the students who are from Caribbean islands and other non-American locations, who many times do not identify as African American, but who may face similar issues as those students.

Predominately White Institution: The term “Predominately White Institution” or “PWI” is used to describe an institution of higher education in which white students account for more than half (50%) of the overall student population.

1.1.2 Conceptualizing Mentoring

While several strategies can aide in the support of students, scholars pinpoint mentoring as a positive means for providing students with attention and support (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Crisp et al., 2017; Jacobi, 2990; Sullivan, 2015). Scholars continuously note the ambiguous nature of the term “mentoring” (Bartman, 2015; Crisp et al, 2017, Jacobi, 1990; Sullivan, 2015). While Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) literature review synthesis noted more than 50 definitions of mentoring, Kram (1985) provided a more succinct definition by describing mentoring as two individuals in a relationship where a more experienced person provides developmental support to one with less experience. Similar to Kram’s definition, Godshalk and Sosik (2003) suggested that mentoring is a goal-centered relationship between mentor and protégé aimed at developing knowledge and competency. Sullivan (2015) also offered a similar definition by suggesting that a mentor is one who “enters into a relationship with a student for the purpose of offering guidance and encouragement” (p. 7). Each of these definitions indicates that there must be a relationship between the mentor and mentee that fosters growth and support. None of these definitions explicitly mentions race or gender as significant components of creating positive mentoring relationships, though several scholars note its importance in the success of black women students (Bartman, 2015; Crisp et al, 2017, Jacobi, 1990; Sullivan, 2015).

According to the literature, a positive mentoring relationship is not specifically derived by matching race and gender, but, other factors should be considered (Fuentes, Alvarado, Berdan

& DeAngelo, 2014; Jacobi, 1991). Jacobi (1991) suggested that five components to mentorship exist, each providing insight into what it takes to be an effective mentor. First, mentors emphasize the importance of achievement and make support for emotions, academics, profession the focus of the mentor-mentee relationship. The association between the two must also be reciprocal and personal, meaning that mutual respect, effort, and direct communication are priorities so that both parties can be successful. Ultimately, the relationship allows growth for both mentor and mentee. Jacobi (1991) explained and Fuentes, Alvarado, Berdan, and DeAngelo (2013) agreed that this growth may be shown through “experience, influence, and achievement” (p. 513). In general, positive and productive interactions must be maintained between the mentor and mentee for the relationship to be successful.

Grant (2011) noted the importance of expanding on traditional interpretations of mentorship, where paternalism and hierarchy “aimed at maintaining the status quo” (p. 103) is embraced. Harris (1999) made a valid point for challenging traditional interpretations of mentorship: “By limiting the examination of mentoring based on one universal definition, the personal, complex nature of the mentoring experience by under-represented groups, who do not fit into a male-oriented, competitive, individualist profile, will be excluded” (Harris, 1999, p. 230). This is an important sentiment from a black feminist perspective, as the experiences of black women have traditionally been unimportant and void. Harris’s statement coincides with the intent of this study, which is to better understand the individual mentoring experiences of black women in order to spark meaningful change.

1.1.3 Formal and Informal Mentoring

While formal and informal mentoring practices have individual benefits, several differences exist between the two. Informal mentoring has been the traditional process where mentors and mentees interact; however, many institutions sought to reproduce the process in ways that were more intentional (Chao, 2009). Furthermore, Chao (2009) explained that formal processes make it easier for designing mentoring programs, where mentors are able to determine when and where mentoring occurs. Menges (2015) noted career support, psychological support, and personal development among benefits to formal mentoring processes. Furthermore, Menges (2015) emphasized the lack of empirical research that highlighted how to effectively achieve those benefits formal mentoring processes.

Informal mentoring relationships are somewhat different. While formal mentoring processes require guidance from an institution or organization, “Informal mentoring relationships, in contrast, develop spontaneously and without involvement from an organization” (Menges, 2015, p. 99). Chao (2009) indicated that many times informal mentoring relationships yield better results, as both parties are “intrinsically motivate dint he relationship”. This is also the case, because many time informal mentoring relationships do not have timeframe restrictions, creating temporary engagement. While a formal mentoring relationships may assign a mentor and give a start and end date for that experience, informal mentoring often happens authentically, leaving room for long lasting relationships (Chao, 2009).

While both formal and informal mentoring processes are important sources of support, some literature suggests peer mentoring as an alternative. Peer mentoring rests under the informal mentoring umbrella. These relationships usually require a more experienced student to be paired with a less experienced one. Pairings can be based on several things, including “race or socioeconomic class" (Crisp et al., 2017, p. 50); yet, some do not consider those things at all. Benefits of peer mentoring include assistance with choosing an institution of higher education and college adjustment (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). Furthermore, peer mentors often offer advice based on their own experiences (Vickers, 2014).

1.2 PROBLEM AREA

Data reflected that many black women have negative experiences on predominately white campuses. Grant (2012) illustrated many of the reasons for negative experiences had by black women:

> They encounter inequity, unfair treatment, misjudging, isolation and marginality in PWIs. Their intellectual capabilities are oftentimes doubted, and their research interests are often questioned or neglected. When they attempt to claim the same prerogatives as granted to their white peers (such as researching and writing about things of personal and cultural relevance to them) they are often discouraged, silenced and sometimes dismissed. (p. 104)

Furthermore, many black women struggle to find relatable mentors at institutions where few people look like them. Students are then tasked with finding coping methods to help them find their place on predominately white campuses. Literature shows that many black women at PWIs face challenges related to academic success, social interactions, finding same-race mentors and relying on cross-cultural mentoring relationships.

1.2.1 Academic Success

Developing the means to better support black women students through mentorship in higher education is crucial for their overall academic success (Bartman, 2015). Collins (2015) pointed to the specific disparities for black women, discussing the failed support they receive in educational settings. Results of mentoring have included higher GPAs and graduation rates, lower dropout rates, and more complete units per semester (Sullivan, 2015); however, black women are often not reaping the benefits of such support (Bartman, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2010) only 45.7% of all 100,210 (about 45,796) black women students graduated in 2008, while 50.7% (319,683) of white women students graduated. Further, Bartman (2015) purported that black women in higher education "are not keeping pace with White, Latina, or Asian women" in regard to academics (p. 3). Many PWIs pointed to these discrepancies as fault of the student while failing to acknowledge structural constraints and barriers, along with the idea that "students who enter into nurturing mentoring relationships tend to not only complete their program in an acceptable amount of time, but do so with great academic success" (Sullivan, 2015, p. 5). Though academics play a major role in the success of black women students (Johnson, 2015), they also need support in other areas.

1.2.2 Social Interactions

Johnson (2015) noted the significance of mentors in providing social and emotional support for students. According to Henry (2008), black women students in institutions of higher education are more likely to have issues with social interactions on campus and are also more "at risk for depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, shame and despair" (Henry, 2008, p. 20) due in part to the overwhelming need to protect their identity and "promote their culture" (Bartman, 2015, p. 5). Without mentors, black women students lose components of psychological support they may need to be successful on campus. Psychological support includes "affirmation, encouragement, counseling, and friendship" (Johnson, 2015, p. 24). While social interactions as a benefit of mentoring is rarely studied, determining who should mentor students has recently become a popular topic.

1.2.3 Same-Race Mentoring

According to the literature, if all students had mentors, they would be better supported on campus and more situated on the path to academic success. Mentors are knowledgeable, trustworthy people who help students succeed, but finding mentors for black women is not always so simple. Wallace, Moore and Curtis (2014) provided a description of the thought process for choosing mentors from the perspective of black women in the academy:

> Black women scholars often seek out their own mentors – both inside and outside of their respective departments, universities, and professional disciplines – with those who not only share their research interests, but also who share similar backgrounds or characteristics, mainly because they view such mentors as trustworthy advocates. (p. 56)

Furthermore, Wallace, Moore and Curtis (2014) indicated that many black women in the academy must seek out their own mentors, but what happens when a student cannot find a mentor who is trustworthy or relatable enough? Some students fall back on advice from their peers and others from their parents; however, not all students are provided the opportunity to do so. Many black women at PWIs are left in an "uncomfortable and untenable situation" (p. 58) when they are asked to find non-black mentors, causing them to seek help elsewhere or remain without mentors.

1.2.3.1 Connections among Black Women

Scholars continually debate the impact of mentor race and gender on the success of black women in mentoring relationships. Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) made the connection between black women mentors and student mentees. They explained that despite differences in their personal experiences, black women share “the struggle to be accepted and respected members of society and their desire to have a voice that can be heard” (p. 102). When black women mentor black women students, cultural connections stem from relatability, ultimately making the mentoring experience more enjoyable for both parties (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Furthermore, Griffin (2013) found that black mentors had an unprecedented commitment to the success of black students due to relatability and comfortability, which was a concept Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) discussed. Dahlvig (2010) also noted several reasons that racial dynamics are important for black students: racial identity development, psychosocial development, and cultural connections are among the most noteworthy. Though having same-race mentoring relationships aides in fostering growth among black women mentors and mentees, these relationships are not always feasible or convenient.

1.2.3.2 Lack of Black Women Professionals

Black women make up a disproportionately small percentage of faculty, staff and administrators in higher education (Dahlvig, 2010; Holmes, Land, Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Sullivan, 2015). Thus, black women students have little access to black women mentors (Sullivan, 2015). Even as many more black women enter college, institutional systems, such as low pay rates and minimal support aide in the prevention of black women attaining administrative jobs in higher education settings (Mosley, 2003). Like most students, black women want to feel that someone understands or is similar to them (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Mosley, 1980; Sullivan, 2015). Considering that most students are familiar with others from their own race, as discussed by Jayakumar (2008), it seems that there may be an indication that *only* black women should mentor black women students. Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) suggested that this model places pressure on black women mentors, who may experience additional pressure to interact with these students. The lack of black women in higher education is a topic that literature suggests hinders black women students seeking relatable mentors (Green & King, 2001; Jayakumar, 2008; Mosley, 1980).

1.2.4 Cross-Cultural Mentoring

While some sources indicated that black women should be mentored by black women professionals (Green & King, 2001; Jayakumar, 2008; Mosley, 1980; Sullivan, 2015), others believe a successful relationship with mentors from professionals with any gender or race is possible (Bartman, 2015; Hughes and Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Johnson, 2011). This concept is known as cross-cultural mentoring. As discussed, a shortage of black women employees in higher education exists, which exposes the need for mentors from different backgrounds to mentor black women. Perhaps, Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) gave a broader explanation for ensuring support by suggesting that black women students “should receive intellectual, spiritual, psychological, and programmatic encouragement from everyone on the campus” (p. 102). Louis, Russell, Jackson, Blanchard and Louis (2014) elaborated on this concept and suggested that it takes effort on behalf of an entire institution to ensure that black women are supported.

Although cross-cultural mentoring can relieve several access-related issues for black women seeking mentors, other challenges are associated with cross-cultural mentoring. As discussed earlier, it becomes clear that a mentee or protégé is meant to gain knowledge from and interact with her mentor. Dahlvig (2010) notes issues with white mentors in mentoring relationships with black students by suggesting that they “have a burden to overcome traditional stereotypes or other negative images historically propagated by racism” (p. 373). To provide such unbiased support for these students, white professionals at PWIs must make mentoring relationships for black women and other minority students a priority (Davis, 2007). Furthermore, it is up to white mentors to create a culture where black women feel comfortable within the mentoring relationships by negating ideas of white supremacy and racial hierarchy (Dahlvig, 2010).

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Much of the existing, relevant literature highlights the benefits of mentoring for black women, but rarely and narrowly gains perspective from black women regarding the matter. This study will aid in reiterating, clarifying, and amplifying many of the challenges faced by black women at PWIs and pinpointing ways to begin to make change for these students. In the process, black women will be given the opportunity to provide insight based on their own mentoring experiences on a predominately white campus. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to help to uncover the mentoring needs and wants of black women undergraduate students at PWIs, which will hopefully help students at the study’s location and other black women on white campuses moving forward.

Voices of black women students seeking undergraduate degrees are rarely present in the literature that frames this study. Chapter two will highlight specific reasons that mentoring relationships are beneficial for black women students seeking undergraduate degrees and why hearing their stories is so important. Creating a space in the literature for black women undergraduate students to tell practitioners and scholars about their perceptions and experiences can help to provide deeper understanding of their needs and wants in regard to mentoring relationships. Ultimately, a deeper understanding will foster ways to better support black women on predominately white campuses, where they are the minority.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I provide an overview of relevant literature that frames mentoring relationships for black women pursuing undergraduate degrees. The principal purpose of this chapter is to frame the benefits of mentoring for black women undergraduate students at Predominately White Institutions. In this chapter, I will describe three focal benefits of mentoring: 1. College Adjustment and Development, 2. Academic Progress and Success, and 3. Professional Aspirations. Additionally, I will provide an overview of Black Feminist Thought, which will serve as the study's theoretical framework meant to shape our understanding of recurring inequities and issues black women students experience on white campuses. More specifically, a black feminist lens will help to frame mentoring relationships as they relate to the experiences of black women undergraduate students at the research location.

2.1 BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP FOR BLACK WOMEN STUDENTS

Few scholars debate the positive outcomes of mentoring relationships for undergraduate students (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford & Pifer, 2017). While mentoring experiences of black women students at predominately white institutions are not well documented, several scholars specifically note the significance of mentoring relationships for black women and other underrepresented undergraduate students. Crisp, et al. (2017) notes two major benefits to mentoring: 1. College Adjustment and Development and 2. Academic Progress and Success. Scholars also suggest a benefit of mentoring is the Influence on Professional Aspirations (Davis, 2007; Grant, 2012). Below, I will use these three benefits of mentorship to frame the significance of mentorship for black women at PWIs.

2.1.1 College Adjustment and Development

The transition from high school to higher education can be challenging for any student. In chapter one, I discussed challenges black women have in regard to academic and social progress, specifically on predominately white campuses. Literature suggests that college adjustment and development can be even more troublesome for black students at PWIs (Davis, 2007; Sinanan, 2016). Davis (2007) purported that black students are often pressured to take part in the dominant culture; ultimately, stripping them of their own cultural identity and experiences. Furthermore, Davis indicated that institutional nihilism adds to the idea that black students must fit into the dominant culture. As institutions continually “retreat from affirmative action and the shift of diversity rhetoric” (p. 228), black students shifted farther away from their own cultural identities. The less they felt like themselves, the less connected they were with the campus.

Sinanan (2016) noted that a student’s perceptions and outcomes are effected depending on how connected they are to the campus. Mentoring relationships play a role in a student’s connectedness to campus. Fuentes, Alvardo, Berdan, and DeAngelo (2014) found that early student-faculty interaction can lead to meaningful mentoring interactions in later years; thus, indicating that natural mentoring relationships can come from these faculty early interactions. Furthermore, Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, and Cantwell (2011) also discussed the importance of student interactions with faculty by noting their positive impact on how students experience their education. Also discussed was the idea that dedicated faculty and staff have the ability to make students from any race or background feel they can achieve their goals. Positive impact can be made through interactions and positive reinforcement (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).

2.1.2 Academic Progress

Many studies note the connection between mentoring and academic success. Crisp et al. (2017) found in their review of literature that “mentoring is positively correlated with academic progress, persistence, and degree completion” (p. 41). Interviews from Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, and Cantwell’s (2011) study indicated that students responded positively to encouragement and motivation from faculty mentors. Furthermore, genuine interest in student success helped encouraged students to succeed.

A prime example of mentoring relationships fostering academic progress is the significant strides institutions have made to mentor and support black women in The Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field. Academic departments are also beginning to note the importance of support for minority women. The STEM field within higher education has made significant strides toward promoting and fostering growth through among black women students through mentorship. Maltby, Brooks, Horton, and Morgan (2016) acknowledge the need for the STEM field to attract minority and women students due to low enrollment in those programs. Black and other minority women are “particularly underrepresented in STEM fields, accounting for only 11% of STEM bachelor’s degrees” (Maltby, Brooks, Horton, and Morgan, 2016, p. 1).

Both faculty and peer mentoring have played a significant role in STEM's commitment to enrolling and supporting black women students in the field (Maltby et al., 2016; Doerschuk, Bahrum, Daniel, Martin, 2016). Doerschuk et al. (2016) noted that mentoring relationships helped "retain, develop and transition [minority students] to STEM careers or advanced study" (p. 692). Similarly, Winkle-Wagner (2008) indicated that black women students specifically benefit from mentoring within STEM fields, noting that mentors continually serve as academic, financial and social advisors to these students.

Not only are mentors helpful in guiding black women to their undergraduate academic success, they can also help guide students in attaining graduate and professional degrees and ultimately careers. A study by Phelps-Ward and DeAngelo (2016) focused on the ways that formal mentoring can help black undergraduate students attain graduate and professional degrees. The study found that mentors can provide graduate school information in regard to application processes, academic and professional advice and recommendations, and access to informal networks. When mentor and protégé's academic and professional goals are aligned, studies found that richer outcomes are more apparent (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Phelps-Ward & DeAngelo, 2016).

2.1.3 Influence on Professional Aspirations

Crisp et al. (2017) found a change in the literature over time, noting the shift of focus from academic outcomes to developmental outcomes. The shift in outcomes revealed ways in which mentoring can be used as a developmental tool, such as helping with career development. The significance of mentors is noted for student protégé's preparing for and transferring into the professional world. Davis (2007) found that mentoring black students aided in increasing “academic engagement, attainment and interest in graduate study” (p. 227), and thus, helped to prepare them for their professional endeavors. Furthermore, career alternatives were found to be helpful for black students who had not considered certain professional options without help from their mentors. Support from higher education to the workforce can also be helpful in ways that prevent negative experiences. Grant (2012) indicated that many of the issues black women face as students in higher education, such as unfair treatment or isolation, transfer with them to their professional careers.

While gaining employment after earning a degree in higher education is many times the goal, a noteworthy discovery by Crawford and Smith (2005), suggested that many black women students tend to focus more on gaining access to jobs rather than “attaining greater mobility and rewards” (p. 62). Crawford and Smith (2005) noted that this focus was a major reason black women are less successful at finding mentors, though the participants in the study did feel mentors were important in gaining professional perspectives. Though they felt mentors were important, many participants in the study did not have them. In cases where participants did not have mentors, they utilized peer support to help meet academic and professional goals. Instead of using mentor help and experience to gain professional knowledge, most participants in the study relied on “luck and chance” (p. 64) to begin their careers. This brings to light an interesting point: many black women are missing out on professional opportunities such as networking, skill-building, feedback, and encouragement, because they either cannot find or are not formally provided mentors.

While many black women are not afforded the opportunity to be mentored, that does not take away from the positive influence of mentoring on professional aspirations. Wallace, Moore, and Curtis (2017) noted that mentoring relationships aide in overcoming challenges associated with career-advancement for black women: finding informal networks, monetary resources, and managing professional expectations. Additionally, Crawford and Smith (2005) indicated that mentors can help black women become acquainted to their professional positions and can eliminate uncertainty about the hiring processes.

2.1.4 Benefits of Mentoring from Black Women Faculty and Staff

According to Green and King (2001), providing mentorship for black woman to black woman helps three aspects of development: emotional, information, and structural. With this structure set in place, black faculty and staff members would directly help black women students by nurturing, providing ideas, “providing opportunities to network” (Green & King, 2001, p. 161), and much more. Students in Davis’s (2007) study noticed this connection first hand, as several participants intentionally sought out black mentors, or more specifically, black women mentors. One student in particular noted the personal sacrifices that black women mentors must make to be mentors to black students. The participant admired this characteristic, which was one of her reasons for selecting a black woman mentor. The participant iterated and reiterated the connection that she had with her mentor from the first encounter, which pushed her to pursue another degree. This sentiment also reinforces Fuentes, Alvardo, Berdan, and DeAngelo’s (2014) finding that early faculty interactions can lead to meaningful mentoring relationships later in the academic process. Many students in Davis’s (2007) study noted external reasons (i.e. race) for choosing mentors and internal reasons (i.e. commitment, connection and knowledge) for keeping them. Mentors taught participants about academic life and the importance of diversity within the professoriate.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As debate continues on how to support black women students in higher education, a seemingly critical task – gaining their perspective on the matter – is frequently disregarded (Grant, 2012). According to Grant (2012), Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is a “theory that centralizes and validates the intersecting dimensions of race and gender uniquely experienced in the lived of African American women” (p. 106). BFT provides a framework for understanding the reasons that black women need the opportunity to seek and identify support techniques based on their own view of themselves and the world (Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005, p. 183). Williams et al. (2005) set forth four themes as the delineation of the BFT framework: “(1) the lived experiences as a criterion of meaning, (2) use of dialogue, (3) ethic of caring, and (4) ethic of personal accountability” (p. 183). Lived experiences provides context for understanding why black women think in the ways that they do. Dialogue was important, as it provides an avenue for solving problems of black women. Use of dialogue also provides an avenue for creating bonds and empowerment among like groups. Use of “expressiveness, emotion, and empathy” (Williams et al., 2005, p. 183) aide in acknowledging unique experiences of individuals. In regard to personal accountability, importance lies in the boundaries of discussions about individual experiences. Overall, these four tenets provide a framework for ensuring that black women’s voices are heard and validated.

Ultimately, BFT posits an alternative for the one-size-fits-all approach: gaining perspectives from black women in order to support them. BFT urges educational leaders to understand that black women have experiences that woman “members of the majority group do not experience” (Williams et al., 2005, p. 183). Thus, exploring the mentoring experiences of black women can help better equip educational leaders to support them, especially at institutions where they are typically the minority.

Collins (2014) made a noteworthy point in regard to the shifting context of race and gender inequalities. In the past, research has been cooperative with issues of sexism and racism, but recent studies have taken a critical, or transformative approach. Unique about BFT is the idea that “centering on black women as agents of knowledge would produce new knowledge” (Collins, 2014, p. 2352). Grant and Ghee (2015) add that the shared marginalization along with the individual life experiences of black women can aid in understanding challenges these women face. Thus, learning about black women and hearing their stories can aide in eliminating challenges and creating opportunities for them.

As I reflected on the reason for choosing Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical framework for this study, I realized something important. I have been in a position where I am forced to choose: do I represent my race or my gender? As suggested by scholars, society can- and should not force black women to choose an identity (Collins, 2015; Grant, 2012). This study represents the idea that black women should not have to choose. BFT represents the intersection of the two identities and encourages those looking to understand black women to consider both. Literature constantly and consistently tells black women what they need. In line with BFT, this study aimed to gain the perspective of black women and give them the power to think about what it really is that they need and want in mentoring relationships. More importantly, it gave them the opportunity to discuss their needs and wants with those that can help make positive change.

2.2.1 Application of BFT to Mentoring for Black Women Students

Research questions in this study aimed to give a voice to black women pursuing undergraduate degrees in regard to their experiences and need for mentoring relationships. For this reason, it was essential to look at the issues black women undergraduates face from a black feminist perspective. Further, analyzing mentorship relationships for black women through a black feminist lens helped to better understand the role that race and gender play in the issues of these students and can hopefully help to create ways to solve them moving forward (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Perhaps more importantly, is the notion that racism and sexism be further studied, specifically in the context of higher education and the inequalities of women of color on predominately white college campuses.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to help uncover the mentoring needs and wants of black women undergraduate students at PWIs using hermeneutic phenomenology. The following research questions were used to guide this study from a hermeneutic phenomenological, constructivist perspective:

1. What type of support are black women undergraduate students at PWIs seeking?
2. What do black women undergraduate students at PWIs need and want in mentoring relationships?
3. How does the intersection of race and gender relate to the mentoring relationships that Black women at PWIs seek?

The qualitative research questions in this study were important as they sought to "hear silenced voices" (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach with an emphasis on the theoretical concepts surrounding Black Feminist Thought, this study aided in identifying issues and experiences had by black women on predominately white campuses; thus, allowing previously disregarded voices to be heard (Mertens, 2015). Interactions with participants allowed me to explore the mentoring issues faced by the black women in the study.

3.2 PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenological research aims to “reveal the essence of human experience” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). van Manen (1990) added the notion of intentionality to the term and suggested that those who do phenomenological research explore what it means to be human and how humans experience the world. Because phenomenology aims to reveal the essence of human experience, using it in this study helped to better understand the experiences of black women at PWIs as they related to mentoring relationships and support. The use of interviews from a phenomenological stance gave these students the opportunity to speak about and reflect on their experiences, which aided in making meaning of those experiences.

While each student has had individual experiences that shape their ideas and perceptions, black women students have different experiences and challenges than do their white and male peers. Using phenomenology to highlight the experiences of black women is important. van Manen (2016) noted the importance of using phenomenology in women’s studies due to the discussion of their lived experiences. Further, creating meaning for the lived experiences of participants in this study gained perspective on what it means to be a woman (van Manen, 2016). “For example, to understand what it means to be a woman in our present age is also to understand the pressures of the meaning structures that have come to restrict, widen, or question the nature and ground of womanhood” (van Manen, 2016, p. 10). Thus, a phenomenological approach aided in identifying specific instances that have led these students to their current experiences in mentoring relationships. Using this approach, I gained the perspectives of black women pursuing undergraduate degrees from PWIs to uncover the nature of mentoring relationships for these students based on their experiences in them and without them.

3.3 HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

More specifically, I used hermeneutic phenomenology to explore the mentoring needs and wants of black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at PWIs. According to Laverty (2003), hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on human experience. The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenology is to make meaning and create understanding by "illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives" (Laverty, 2003, p. 24). Kafle (2011) provided a similar summary of hermeneutic phenomenology, suggesting it focuses on viewing the world through the subjective experience of individuals and groups. Thus, in hermeneutic phenomenological research, the researcher must communicate the essence of the participant's experiences, while also reflecting on her own (Kafle, 2011).

In terms of this study, hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to learn the experiences of the participants and interpret them from their perspective and mine. To do so, I used a suggestion from van Manen (1991), who indicated that reflection and writing are major aspects of hermeneutic phenomenology. While hermeneutic phenomenology allowed participants to describe their lived experiences, writing and reflection allowed for meaningful interpretation of those experiences from participant and researcher perspectives. Furthermore, researcher's personal reflection in conjunction with participant information provided context to the research (Laverty, 2003). Writing memos and personal reflections allowed me to better understand the experiences of the black women participants in the study, and my personal biases and experiences. I kept personal reflections and participant data separate so that my bias was not reflected in participant data. Ultimately, I was able to describe these women's experiences, clarify misunderstandings and reflect on mentoring relationships from different perspectives. Gaining data from both the participant and researcher was appropriate for this study, as it allowed me to take into account Hatch’s (2002) concept of individuals having separate experiences and meanings for those experiences. Data gained from the individuals in the study through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach helped to provide context for answering the posed research questions.

Hatch (2002) suggested that hermeneutic phenomenology is embedded in the constructivist paradigm, which “assumes that multiple, socially constructed realities exist” (p. 30). Further, Hatch explained that individuals have separate experiences and meanings for those experiences, which should be “objects of study” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30); hence, the reason for this study. Using hermeneutic phenomenology in this study helped me to understand the needs and wants of black women in mentoring relationships at PWIs. More importantly, is the idea that participants were able to tell me exactly what they needed and wanted in mentoring relationships based on the experiences they have had in them.

3.4 RESEARCH SITE

This study was conducted at a relatively small, private, religious-based, predominately white college in a rural town on the East Coast. For purposes of this study, the site was referred to by its pseudonym—Uptown College (Uptown). This particular site was chosen for three major reasons:

1. The site yielded easy access,
2. The minority population was steadily increasing according to enrollment numbers; however, retention remained an issue, specifically among minority students, according to the college’s 2016-2017 Fact Book, and

3. Uptown was a predominately white institution in a majorly white location, where black women were clearly the minority.

According to the Uptown 2016-2017 Fact Book, full-time undergraduate enrollment at Uptown was 1,586. Of the total full-time undergraduate population, only 173 students (10.9%) were considered minority. The Fact Book defined a minority student as one who has self-identified as “not white, non-resident alien, unknown, or n/a”. While the total number of undergraduate minority students may have seemed low, the number of black women was even smaller.

To provide additional context related to the institution’s setting, the study took place in an area that is 97.5% white and only .8% black or African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Uptown’s Fact Book showed that approximately 50% of the students enrolled at the institution lived in the same or a neighboring county before attending college. This data alone showed that racial diversity in the area and on campus was uncommon, possibly contributing to the experiences of black women students at the institution.

In previous years, Uptown had experienced successful and unsuccessful mentoring efforts aimed at supporting black students. Failure was in many instances due to the high level of staff turnover, a lack of resources, and other institutional capacity issues. The institution’s majority white environment and its attempt to support black students were two of the main reasons I chose this location to conduct my study.

3.5 PARTICIPANTS

Creswell and Poth (2017) indicated that a phenomenological study must contain a heterogeneous group of three to 15 participants who have experienced the targeted phenomenon. This study consisted of 8 black women enrolled full-time (i.e. 12 credits minimum) in undergraduate courses at Uptown College. In order to provide significant details based on experiences, participants must have been enrolled as sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Participants must have been enrolled at Uptown College for the entirety of their higher education experience in order to ensure data collected is consistent. Students were chosen using criterion sampling (Patton, 2002), which aided in finding participants who best matched the criteria of the study. Potential participants received an email notification informing them about the study (see Appendix A). Before inclusion in the study, participants were given a pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix C), which included questions confirming that participants matched the study criteria. Information for this population was provided by administrators in the Student Affairs Department at Uptown. Interviews took place in the Diversity Office at Uptown. Each participant was given and identified by a pseudonym to protect individual identities. It should be noted that the office of Student Affairs at Uptown College supported the purpose and lasting benefits of this study. Before digging into data collection, further understanding the participants is important. Table 3.1 presents a visual of participants' profiles.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Standing	Athletics	Formal Mentor	Major
Toni	Senior	No	No	Social & Behavioral Science
Jordyn	Sophomore	No	Yes	Social & Behavioral Science
Leesha	Junior	No	No	Social & Behavioral Science
Cierra	Senior	Yes	Yes	Liberal Arts
Erin	Senior	No	Yes	Social & Behavioral Science
Courtney	Junior	Yes	Yes	Business Administration
Ashley	Junior	Yes	No	Liberal Arts
Justine	Senior	Yes	Yes	Fine Arts

Table 1 illustrates the similarities among majors and pinpoints the divide among those who were and were not assigned formal mentors. Also made clear is that half of the participants participated in college-level athletics while enrolled at Uptown. This information is included, as participants pointed to athletics, academics and mentor assignments in details about their mentor experiences.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured interviews provided participants with the opportunity to respond openly and flexibly to the posed questions. Thus, a semi-structured interview approach allowed participants to discuss and reflect on their experiences in mentoring relationships at PWIs. In this study, individual (one-on-one) interviews that lasted approximately 40 to 75 minutes were used as the primary method of data collection. Interviews were semi-structured to allow follow-up and clarifying questions (Trochim, 2006). Follow-up and clarifying questions were asked as needed.

Questions were aimed at gaining student perspectives about their current experiences and future expectations in mentoring relationships (e.g. how do you define mentorship? Can you describe your ideal mentor?). The interview for this study aligned closely with Rubin and Rubin's (2005) interview structuring protocol, which suggested three types of interview questions: main questions, probes, and follow-up questions. Main questions were tied closely to the research questions in order to guide the participants through the interview and gain details about the participants' experiences and the context in which the experiences occurred. Participants were asked about the support they currently receive, their needs and wants in mentoring relationships, and the effects of race and gender on their experiences in mentoring relationships. Probe questions were prepared to gain additional "detail, depth, or clarity" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 146) when the responses to main questions were lacking in those areas. While not included in the original interview protocol, follow up questions were used to "get the depth that is a hallmark of qualitative interviewing by pursuing themes that are discovered, elaborating the contexts of answers, and exploring the implication of what has been said" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 151). Providing general, open-ended, neutral questions and allowing room for follow-up questions provided an atmosphere where the participants felt their voices were being heard (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008; Trochim, 2006).

Analysis served to uncover themes in the data and make meaning of them (van Manen, 1990). Interviews were transcribed and coded in order to reduce risks of bias, maintain confidentiality of participants (Rosenthal, 2016), and to provide evidence of the interviews (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). Each interview was recorded using my laptop and was stored in a secured University of Pittsburgh online Box file. Before analysis, professional transcription occurred once interview recordings were complete. Finally, I followed several steps in order to analyze the data and ensure that I represented the essence of the participants' experiences.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

In order to analyze collected data, first, I took notes on each individual transcript. The purpose of these notes was to identify emerging themes before the coding process. Next, I coded the data and created reflective and thematic memos that captured the experience of each participant (van Manen, 2014). Coding was chronological and reflective of observed themes based on participant experiences. Codes included descriptive and interpretive data along with emergent themes and concepts (Bazeley, 2013). Additionally, codes were narrowed based on relevance to the study and sorted into larger categories, together making up a description of the phenomena (van Manen, 2014). The larger categories encompassed all of the smaller thematic categories and were used as major findings in this study. Structural and textual codes were also included in the categories. For instance, structural codes included notes on how participants described an experience. Structural codes included reactions, feelings, etc. Textual codes reflected the participant's experiences such as events or incidents that happened (van Manen, 2014). Once organized, descriptive labels were assigned to each category. Once initial coding process was complete, I re-read each transcript to ensure all themes were covered.

Transcriptions were summarized and converted to reflective and thematic memos, a tactic van Manen (2014) suggested is important for pinpointing similarities and differences among participant experiences. Furthermore, van Manen (1990) pointed to thematic analysis as the process of discovering themes within a work, in this case, within the transcribed interviews.

“Phenomenological themes may be understood as the *structures of experience*” (van Manen, 1990, p. 79), or an attempt to uncover codes within the transcriptions, which aided in finding and interpreting meaning. These memos contained detailed descriptions of participant experiences including important ideas, phrases, and key concepts (Bazeley, 2013). Each memo was reflective of one participant’s summarized interview with key concepts highlighted. Incorporating identified patterns and themes in these memos allowed me to be reflective of my own experiences while fulfilling major principles of hermeneutic phenomenology – writing, reflection, and exploring multiple realities. Once finished, these memos were sent to the respective participants as part of the member checking process. Once participants had a chance to review the memos that corresponded to their interviews, they had the opportunity to make corrections and add additional thoughts to the interpretations of their experiences.

Finally, van Manen (1990) indicated the importance of researcher interpretation. Because this thematic analysis process seeks to make sense of and understand the significance of the participants’ experiences, it was important for the researcher to begin the process without bias. To do this in alignment with phenomenological principles, I kept a reflective journal, where I documented my observations, biases, and experiences after each individual interview. This allowed me to analyze each interview and help develop meaning in participant experiences.

Once coding and memo writing was complete, I began to describe themes as findings in the study. Data was analyzed the same for all interviews for purposes of consistency.

3.8 EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE

A researcher's epistemological stance encompasses the relationship between the researcher and her study, which allows her to think about and evaluate her study from a certain perspective. I strongly believe that each person has her own reality that is constructed through the things she experiences. Consequently, her knowledge and reality is subject to her experiences. I also believe that given our experiences, we should have a hand in the dealing of our cards. In other words, I feel that each person should have the opportunity to express their needs for the future based on their experiences from the past, a sentiment also true in Black Feminist Thought and Constructivism.

Constructivism was first used by philosopher Jean Piaget. Constructivism argues that knowledge and meaning are produced based on one's experiences and thus, people construct their own understanding of the world based on prior knowledge (Carson, 2006). Since its early stages, scholars have continually debated the true meaning and definition of constructivism; however, consensus suggests that constructivism is similar to a theory of learning. In researching the constructivist perspective, I found that my thoughts mostly aligned with Carson's (2006) stance.

Carson pinpointed two types of constructivism: individual and social. Individual constructivism posits that knowledge is constructed within an individual, while social indicates that knowledge is influenced in the social context. Though I am in agreement with aspects from both individual and social constructivism, social constructivism is more significant to note for this study. I understand that each of us takes in information and we must process that information from our own perspective; however, I also acknowledge that through interactions with others, we learn behaviors, cultural norms, and other social contexts that shape our perspectives and build our knowledge of the world. This acknowledgement allows me as a researcher to contextualize the individual and unique responses given by participants in the study based on their personal experiences.

Looking at this study from a constructivist lens was important for many reasons. Perhaps, most significant was the idea that black women are given the platform to discuss their experiences and how they can influence their perceptions of and future experience in mentoring relationships. Also noteworthy was the idea that black women in the study have experiences that are unlike those of their white or male counterparts, and thus, they have separate knowledge and different perspectives than would other non-woman, non-black students. Collins (2015) made an earth shattering statement when discussing the purpose of Black Feminist Thought. She suggested that “black women’s experiences are cast as being so particular or unique that they have little wide-ranging value” (p 2352). To me, this sentiment suggests that society deems the experiences of black women irrelevant. For this reason, I feel it even more important to share the stories of black women, because black women are constantly undervalued. Finally, using a constructivist lens allowed black women in this study to combine their prior knowledge with their current experiences in mentoring relationships, which may help to create a great balance for discovering what they need and want in mentoring relationships at predominately white institutions moving forward.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Member checks and peer debriefing were used as methods for ensuring trustworthiness. Member checks were conducted to ensure that the researcher’s perception and analysis of the participants’ interviews were represented. Member checking aided in the elimination of researcher bias and ultimately enhanced the trustworthiness of results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016). As indicated in the Data Analysis section, participants were provided with thematic memos that expressed the researcher's summary of the respective participant's interview. Participants were then able to provide additional information and clarifying data. As indicated by Creswell and Poth (2017), phenomenology studies typically end "with a descriptive passage that discusses the essence of the experience for individuals incorporating "what" they have experienced and "how" they experienced it. The "essence" is the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 77). Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) deemed it necessary for researchers using member checking to discuss the nature of the process in accordance with their epistemological stances. In this study, the member checking procedure aligned with the constructivist idea that we must individually process information, but also gain the perspectives of others. Furthermore, constructivism notes that knowledge is acquired through interaction and communication with others.

In addition to member checking, peer debriefing aided in ensuring the trustworthiness of this study. Discussion with fellow doctoral candidates in my advisee group and my advisor, along with peer review and critiques helped me to identify areas where my voice was being presented over those of the participants.

3.10 CONFIDENTIALITY

To assist with keeping participant information confident, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and the research site. Participants were also provided consent forms (see Appendix B) that included their rights as research participants. All electronic data collected from participants was stored in a secure, password-protected online University of Pittsburgh Box file. Print materials were secured in a locked drawer inside of the researcher's locked office.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Pittsburgh and Uptown College was also needed before conducting this research study. Participants were given a consent form, approved by the IRB, which included rights of research participants, benefits, potential risks, and instructions for the study. The IRB from both the University of Pittsburgh and the research site approved this letter before data was collected.

3.11 REFLEXIVITY

When I look in the mirror, I see a black woman staring back at me. To me, I am so much more than *just* a black woman; I am a student, a traveler, and an introverted extrovert. I hate being in big crowds, my favorite color is black, and I know that I have the ability to reach my highest potential. When I go out in public though, I often imagine who and what people perceive me to be. More than likely, I am *just* a black woman to anyone who knows nothing about me; but like I said, I am so much more.

I grew up in a poor neighborhood and went to an underfunded (and now closed) elementary school. During middle and high school, I attended math and science magnet schools, because I loved and excelled in math. Several teachers attempted to test me for the scholars program (a program that provides support for gifted students), but I begged my mom to let me skip the test so that I would not be an outcast among my peers. My mom, a former nurse and now educator, encouraged me to take the test, because she knew my potential, but I refused. My mom was my original mentor. More precisely, she was a mentor to most of the kids in my neighborhood, many of which lived in poor, one-parent households. I was unaware how lucky I was to have both parents in my life. I was a smart child who had loving parents and teachers that saw beyond my black girl exterior. Though my teachers believed in me, they had no idea what else this poor black girl went through, because they did not share my identity. They were frequently old, white men and women who lived middle class lives.

My school experience was spent trying to fit in, when I did not really fit in. I was bullied for my light eyes and complexion and teased, because people thought I was adopted (I was not). I was a “nerd”. Many of the children in my neighborhood were involved in gangs, had dropped out of school, or cared little about academics. I’m sure anyone could imagine why I did not need another reason to stand out by going to scholars classes, especially when no one else from my school really did. My teachers knew little about my personal experiences and often did not try to find out about them. Though they were encouraging, sometimes, that was simply not enough. Luckily, my parents were the relatable mentors I needed to help me succeed. They were (and still are) smart, employed, and had obtained college degrees. More importantly, they were caring and loving. Most of my peers did not have the same experience at home or in school. Thus, many did not receive the support they needed to attend or succeed in college.

Most of my friends growing up had tremendous potential to be and do better; however, many of them did not have encouraging parents or teachers. Once I graduated from high school, I made it my goal to mentor students who needed an extra push to do and be better in spite of their home lives and socioeconomic statuses. I reflected on the reasons why it was socially unacceptable to go above and beyond in school and where I could have been if my teachers pushed me to be better. I also wondered why many teachers are only supportive to students who excel, when struggling students probably need it the most. I deemed Student Affairs a place where I could be a part of students' lives, educationally, professionally, and personally. In the process of finding my place in the world of mentoring, I noticed something that had a huge impact on me and it ultimately became the reason for this study: not once did any of my teachers ask me how I wanted to be helped or mentored. I believe that many times we assist others in the ways we want to be helped, not realizing that those methods may not work for everyone. My white, middle class teachers could have had a bigger impact on my educational experience, but they never took the time to ask what I needed to be successful. Luckily, I had my parents to coach me through, but what about the students who had unhelpful parents and teachers? Where would they end up?

My goal for this study and in the future, is to gain perspectives from black women so that they may have more opportunities to have and be mentors than I did. I believe that anyone can be a mentor with the appropriate knowledge, respect for all people, and a positive outlook. I hope that educational leaders will look at black women students and see more than their exterior, because black women have so much more to offer. And then perhaps one day, students will not have to wonder what people perceived them to be, because being *just* a black women will be enough.

3.12 RECIPROCITY

Results from this study aided the Diversity and Student Affairs offices at Uptown College in creating mentoring opportunities for black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at their institution. This study also allowed for previously disregarded voices to be heard by administrators who have the power to make positive change. More broadly, this study contributed to the body of literature aimed at supporting black women students in higher education, as well as literature aimed at exploring mentoring relationships.

3.13 LIMITATIONS

Limitations in this study were related to the participant selection, context, and data analysis processes. This study was meant to gain the perspective of black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at PWIs. Though these women provided individualized data, no data was collected from the perspective of black women seeking mentors from other types of institutions (i.e. large, public, non-religious, etc.). Furthermore, using the criteria-based sampling enabled black women who fit the guidelines of the study to participate, recruitment efforts relied heavily on participants known by the Student Affairs and Diversity offices. Many of these students were often involved in several clubs and organizations that had advisors on campus, which may have fostered a different interpretation of mentoring relationships. Given the participant selection process, findings from this study should not be generalized to all black women.

Perception was also a key factor in this study. Because mentors of these students were not interviewed, it may be difficult to understand the extent to which these women have been mentored and offered support before the time of the interview. For instance, if a white faculty member offered support and the student did not accept the support, the student may miss an opportunity to be mentored by said professor. This may have changed the student’s perception of white faculty, because they may not have appeared helpful to the student.

As in many qualitative studies, the researcher has personal experiences and biases that may be reflected in the analysis of the data, though member checking processes were implemented to ensure that participant experiences were reflected as intended. As a black women who has experienced a predominately white institution as an undergraduate student, I had my own perception of the mentoring relationships and opportunities available at similar locations. Principles of hermeneutic phenomenology encourage researchers to separate their own experiences from the experiences of the participants in the study.

4.0 RESULTS

Chapter 4 offers an overview of the results from this hermeneutic phenomenological study at Uptown College. This chapter will provide insight into participant lived experiences. Participants in this study had multiple experiences, but ultimately, had the same end goal–to graduate from Uptown College. While their stories are only few of many to be told, participants provided insight into the mentoring experiences of black women at Uptown College. This chapter will include numerous examples of word-for-word recollections from participants in order to honor the individualistic nature of Black Feminist Thought and the many perspectives seen in Constructivism. Through careful examination and interpretation of the study results, hopefully a better understanding of the phenomena—mentoring needs and wants of black women undergraduate students at PWIs—is established.

4.1 PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions will briefly highlight descriptive information about participants' academic programs and geographic home and high school locations. Also highlighted are the reasons that participants decided to attend Uptown, and their biggest motivations to succeed.

4.1.1 Ashley

Ashley was an athlete who studied in a Liberal Arts program. Ashley was from a large city with a diverse school population and she struggled with her transition to a suburban area. Of all the schools she applied to, Uptown "was the school that gave the most money", which was her reason for attending. Ashley's biggest motivation to succeed was her younger siblings. She wanted them to know that if she can succeed in college "they can do it too".

4.1.2 Cierra

Cierra was a first generation student and athlete who studied in a Liberal Arts program. While Cierra was from an urban area, she was accustomed to predominately white private school settings. She attended uptown due to "financial reasons and family reasons". Cierra's biggest motivation to succeed was her family. She wanted to ensure that she can "provide comfortable end of life care" for her parents and make enough money so that she can financially "take of [her] little brother".

4.1.3 Courtney

Courtney was an athlete who studied in an International Business program. Courtney lived slightly east of Uptown College in an urban area, where she attended high school. Courtney attended Uptown for financial reasons – "they offered the most money" and were close to home. Courtney's motivation to succeed in college was ensuring that she would find a job that paid well, but also one that she enjoyed.

4.1.4 Erin

Erin was a first generation student who studied in a Social and Behavioral Science program. Erin was from one of the most populated and diverse cities in the country. Erin also attended a diverse high school in an urban area. Erin attended Uptown College “because of the money”. After her family faced financial difficulties, Erin realized her biggest motivation to succeed was ensuring that her family “has food in the fridge”.

4.1.5 Jordyn

Jordyn was a student at Uptown who studied in a Social and Behavioral Science program. While Jordyn is from a large, diverse area, she attended a predominately white private high school. While neither graduated, both of her parents attended institutions of higher education. Jordyn decided to attend Uptown College in pursuit of her goal to become an attorney. Jordyn sought a campus that was “small and close-knit”, which she found at Uptown. Jordyn’s motivation to succeed was her grandmother, who had a difficult life. Jordyn hoped to “rewrite” her grandmother’s story through her own actions.

4.1.6 Justine

Justine was a first generation student athlete who studied in a Fine Arts program. Justine lived in two large and diverse cities before attending Uptown. Justine indicated that she did not choose to attend Uptown, but instead “Uptown chose [her]”. Because her family was in a “financial bind” and the school offered her money for athletic scholarships, along with being “recruited very, very hard", Justine found herself attending Uptown. Justine's biggest motivator to succeed is that she has always been told that she "would never succeed". Thus, Justine indicated that she wanted to "prove [naysayers] wrong".

4.1.7 Leesha

Leesha was a first generation student who studied in a Social and Behavioral Science program. Leesha was from a large city, where she attended a diverse high school. Leesha attended Uptown College, because of the "internship and job rates" post-graduation. Leesha's biggest motivation to succeed was "wanting a better life" and wanting to "do better" than her parents. Ultimately, Leesha said that she wanted "someone to remember" her success and the "name" she made for herself.

4.1.8 Toni

Toni was a first generation student who studied in a Social and Behavioral Science program. Toni was from a moderately sized city with a diverse population. Toni applied to Uptown College, because her high school counselor suggested it to her. After a visit to campus, Toni felt the campus "scenery was very nice", which is her reason for attending. Toni's biggest motivation to succeed at Uptown was her late grandmother. Toni indicated that since she was the "first in the family to go to college", she wanted to "make her [grandmother] proud".

4.2 THEMES

When summarizing the lived experiences of black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at PWIs, three major themes emerged, as presented in Table 2. The themes were: 1. Concepts of Mentoring, 2. Interaction Patterns with Uptown Administrators, and 3. Barriers to Developing Mentoring Relationships.

Table 2. Thematic Description of Findings

Theme	**Description**
Concepts of Mentoring	Participants provided personal definitions of mentorship and pinpointed persons they viewed as mentors and what those mentors bring to the table.
Interaction Patterns with Uptown Administrators	Participants discuss their interactions with administrators at Uptown and how they led to barriers in mentoring relationships on campus.
Barriers to Developing Mentoring Relationships	Participants discussed experiences that negatively influenced the mentoring relationships (or lack thereof) that they had on campus.

4.2.1 Concepts of Mentoring

Each participant had a different; yet, similar perception of a mentor and the role a mentor should play. Many participants noted a lead-and-follow dynamic in a mentoring relationship: the mentor leads the mentee. Almost verbatim, Courtney and Leesha both described a mentor as “someone who is going to take the lead in helping someone else find their calling”. Both Courtney and Leesha pointed to the idea that mentors should “guide” their mentees not only professionally, but also encourage them to make “positive life choices”. Jordyn also mentioned a lead-and-follow aspect in mentoring relationships:

> I would define mentorship as someone taking someone else under their wing and taking the extra steps to make sure that they're doing well academically, socially, mentally, mind, body, and spirit, and just making sure that they're on the right track to meet their goals. Also a mentor is someone who realizes that my goal may be one thing, but [the mentor's] goals aren't any different from my goals.

Jordyn spoke about the overall wellbeing of the mentee in a mentoring relationships. Jordyn wanted someone who helped her with school, her social life, and with all things that make up her mind and spirit. Also explained was the importance of the common goals that a mentor and mentee share. Jordyn suggested that though specific goals may be different, a mentor and mentee share the goal of "working together" to enhance growth on both ends. Jordyn later described her ideal mentoring relationship as a "friendship", which explains her need for a reciprocal relationship with her mentor. Erin and Ashley also noted the reciprocity of mentoring relationships. Erin indicated that "both individuals [in a mentoring relationship] get something out of it. . . Two people are learning and growing with one another". Ashley suggested that "mentorship is a relationship between two people, where one person is helping the other person, but you guys both benefit and grow from the situation". Jordyn, Erin, and Ashley indicated that they wanted to learn and grow in a way that benefits them, as well as their mentors.

Like Jordyn, Cierra described her relationship with her mentor as "a friendship" that was "rooted in trust, deepened through criticism and strengthened by faith". Cierra took several minutes to explain this sentiment:

> I really, truly believe that there has to be a friendship there. There has to be a true kindred spirit-ship. Some people just don't click right away, but most people do find some type of connection with a person that they meet. There has to be a connection that builds over time. And there has to be a friendship. Next comes the trust. You have to be able to trust this person to hear you out and be able to criticize when you're wrong. I don't believe a mentor is somebody that tells you, "It's okay. It's going be alright. Let me pat you on the back, let me hand you a tissue". No. A mentor needs to be somebody who says, "Yeah, that gentle side will come, but I need to tell you what's up first". And that comes with also having the strength to be able to tell a person, "I'm not attacking you" and "I'm trying to help you".

> And the last part of it would be the faith because obviously, God has a plan for all of us and God put certain people in your path for a reason. And whether good or bad, it's for you to decipher and for you to be aware. But you have to trust that no matter what, there's a reason there. . . That's what makes a mentor.

Cierra pinpointed three things she believes makes a good mentor. Trustworthiness and the ability to criticize seemingly go hand-in-hand. Mentors should be trustworthy enough to give beneficial feedback, but also to give truthful criticism, even if it is hurtful to hear. Thus, a mentor who holds back important feedback to spare the feelings of a mentee is less beneficial to Cierra. Cierra placed value on a more realistic mentor who explains success in terms of the hard work and difficult path it takes to make it. Additionally, Cierra noted that mentors and mentees should have faith so that they understand the purpose they have in the relationship – to “balance” one another.

While some participants noted the importance of growth to the mind, body, and spirit or the significance of having faith, others spoke about the roles mentors play in the lives of their mentees. Justine noted an experience she had with a mentor before she was enrolled at Uptown. Justine said that a mentor played the role of a “father-figure” when she lacked that support at home. Along with this comment, Justine brought forth the idea that a mentor can play many roles “if it needs to happen”. In simple terms, a mentor can be different things to different people. If Justine needs a father-figure, a mentor could be that for her. Justine felt that if a mentee needed professional guidance, mentors can do that for them too. Justine’s point was that mentors can “take care” of their mentees in the ways that foster growth and support for the mentees. Similar to Justine, Toni explained that mentors should ideally play a role similar to a family member. Toni specifically defined a mentor as a “big brother or sister” that one can “honestly call for anything, like if you need help with homework or even if you just want to cry on their shoulder… you know, like a friend; a sister.” In discussing their biggest influences and mentors, many of the participants felt that their actual family members and friends filled those roles.

4.2.1.1 Who are Mentors?

Participants characterized several groups of people as their mentors. Family, friends, and support staff were among those described as mentors for black women in the study.

Family.

Black women in the study counted on their families to provide support for them while they were away at school. When discussing their needs and wants in mentoring relationships, examples came from experiences with “strong” family members. Participants saw parents, grandparents, aunts, and cousins as supporters and mentors during their time at Uptown College. While these relationships did not necessarily occur on campus, the impact they had on students was significant enough to note.

On several occasions, Jordyn looked to her mother, aunt, and grandmother for guidance and she saw them as her most important mentors. Jordyn repeatedly brought up the mentoring relationships she had with her grandmother. A story Jordyn told about her grandmother explains some of the reasons she looked to her for guidance:

> My motivation doesn't come from here. My grandma . . . her mom died when she was five, and when she was 13 her dad died. So imagine you're 20 and you don't have either of your parents. She had like eight other siblings . . . and she still managed to, with a sixth grade education, buy her own house and work to maintain that, and that's what my motivation is. . . She still made sure her daughters got an education. My grandma got her Master's and her Ph.D. and taught for 30 years.

Jordyn saw her grandmother as a woman who overcame enormous obstacles in order to ensure the success of her children and grandchildren. Furthermore, Jordyn went on to explain that when she felt like she could not continue in school, she thought of or spoke to her grandmother in order to gain confidence in herself. Additionally, Jordyn highlighted “positivity”, “reassurance” and “motivation” as valued characteristics of her grandmother. Though tangible items or actions were not made to support her, Jordyn’s interactions with her grandmother made her feel like she could succeed. Jordyn’s relationship with her grandmother provides a prime example of how a mentor can enhance her mentee’s mind and spirit, as Jordyn suggested previously.

Ashley pinpointed her mother and grandfather as her mentors. More so than providing other types of support, Ashley continually noted her appreciation for the financial stability her grandfather and mother provided:

> Definitely my grandad. He and my mom are very supportive. My grandad calls me every week to make sure I'm good. He knew that in the beginning I couldn't work and he would always make sure I was financially stable in that sense. My mom told me I could quit sports and that she would take care of all the financial things in my life, even though I've got four other siblings she has to take care of. . .When I had my little mental breakdowns, she was always there telling me “you know why you started this, you have to finish”.

Though Ashley spoke about the financial support, she also touched on a deeper meaning behind the money. Her mother and grandfather continually checked in with Ashley, because they seemed to know that monetary challenges could keep her from completing her degree. Ashley’s mentors encouraged her to continue with her studies and let them handle the financial hurdles. Like Jordyn, Ashley noted the additional responsibilities of her mentors (other siblings). Both Jordyn and Ashley admired the willpower their mentors had to support them while also supporting other members of their families and fulfilling other responsibilities.

Courtney was the only participant that included race and gender when describing her current mentor. While others implicitly described black women, and in the case of Ashley, a black man, no other participant specifically pointed it out without being specifically asked about it. When asked about her mentor, she described her cousin, Tarra (pseudonym):

> She's another black, African American female in our family that went to college, and she has a really good job. . . She is always encouraging me. Like she'll send me cards and stuff and say, "Keep doing well and keep going to school. It's hard now, but it'll pay off". . . She went back to school, and she is a good role model, especially because she goes through some of the same struggles as me.

To Courtney, Tarra was an encouraging figure that repeatedly reminded her that school may be difficult, but would eventually make a difference in her life. Also noteworthy, is the idea that Tarra may have experienced similar challenges, but she made it through and became a professional woman. This alone showed Courtney that she, a black woman, could overcome challenges with hard work and a good mentor.

Friends.

As indicated, Erin and Cierra both listed friends among their mentors. In fact, Cierra listed Erin as her main supporter and the person who has made the biggest impact on her since she was admitted to Uptown. Cierra discussed her reasons for naming Erin as her mentor:

> I met her freshman year and . . . there was just something about her that instantly drew me towards her. She was so bubbly and so smiley. I can say that throughout the years, not only have I helped her mature, she's been there to support me and help me through so much that I've been through. You know how you have those friends that you talk to every day and then you have those friends that you don't have to speak to for a month but then when you talk to, it's like you've never left? [Erin] is one of those people and although we see each other all the time, because we are in school, during the summer, we'd go a couple weeks without talking. I could get a text from her that's just right on the money, right on time, right when I needed it as if God sent her to do it. I am truly blessed for [Erin's] friendship. She has been one of the biggest influencers to help me get back on the right path whenever I've been led astray and has been there to support me through, no matter what I was going through.

Cierra’s description of Erin as a mentor is parallel to her definition of a mentor. Erin offered Cierra friendship, trust, criticism and faith while encouraging Cierra to succeed in school. Cierra also valued Erin’s will to support her through in her times of need, and reach out to her even when she did not ask for help. Erin was a mentor who assisted Cierra with personal and academic challenges that also boosted her spirit through her bubbly personality.

While Erin did not list Cierra as a mentor, it was apparent that they sought similar characteristics in their mentors. In describing her boyfriend as a mentor, Erin noted his willingness to reach out and help, which was definitely a factor in their relationship. Erin offered a description of their mentoring relationship:

> An obvious answer would be my boyfriend. . . He has pushed me to no end. I've been trying to figure out money and trying to figure out how I'm going to pay for this semester, and trying to figure out when I'm going to eat and all these things. He has been making sure that I don't have to worry about anything. He texts me whenever he can and he stays up with me until 4 o’clock in the morning so I can finish my papers so I don't fall asleep. He'll help me study for tests over the phone with index cards online, and we'll do it that way. He's really been supportive.

Erin pinpointed the financial stability her boyfriend provided, his will to lose sleep to help her, and his help with academics as aspects that made her boyfriend a mentor. While Erin’s definition of a mentor included a reciprocal relationship, Erin did not mention ways that her boyfriend was benefitting. Thus, unclear is the idea that Erin’s boyfriend was being a mentor, or simply being a good boyfriend. Still, Erin’s perception that her boyfriend was a mentor is significant in that he helped he was very supportive in her academic journey.

Support Staff.

Exactly half of the participants pinpointed mentors from a campus program that facilitates learning and advising for first generation and financially disadvantaged students. For purposes of this study, the program will be addressed as the “Learning and Advising Program” (LAP). Dr. Hank (pseudonym; program director) and Ms. Marshall (pseudonym; support staff) were among the staff members from LAP who were identified as having provided levels of support to participants in the study.

Leesha indicated that Dr. Hank and Ms. Marshall were her main support system at Uptown. After a long conversation with Dr. Hank and Ms. Marshall at the beginning of her freshmen year, Leesha saw the importance of having mentors who were “serious” about academics when she needed someone to push her to do better. Leesha explained that not only was verbal encouragement and pushback needed to succeed in the classroom, Dr. Hank and Ms. Marshal gave her “the tools to do it”. It also helped that Dr. Hank was able to help Leesha financially. When Leesha had an outstanding balance on her student account, Dr. Hank was there to “wipe [her] tears” and find ways to pay her tuition bill. Like many of the participants with family as mentors, Leesha felt that a mentor could provide financial stability, or at least provide opportunities to “earn money”.

Like Leesha, Justine also identified Dr. Hank and Ms. Marshall as mentors. As an athlete, Justine sought help from her mentors when she faced issues of eligibility due to academic challenges. Justine described her relationship with her mentors:

> When I was going through my eligibility issues and being able to play [sports], [Ms. Marshall] always pushed me and helped me and she also helped other people to see my potential. And [Dr. Hank] did an amazing job of that too, and if it wasn't for both of them, I probably would not be in college still to be 100% honest.

Justine explained that Dr. Hank and Ms. Marshall were supportive in helping her bring her grades up so that she could participate in campus sports. In the process, Dr. Hank and Ms. Marshall taught Justine that “if you set your mind to do something and become responsible for your own actions . . . then everything will fall into place”. Not only were Dr. Hank and Ms. Marshall contributing factors to Justine’s academic and financial success, Justine attributes her continued attendance at Uptown to her mentors.

Toni and Jordyn also pointed to Ms. Marshall as a mentor. Toni explained that Ms. Marshall helped her transition to campus and she motivated her to “speak up in class”. She would say “don’t just sit there, because people will only associate you with being there”. Ms. Marshall encouraged Toni to use her voice to show that she could do more than just be in the room and to show that she could be an active member of the classroom, which is much like the premise of Black Feminist Thought.

4.2.1.2 Ideal Mentors

Participants were asked to describe their ideal mentors and the responses were somewhat similar. Each had a specific idea of the qualities and characteristics they felt mentors should possess in order to be effective. “Encouragement”, “positivity”, “patience”, “reassurance”, “communication”, “advice”, “trust”, “knowledge”, “faith”, and “understanding” were among the characteristics participants sought in mentors. In describing their ideal mentors, women in the study ultimately described a figure like a mother. Cierra discussed her ideal mentor:

> I would like a woman mentor, a black woman mentor. One that does not judge, and I know that's cliché to ask for but, that's true. I want to be able to tell her absolutely anything. I want an educated one and an educated one doesn't mean she had to go to college and/or finish high school. She must have wisdom that she can to share with me. That's what I mean by an education. I would like a mother, because mothers know better than anybody. They've seen it all, they've been through it all, and they’ve done it all; they can instantly see when something's not right. They're on it. Every mom that I've ever met was on it.

Cierra’s description of her ideal mentor shows her need to have a mother-like figure around to catch her when she falls and use her instinctive and understanding nature to provide guidance. Black women faced many obstacles on and off campus that they felt went unaddressed. As such, participants felt that their mentors should have some knowledge of their experiences so that mentors could guide and coach them through. When asked about specific issues facing black women at PWIs, Jordyn discussed the significance of having mentors and counselors who understood the black student experience and could give advice and suggestions accordingly. Erin also expressed her frustration for the lack of mentors who specialized in helping black students work through challenges when she pointed out that “multicultural counseling is something that I need”. Jordyn also looked for counseling, reassurance, and guidance from her mentor:

> There's a level of guidance there, where it's like ... Okay, well maybe if I'm going to make a bad decision she'll be like, "Hey! Girl! Get it together!" Because I feel like in this day and age, we're too afraid to hurt each other's feelings when we're necessarily saying, "Look. That path you're going down, what you're doing, it's not going to go well, and you need to chill," or, "I saw you got a C, what are you doing to make it better? Not that what you're doing isn't good enough, but there's always room for improvement, always room to level up”.

Participants wanted mentors who were willing to tell the truth, but could also be encouraging and reassuring. More often than not, participants sought what they were missing in their current mentoring experiences on campus – black women. Every participant in the study described their ideal on-campus mentor as a black woman. Ironically, participants did not seek black women mentors specifically because of race and gender. Instead, participants knew that black women mentors could understand the challenges they faced and in turn, could provide empathetic support. Thus, participants wanted black women mentors, because they could be empathetic to the experiences of participants. Being one of few people who identify with being a black woman on a white campus was difficult for women in this study. Participants shared stories of having been victims of racism, sexism and discrimination, but they withstood those challenges as they continued to work toward graduation. Participants expressed that they felt a black woman mentor may have been through similar struggles, or at least know others who had been through them.

4.2.2 Interaction Patterns with Uptown Administrators

Many participants felt that specific groups of people did not serve as mentors for black women. Administrators, Athletic Coaches and Professors were among those that were not considered mentors for many participants.

4.2.2.1 Administrators, Athletic Coaches and Professors

Many participants in the study considered parents and other family members to be mentors during their time on campus. While participants looked to parents for support, many of the first generation students found that support from family was limited in some capacities. Parents of first generation students did not understand academic processes or how to help their children through difficulties they faced in classes. Similar to what participants experienced, Vickers (2004) purported that families may not understand the complexities of processes related to higher education (i.e. admissions, scheduling, graduation), as they have not gone through them, which can be a detrimental factor for first generation students, as indicated by Erin:

> To start off my freshmen year, personally, I had difficulties academically. I didn't really have any concept of what I was supposed to do in college. I'm a first generation student so that was not like anything I could call my mom and ask about or call my dad to ask about. I had an older sister who went to college for two semesters and she dropped out, because of illness. I didn't really have anyone to talk to about that kind of stuff. . .like I said I was a first generation student and I didn't know anyone here, because it's completely out of my home state, so I didn't feel comfortable going to the advisors here for a while. So I just kind of tried to pull it out on my own.

Because Erin had a family who lacked understanding of the processes of higher education and she did not feel comfortable seeking help from campus professionals, uncertainty and the burden to succeed without support rang true for her. This reality pinpoints a major issue involving the intersectionality of being a first generation student and a black student at a PWI.

Instead of only having trouble finding support at home, Erin, and other first generation black students had two hurdles to climb without even attending class or considering academics. The idea that black women first generation students had no support at home and did not feel comfortable communicating with campus professionals had significant implications for mentoring relationships for those students.

Many black women were not part of a family with mentors who understood the academic process and they did not have mentors on campus who understood them. They had to find mentors on their own if they felt it necessary. For instance, Leesha indicated that she could not find a mentor, because she did not feel comfortable speaking with them about personal issues (i.e. racial incidents, relationships advice, etc.). Leesha’s discomfort was not attributed to her mentors being white, more so, it was because her advisers and professors were from the area, where she was having a difficult experience. Leesha’s mentoring experience was being hindered not only because she was a first generation black woman student, but also because of the campus climate, which she perceived to be negative.

Finding mentors elsewhere proved challenging for some participants considering their first generation status and their perception of the campus climate and professionals. While Erin and Cierra listed friends among those who have influenced them on campus, one participant felt that she had no mentor at all. “I’ve always mentored myself”, Leesha explained about her mentoring experience at Uptown College. Leesha indicated that she felt that no one fully understood the support she needed – not her parents or her advisors or her professors, all who she felt could have possibly served as mentors for her. Leesha’s experience shows that first generation black women students have a disadvantage when it comes to finding mentors, especially ones who understand their needs in mentoring relationships. In other words, first generation black women needed to feel understood in order to be supported.

At an institution of higher education, it would be no surprise if athletic coaches or professors were mentioned as mentors. In the case of this study, these figures were either 1. Not considered mentors, or 2. Not mentioned at all when mentors and influential people were discussed. Leesha indicated that “there are a lot of mentors [coaches] who just have that name for no reason”. Leesha felt that some coaches had a “negative outlook”, which she feels defeats the “purpose of being a mentor”. This sentiment is true for other participants too, specifically for those who once considered athletic coaches as mentors.

Half of the participants in the study played collegiate sports. Of the four athletes, Justine was one of two who spoke about her athletic coach. She was also the only participant who spoke about her coach positively. Justine indicated that her coach was reassuring and talked to her in a way that did not “tank” her attitude when she was on or off the playing field. Justine also liked that her coach was “harsh, but in the right way”. While Justine liked several things about her coach, she did not specifically point to her as a mentor.

Cierra was the only other athlete to speak about her coach. At first, Cierra and her coach had a positive relationship. Cierra indicated that in her early years as an athlete, her coach “really guided” her and “mentored” her so that she could “become a better [athlete]”. Eventually, Cierra felt that she “learned another lesson from him”. She felt that she was unrightfully and “unfairly” removed as a captain of the team, because the person who filled her spot was “a young white woman” who was a “lesser athlete”. A comment by Cierra made it clear that she felt race was definitely a factor in her removal from the captain position: “Could there have been something deeper to that? Yeah. But at face value, it just looked like he picked his color. That's what it looked like.” Whether the intent of the change was based on race or not, the perception that race was involved, led to Cierra losing a mentor.

Only one of the eight participants made note of professors when discussing influential people on campus. While Leesha indicated that some faculty members were helpful, she did not specifically call them mentors. What Leesha did say is that “the teachers here, or at least the ones I’ve met, are helpful when you ask for help”. This is the only comment about professors that gave any indication that teachers play a role in mentorship. While no one specifically identified professors as mentors, the lack of mention is an indication of the participants’ views on the matter. While Leesha felt teachers were sometimes helpful, she also indicated that help was not necessarily offered – a student needed to ask for help in order to receive it. Others also had issues with professors. Courtney wished “[Uptown] would do a better job integrating African American mentors, as far as advisers and even professors”. Justine repeatedly noted her dissatisfaction with her professors, noting the “major issues” she has had with them. Most notable is the idea that “professors stereotype black students”. Jordyn criticized the workload her professors gave, frustrated that professors did not understand the importance of encouraging students when they were working to “juggle everything”. Clearly, participants did not have a positive perception of professors; thus, mentoring relationships with those professors did not exist. Several factors contributed to the idea that not all groups served as relatable mentors; however, one factor was noted by several participants – lack of understanding.

4.2.2.2 Lack of Understanding

By far, the most discussed topic in this study (and one that is likely a factor in the challenges participants faced in regard to finding mentors), was the lack of understanding of the black woman’s student experience on part of white students, faculty, and staff. While most participants had some form of a mentor either on or off campus in their experience on campus, each participant felt in some way misunderstood by the students, faculty, and staff they encountered at Uptown College.

Many participants pinpointed supporters and mentors from the Learning and Advising Program. While the program was filled mostly by black students, none of the support staff in the program were black. Though difficult to explain for some participants, black women in the study were able to highlight several reasons their white mentors did not fully understand their experiences. Justine specifically pointed to LAP staff as mentors, but indicated that she could not fully connect with them. Justine recounted her experience:

> I would say Dr. Hank and Ms. Marshall are mentors, but not fully. They're there if I need them for the most part, but some stuff, I can't go to them for. . . If something racially happens on campus, I can't talk to them about that. If I feel some type of way about being [at Uptown], I can't talk to them about that because they're from around here.

Justine was the second student to point to the geographic location or hometown as a boundary for mentors and mentees in mentoring relationships. Leesha also expressed her frustration with the conversation limitations she had with her mentor, as discussed previously. Justine and Leesha’s experiences bring to light the idea that many black women cannot fully connect with their mentors, because their perception is that white people who live in certain areas do not understand or care to discuss topics relating to race.

While Cierra recounted her high school experience with white mentors as positive ones, she felt they did not understand her fully:

> I've met some great mentors, both white and black. I will not discredit either. Like I said, I came from a background where I was around majority white. Most of my friends were white. My black friends were my family. Okay? I don't have a problem with either race and I've had mentors in both that were fantastic. . . In the real world, it's a different ball game from the ones you see in grade school and in high school. It's like, really stepping out into a battle zone and as much as I love the Caucasian people and the people of different races that I've encountered, I've encountered some real ugly that scares me. I'm

> not going to lie. It scared me to a point that I want to be prepared for what I'm about to face. I need a woman, a black woman, who's been through it, who has seen it to tell me what's about to come my way. I don't need a Caucasian woman telling me that, "it can work out. Here's what you need to do". Yeah, you might know some steps, but you don't know them for the path that I need to walk. Two completely different paths.

Cierra’s fear for the “real world”, depicts the feelings had by many black women at Uptown. Participants in this study often felt that only black women could understand the experience of black women students, which is the reason Cierra wished for a black woman as her mentor on campus. While Cierra’s comments show that she appreciated the mentoring relationships she had with black and white mentors, she felt that a black woman could be a more effective mentor in terms of understanding the “path” that she felt was necessary for success. Cierra felt that a black woman mentor could help her better understand the complexities of the real world that she would soon face. Cierra knew that gaining a black woman mentor was unlikely, as she noted that lack of black mentors on campus:

> I can honestly say that there's not enough African American mentors on the campus. There hasn't been since I entered into [Uptown] and honestly, it hasn't seemed like it's grown. Although, we have gotten a number of African American students. So, hopefully it should be on the agenda to hire more African American male and females.

Because the campus has few black women in leadership positions, finding mentors who understand the experience of students like Cierra is difficult. Still, Cierra acknowledges that white mentors who put in time and effort can be successful mentors for black women, no matter what path they follow.

Similar to Cierra, Ashley and Justine pointed to the lack of black women faculty and staff as an issue. Ashley noted the specific reasons that black women mentors are necessary for black women students:

> Representation. We don't have representation, especially here. We'll wear our hair a certain way, we'll walk a certain way, we'll act a certain way, and we get looked down upon or we get looked at a certain way and we automatically get deemed “ghetto” or

> “ratchet”, and other stuff like that. We automatically get deemed that, because they don't understand us and there's nobody like us in the faculty or anywhere in the school. I think I've seen maybe three faculty of color and they were Asian women. Besides Asian women, there are not that many people of color here. It's different, because you don't know what you can say and what you can't say [with non-black women]. You don't know how they would take certain things; you don't know how they view the world and social views. You don't want to really get into social views, because you don't know how they're going to react to yours. . . Some stuff I wish that I could talk to somebody about, but I can't, because nobody has gone through it.

Ashley expressed her fear of discussing social views with campus administrators. Instead, she refrained from speaking about them in total, in order to avoid whatever reaction her white mentors may have made toward the experiences and views of black women. Furthermore, Ashley felt some topics were off-limits in conversation with white mentors, because those mentors had not personally experienced them.

While Cierra and Ashley pinpointed experiences where they felt not fully understood at Uptown, Justine discussed incidents with student leaders who did not understand how to interact with her:

> I was assigned a [student leader] coming into my freshman year and I don't even think she knew how to talk to me. I think she was afraid of me, she hasn't even met me yet. . . I think that she didn't know how to approach me as a person or know how to say something that didn't come off racist . . . even though I probably wouldn't have cared what came out of her mouth, because I'm used to it. I think that if she didn't try to filter herself so much and try to relate to me so much that it would've been an easier adjustment for her to get to know me. She would call me her “home girl” and all that stuff, and it's kind of like “you're trying a little too hard; just be yourself”. . . And I feel like that's why our relationship wasn't necessarily the best.

Participants also experienced mentors who did not understand, but tried to connect in ways they believed were appropriate, seemingly based on what is traditionally depicted in the media. Justine made it clear that connecting on a surface level would have been better than spewing stereotypical language amidst interactions with black women students. Also significant to note about Justine’s experience was the idea that she learned not to care about racist and stereotypical language due to the repetitive nature of those types of comments made to her. Not only did faculty and staff not know how to interact with black women in the study, their white peers were ignorant to the simplicity of saying “hello, Justine” instead of “hey, home girl”. When it comes to mentoring relationships where white students and professionals interact with black students, Justine suggested that “if they have an understanding of how to approach a situation the right way, especially when it comes to a group of minorities, then I feel like that will benefit us.” Justine’s statement urged white faculty, staff and students to educate themselves on cultural norms of black students, learn better ways to approach black students, and hold honest and meaningful conversations without using stereotypical, hurtful and hateful language.

The overall lack of understanding that the white campus community had for black women is a part of what Jordyn deems “the struggle”, a term coined in the black community to depict their difficulties in society. Many of the stories told by participants reveal elements of the struggle, as depicted by Jordyn:

> I feel like a black person can understand the struggle, if that makes sense. . . Things that I say if I'm rubbed the wrong way by something, [black women] just get it more . . . Sometimes I have to say "Listen, this is why this is like this," or "This is why black people shouldn't stay to themselves." You have to explain to them in great detail, have to give a whole history lesson, and sometimes I just want them to say "Yes, I understand," and we can move on to the next thing, just to be able to relate more.

Jordyn went on to explain that the struggle is a mixture of being met with “stereotypical language”, having to constantly prove that “black people can be intelligent”, and constantly explaining why “black ideas and lives actually matter”. Jordyn pinpointed a huge burden black women had encountered. Black women were constantly put in positions where they had to explain themselves and why things were the way they were for black people. Jordyn became frustrated with repetitive questioning. Significant is the idea that Jordyn would rather a white person pretend to understand, than to continually give “history lessons” about the struggles of black women. Jordyn eventually got to the point where she explained that having black women as mentors would give students a professional to get advice from when it came to the "struggle with racism, sexism, and other discriminatory incidents".

Many of the participants noted elements of the struggle in discussing their experiences on campus and in mentoring relationships. Cierra described situations with professors that she felt perfectly explained the struggle:

> There are stories of professors telling students that they should probably look into a different career path, because it's unlikely that they will succeed because of their race . . . and that's unfortunately what I have encountered from Caucasian men.

Black women in this study were constantly told that they were not smart enough by white professors, specifically white men. Participants were left with the burden to continually explain why their ideas, concepts, and issues were valid, and their mentors could not understand that struggle. Incidents in the classroom only strengthened the separation between participants and white professionals and mentors. Furthermore, black women felt that they could not connect with white men in mentoring relationships due to the criticism they received in and out of the classroom. The separation between white male professionals and black women students limited black women on who they would consider mentors.

Courtney gave a simple phrase that shed light on the gist of the problem in mentoring relationships among participants, "I can't relate to my white male teachers or white female teachers, because we don't go through the same things". While other participants gave more detailed explanations of the issue, Courtney's to-the-point explanation sums up what each of the participants felt. Participants felt that their experiences were so unique that mentors simply did not understand how to mentor them, even if they had good intentions of doing so. Furthermore, black women sought unbiased support, where mentors understood the challenges that black women endured on and off campus. All participants agreed that white mentors were not getting the point of what it meant to mentor a black woman. Furthermore, the data from this section suggests that white professors and white students did not know how to support black women the ways in which they needed to be supported in mentoring relationships. Black women wanted support from black women, because they understood their experiences and the struggle, and could be empathetically reassuring.

4.2.3 Barriers to Developing Mentoring Relationships

While all participants were black women, each person's mentoring relationship was affected by their campus experience differently. More specifically, mentoring relationships many times suffered because of the ways that black women navigated their campus experience. Campus and Political Climate, Support of Black Men, and Classroom Isolation were among the areas that participants spoke about in relation to the experiences they had that created barriers to developing mentoring relationships.

4.2.3.1 Campus and Political Climate

Black women in the study had strong feelings about the campus, community, and political climate, especially amidst the Trump Administration era. Participants expressed their disgust for the support of hateful and hurtful symbols of racism on campus and the students who outwardly support them and taunt black students on campus because of them. Incidents described by participants negatively affected the way black women viewed professionals at Uptown College, which ultimately affected their mentoring relationships. Erin recounted an experience where white students used the Trump election as a device for spewing racially-charged and hateful speech:

> I remember last year when Trump got voted into office. There were people outside of [a residence hall] calling people “niggers” and telling people to go back to their countries. And that was uncomfortable, because as a lot of people know that many of the minorities live in [this residence hall] so that incident was clearly directed. Unfortunately, the school didn't really say anything much after the event, even though the harassment was reported. They still didn't do anything. There was a peace initiative, that students and faculty signed, and I was a part of making it. But it was something that went out and said that “at [Uptown College], we'll respect each other”. It was a website where you make a campaign and if enough people sign it, you can get said thing approved. I feel like we shouldn't have to make that happen in the first place. I feel that should have been protocol and it wasn't. . .
>
> Frankly, you just kind of feel out of place and when you don't have a school that has protocols and things in place to help you feel at least safe, or at home, that's a problem. And when the majority of your school doesn't have the same experience as twenty percent of your student body, that's a problem, because then the buildings, the structure, the things and resources that are available don't always pertain to everybody in the student body, and so, you end up in situations with kids running around with fucking Confederate flags, who think it's okay.

Based on Erin’s explanation of her experience, it seems that she was more upset with the lack of action on behalf of the administration, more than the racist comments made by her peers. Erin’s experience highlights an issue that many black women face at Uptown on student and professional levels: their issues are overlooked and many times unaddressed and their voices are often “silenced and sometimes, dismissed” (Grant, 2012, p. 104). Instances like these fostered discontent for the campus and campus professionals among black women. Furthermore, the repetitive nature of racial incidents toward black students perpetuated perceived acceptance of these actions, or at minimum, apathy on behalf of the administration. Erin felt issues of racism went unaddressed, which affected the way she perceived the administrators that she could have called her mentors. When asked what role she felt race and gender had on mentoring relationships, Erin pinpointed the significance of having support of administrators during racial and political incidents.

> When I was back home in high school, I had mentors who were my race and gender. I believe it was my sophomore or junior year when Trayvon was shot and we got support without even asking . . . mentors were coming out, contacting us, asking if we were okay, and asking us how we were feeling. They were giving us numbers to call if we were ever in a situation like that. And then just talking to us. . .They were extremely supportive, so when I look back and look at how that situation was dealt with by mentors, I can see how the situation is more persistent now and how it's not being dealt with by my school. It's frustrating.

Erin was frustrated by Uptown College's failure to address racism on campus. Erin indicated that she needed support from her mentor during specific situations where she and other students were in distress. Erin felt that the individualized support would have aided in her success, because it would have demonstrated a caring environment for the students affected. Erin mentioned her high school to identify the things she was looking for in her mentors on campus. Based on her statement, Erin characterized her former mentors as those who provided support without asking, conversation to gain information about students' wellbeing, and resources, such as contact information for times of need– things she was not getting from her mentors at Uptown.

Similar to Erin, many of the participants explained in great detail several incidents of racism, sexism and discrimination; some even urged their mentors to teach them how to fit in where they felt they did not. Toni insisted that she needed a mentor who could teach her "how to adapt and adjust. I just need to know how to talk to them and how not to talk to them". Erin and other black women felt that they needed to speak a certain way so they could fit in on a predominately white campus.

Like Toni, Cierra felt that she and other black women were constantly targets of one of the most prevalent stereotypes about black women. Black women were put in positions where they had to defy images of what Cierra called “the stereotypical angry black girl”. Additionally, black women in this study felt the need to put on masks to be viewed as acceptable forms of themselves by their mentors. They had to change the way they acted and the way they talked so that they not only had a decent perception themselves, but also so that their black women peers were not susceptible to the same stereotypes.

Even with the name-calling and the stereotypes on campus, participants knew they needed mentors to succeed, so they put their pride aside and sought help. “I caught myself not wanting to seek help, because I wanted to be wonder woman, but I crashed and burned. . . I needed to go seek support and I eventually found a great mentor” Cierra suggested. Cierra was pressured to see the light in the dark. She did not feel comfortable seeking a mentor on campus, but she had nowhere else to turn. Black women were burdened with having to seek help on a campus that did not fully support them. The campus and political climate at Uptown College caused for negative experiences on behalf of the black women in the study. The negative experiences had by these students was definitely a factor in the feelings black women had toward their white mentors on campus. All of the participants felt that they needed a mentor who could better understand the situations and experiences they had on a campus where they were the minority.

4.2.3.2 Campus Support of Black Men

When attempting to determine who understood the challenges of black women students on campus, participants indicated that black men also did not fully comprehend their experiences. Participants in this study believed that black men received much more attention and support in comparison to black women. Every participant in this study felt that men, specifically black male athletes, were favored by the Uptown College professional community. The support given to black men was not equally reflected in experiences had by black women. Ashley, who is an athlete on campus, felt that faculty and advisors put extra effort in ensuring black men were supported and scheduled for classes. Furthermore, she felt that she also needed assistance from advisors, but was turned away. Ashley, explained the treatment she received from advisors versus the treatment of her male peers:

> Most of the black men here, they're athletes, so they get babied. But we are like oh no, you can do this yourself. So because we're black and we're female, they think we should be able to do this already. They say black women don't need help . . . I've experienced things like when we're scheduling, when we need help, we're pushed away sometimes. But I've seen mentors or faculty members do the black men's whole schedule. They will do it for them. They will look for the classes. They will schedule them. But when it comes to us, they’re like “oh no, go do it yourself”.

Ashley’s scheduling experience with her advisor was non-existent, while men received extra support in similar situations. Ashley felt it was unfair, because she needed the help while some of the men took advantage of the assistance they received. Ashley’s experiences also highlighted that the intersection of race, gender, and athletic ability determined who received support on campus and who did not. Participants, whether athletes or not, felt that black male athletes received more support. In instance like scheduling and registering for classes, black women were expected to understand how to do these tasks without help, though participants made it clear that they needed help completing these academic processes.

Being a black athlete did not automatically make a difference in the support received by students. When gender was added to the equation, a new dynamic was created. Once a black athlete was recognized as a woman, she was worth less, or at least that is what mentors’ and coaches’ actions were telling participants in this study when they denied support to students who needed it. Black women had to consider that being a woman made them inferior and so did being a black student. Thus, participants had to compete with white men, black men, and even white women for support, what seemed to be a losing battle.

While black women definitely received the short end of the stick when it came to gaining support in comparison to their athletic black male peers, Jordyn felt that all women were treated like they are second-class students.

> I definitely feel like guys are just assumed to be smart . . . If a guy is in class and he says something, it's like, "Oh, great!" If a girl says something, it's like, "Wow, she knew that?" It's definitely not level at all, and I feel like for guys, it's like, "Oh, he's smart. He can be an engineer, a doctor, or whatever." But if a girl is aspiring to it, it's like, "Oh, wow, you're smart? That's so cool!" It's like if you aspire to be a doctor that's great, but it shouldn't bring a level of shock or be praised extra hard because she's aspiring to this. That's great, but it should be normal. It shouldn't be like "Oh, wow!"
>
> So definitely guys get, I don't want to say better treatment, but it's expected for them to do well, so it's not a shocker when they actually do well. It's like, "Oh, yeah, well he's a guy. He's supposed to do that." But with girls it's like, "Oh my god, you're doing great! Wow!" Okay, we've come a long way from housewives . . . and even then we were the women behind the men. The men forget to say that.

Black women in the study felt that faculty mentors disregarded their intelligence. Professors were surprised when women succeeded, especially in math and science related majors like engineering and medicine. The idea that women and minorities cannot pursue careers in “difficult” industries is not a new one. Black women in the study urged the faculty and their mentors to treat them like individuals and give them the benefit of the doubt when considering the stereotype that women, especially black women, cannot succeed in certain fields.

4.2.3.3 Classroom Isolation

One thing that most participants felt their current mentors did understand was how to help them academically. Though there was some understanding between mentors and mentees when helping prepare for academics, mentors did not know how to help black women deal with the experiences they had in the classroom. Participants noted the limited number of black students in each class due to the low percentage of minorities on campus. Also discussed was the notion that black women could not grasp information. More specifically, participants recalled instances when professors directly stereotyped them based on race. Justine described the way the incident made her feel:

> I got told going into [a math-related] class that I was going to fail the class by the professor, because I'm black. I don't want to hear that; no one wants to hear that. What if I went up to a white person and said “you're dumb, because you're white”? No one has the [courage] to actually do that, so it's not going to happen. But for some odd reason, people have the courage to do that to African American students, which makes no sense to me.

Participants were told that they were not smart enough to succeed in specific majors, because they were black. Black women were then put in the position to participate in a class where the teacher did not believe they could succeed. As indicated previously, Justine’s idea of a mentor was someone who could help others see her potential. This sentiment shows that her mentor could help in some ways, but other ways proved more difficult. Justine’s mentors could not “force teachers to see the potential” and they did not “attempt to even try”.

Even some participants believed that the concept of success was not plausible for black students. This sentiment is highlighted by Ashley’s experience:

> I wish there were more. I wish we had more women of color, black men, and just people of color here in general. When we don't see ourselves in that area, we get diminished and we begin to think “how am I going to succeed here if nobody that looks like me has succeeded here?” A lot of the black people who are here, they leave. They drop out and it's just like “here’s another black kid who left”. So if we had more representation here and we hired more black professors and faculty who are not just “the help”, then it would be a better environment for us and we would feel more comfortable.

Before they even entered a class, Black women had feelings of isolation about the classroom. Ashley’s experience shows that a connection between representation and self-efficacy may exist. If students saw other students like themselves succeeding, they were more likely to believe they could succeed. Black women felt that the only black people they had to look up to were “the help”, a term that refers to a person of lesser social standing who more than likely is a servant in some capacity (i.e. housekeepers, food servers, etc.). Participants made it clear that they were not satisfied with the current representation of black women in professional spaces on campus. With black faculty and staff there to support, black students felt that they may have positive role models to fill the void when their peers left the college.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to help uncover the mentoring needs and wants of black women undergraduate students at Predominately White Institutions. The complexities of mentoring relationships for black women pursuing undergraduate degrees need to be further represented in research, because this research helps to frame the overall experiences of black women students. In addition, through this research we learn about and support black women and their needs. This research is important, because the number of black women students in higher education continually increases (Bartman, 2015; Reddick & Pritchett, 2015; Sullivan, 2015; Vickers 2004). Furthermore, the results of the study illuminate how mentoring relationships are affected and have been affected by the experiences of black women on predominately white campuses.

The framework of this study was designed with the complexities of mentoring relationships for black women at its core. This study was grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology with a black feminist lens. The study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 8 black women enrolled full-time (i.e. 12 credits minimum) in undergraduate courses at Uptown College (pseudonym). The primary research questions that guided this study were:

1. What type of support are black women undergraduate students at PWIs seeking?
2. What do black women undergraduate students at PWIs need and want in mentoring relationships?

3. How does the intersection of race and gender relate to the mentoring relationships that Black women at PWIs seek?

Results of the study highlighted three major themes: 1. Concepts of Mentoring, 2. Interaction Patterns with Uptown Administrators, and 3. Barriers to Developing Mentoring Relationships. Chapter five covers a review of the major findings of this study, as well as their implications for theory, research and practice.

5.1 OVERVIEW OF MAJOR FINDINGS

This section will provide an overview of the major findings in relation to the study’s research questions.

5.1.1 What type of support are black women undergraduate students at PWIs seeking?

While family, friends and support staff were deemed mentors for participants, other administrators, such as athletic coaches and professors did not serve in those roles. The belief that faculty, staff and students did not fully understand black women shaped the way that participants interacted in mentoring relationships, a concept Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford and Pifer (2017), and Reddick and Pritchett (2015) also found to be true. Black women described many of their challenges in terms of “the struggle”, a term meant to describe the difficulties faced by black people in society (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Because of these challenges, mentors were urged by participants to teach black women how to be accepted on campus, because these women felt isolated; and faculty were urged to encourage participants to succeed instead of stereotyping them, because of their race and gender. The idea that administrators did not understand the challenges black women faced ultimately meant that they did not know how to mentor black women, or minimally, those mentors were limited in their capacity to mentor those students. Thus, a gap between current administrator knowledge and abilities and student needs was revealed. Black women in the study could not rely on white administrators to discuss issues of race and racism, relationship challenges, and other personal issues. While white administrators were not able to speak with participants about racism, emotional support in such instances was also not present (Alveraz et al. 2009). This knowledge gap, in addition to participant perceptions of white administrators, were reasons that many black women had a difficult time finding mentors on campus. Consequentially, black women needed support from administrators that was understanding of their needs, challenges, and experiences.

The campus and political climate at Uptown College also served as a barrier to building mentoring relationships for black women in the study. Experiences of participants revealed the frustrations that black women had regarding racially-charged interactions with white students, faculty and staff on campus, which ultimately exposed areas of support black women in the study were not receiving. Participants were extremely vocal in their outrage for racism and racist incidents on campus, but also in urging administrators to take a stand and support black students during those instances. The process of holding students accountable was a representation of the campus and political climate at Uptown in that it exemplified disparities of black students. Participants felt that the administration did not consider the repercussion of actions had on black students who were targets of racially insensitive language and behavior. The lack of response on behalf of the administration showed that the needs of black women on campus were not reflected in accountability processes. Furthermore, black women were not receiving support from mentors or other administrators in regard to the negative racial incidents they faced. The lack of support for participants left them feeling frustrated and alone in mentoring relationships and on campus. Heightened frustrations due to lack of support were some of many reasons black women did not look to white administrators for help or mentorship, even when they needed uplifting mentors when negative and racist language was directed at them (Vickers, 2014). Participant experiences dealing with offensive language showed that support from administrators may have enhanced connections between both groups, ultimately leading to fewer instances of blatant racism and more opportunities for conversation and mentorship (Brown, 2017).

Black women in the study noted several instances where they were lacking support. This lack of support is made evident by the differences in treatment of black women, the ignorance of administrators in regard to black women's experiences, and the absence of accountability processes that supported and acknowledged the challenges of black women. Given the results of this study, this gap in support existed due in part to structural aspects of the institution. The institutional structure at Uptown perpetuated a hierarchy among students, where black women were inferior to white men, white women, and black men. More explicitly introduced was the idea that the value on diversity and creating a climate of equity and inclusion was not a priority among the administration. The culture of inequity and exclusion left black women turning to mentors in places they felt comfortable on and off campus.

5.1.2 What do black women undergraduate students at PWIs need and want in mentoring relationships?

The needs and wants of participants were discussed in many ways. Two of the primary indicators of needs and wants were presented in terms of current and ideal mentor descriptions. Among current mentors, participants noted family members as integral contributors. Familial support and mentorship were concepts that emerged early and continued throughout the interview process. More specifically, many looked to black women family members – mothers, aunts, and grandmothers – as mentors. Participants felt that having black, motherly women as mentors may serve as a way for black women students to address their challenges and concerns by gaining advice based on personal experience. Perhaps more important was the idea that participants turned to family, because many times they had little to no support on campus. Participants sought mature and intuitive mentors who would not judge them for the very specific challenges they faced. Black women were not finding that support on campus, so they turned to those who were already familiar to them. Not that family did not provide important mentoring relationships for black women in the study, but participants were hindered for having to find mentors in familiar places. Inadequate access to mentors limited black women in the study in terms of finding mentors who could influence them on careers aspirations (Davis, 2007), academic processes (Crisp, et al., 2017), and other benefits participants hoped to gain from their mentors. This was especially the case for first generation students who often did not have family members that understood collegiate processes (Vickers, 2004). Though support from family stemmed from familiarity and not being able to find suitable mentors on campus, mentors among family members provided emotional and tangible support to participants. Participants made it clear that they needed support from family, because they provided an instinctive and understanding nature to mentoring relationships.

While participant descriptions of their ideal mentors were different, the overwhelming common thread was that they wanted mentors who were also black women. Participants indicated that having white mentors was a challenge, because they did not fully comprehend the complexities of the black experience at PWIs (Bartman, 2015; Hughes and Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Johnson, 2011; Louis, Russell, Jackson, Blanchard & Louis, 2014). In order to feel comfortable confiding in their mentors, black women in the study wanted to see that they shared similar experiences and feelings toward certain matters (i.e. race, gender, world events, politics, etc.) (Davis, 2007). White administrators struggled to fill that need for black women students at Uptown. This sentiment shows the strength in having same-race mentors. Participants trusted mentors who were black, because they shared similar backgrounds and characteristics (Wallace, Moor, and Curtis, 2014). Because white administrators did not have the same similarities, limitations in those kinds of mentoring relationships became apparent (Bartman, 2015; Hughes and Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Johnson, 2011; Louis, Russell, Jackson, Blanchard & Louis, 2014).

Even formal mentoring opportunities like the Learning and Advising Program (LAP) were deemed inadequate, because participants could not fully relate to the white professionals selected as the organization’s leaders. Because the program had no black professionals, participants had to rely on white staff to support them, even when they were inadequately prepared to help. While black women in the study called some LAP staff mentors, participants were quick to point out that they still did not fully trust them. Not only does the lack of minority professionals in LAP suggest that administrators do not understand the needs of participants, it also suggests that black women in the study could not fully relate to those who they considered their only on-campus mentors. The significance of the lack of black women professionals in the LAP program and on campus becomes even more apparent, because participants made it clear that they needed and wanted mentors who could provide empathetic support and understanding. This is especially important, because the LAP, according to its mission, was specifically created to provide mentors and support for black women and other minority students. If participants could not find adequate mentors in a program that was directly aimed at supporting them, chances of them finding mentors elsewhere seemed slim.

Financial support was also a major factor for participants in choosing a college and a mentor. Furthermore, many also noted that they looked to their mentors for work opportunities, financial support and guidance. Despite the overwhelming call for financial support, participants also found a deeper meaning in that support. Many found that family members who were mentors played a huge role in the financial difficulties they were experiencing. Also of note was that when participants talked about receiving financial support, they also spoke highly of the time and care that came with sending money. Participants liked that their families and mentors were constantly checking in on them to ensure that they were alright, financially and otherwise. Furthermore, mentors' financial contributions allowed participants to focus on academics and the overall Uptown experience. While monetary support definitely made an impact in mentoring relationships for participants, the emotional support, care and concern that family members had was even more significant, especially when they were not receiving that support on campus.

5.1.3 How does the intersection of race and gender relate to the mentoring relationships that Black women at PWIs seek?

While participants namely discussed issues regarding race, also described were challenges involving the intersections of race and gender. Black women felt that they were treated as inferior not only to white students, but also in comparison to black men (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Participants' feelings about their treatment stemmed from negative stereotypes regarding the abilities of black women and disparities in the support that they received from administrators. Both of these barriers definitely contributed to the lack of mentoring relationships black women had at Uptown. Black women felt specifically targeted, because of the intersection of their race and gender. Actions of campus administrators, specifically professors, athletic coaches and advisers, communicated to participants that they were inferior to their white counterparts, which exposed a burden that many black women have at PWIs as they experience life through multiple marginalized identities – they feel they must compete to fit in with the dominant group (Bartman, 2015; Sinanan, 2016; Turner 2002). This finding revealed that the climate at Uptown was dominated by a structure of white patriarchy – a common challenge black women face (Turner, 2002; Vickers, 2014). This campus structure created barriers for black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at Uptown. Consequentially, black women found it difficult to create relationships with white administrators, making mentoring connections between the two groups almost non-existent. Participants were not finding mentors on campus, and when they were, the support was deemed inadequate by black women in the study.

Furthermore, participants directly and indirectly made it clear that they understood the importance of having mentors of a specific race and gender. If race was the only factor participants placed value on, perhaps some of them would have asked for black men mentors, or white women mentors. Black women sought mentoring relationships with other black women on and off campus, as they were often left in uncomfortable situations when interacting with non-black professionals (Wallace, Moore, & Curtis, 2014). For participants, no other gender or race of mentor was considered when discussing their ideal mentors. Given that the ideal mentor for participants were rarely, if ever, found on campus, revealed is the idea that black women are disadvantaged when looking for meaningful mentoring relationships, specifically because of the needs they had related to race and gender (Turner, 2002).

5.2 IMPLICATIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

Given the findings of this study, the following discussion highlights implications for theory, research and practice. While this study focused attention on the lived experiences of eight black women undergraduate students at Uptown College, the results of this study inform our overall understanding of mentoring relationships for black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at predominately white institutions; thus, they have implications for theory, research, and practice moving forward.

5.2.1 Implications for Theory

In her book explaining the significance of Black Feminist Thought, Collins (1986) coined the term “outsider-within” (p. 16) to establish the position of black women as outsiders. This term was stemmed from the idea that black women do not fit in, in regard to feminist thought or black social thought, because those theories do not encompass their complete identity. Something participants found was that they were also “insiders-without”, a term I will describe as a black woman being immersed into a community of peers without having the same support, resources, or value as others within it. This term was derived from the findings, where participants repeatedly noted the lack of support they had from campus administrators and the lack of worth they felt they had in comparison to their white peers. Participants felt that other students were considered more valuable to the college or worthier of respect from campus professionals than black women.

The insiders-without concept acknowledges that the identity of a black woman is not fully complete without recognizing both race and gender, but it also concedes that black women will face challenges in places where their identities are recognized as inferior. Outsiders-within and insiders-without are fairly similar, but both important in their own right. Outsiders-within indicates that race and gender should be seen as intersections, not as parallels. While insiders-without also acknowledges that both race and gender are important identifiers for black women, it also highlights a major challenge faced in light of that intersection: even when black women are on the inside, they are excluded. For instance, participants were a part of athletic teams, but were overlooked for leadership positions. Black women were members of the classroom, but were stereotyped, because of their race and gender. Campus climates like Uptown’s do not allow black women an opportunity to explore or be part of the “inside”. While black women are on campus (the inside), many times they go without mentors, support, and even respect.

Pinpointing the idea that black women student go without the support they need only reinforces the concepts acknowledged by Black Feminist Thought, but it ultimately brings the conversation full circle. BFT and the outsiders-within frameworks urge people to acknowledge and consider the full identity of black women. BFT traditionally shows that black women face double burdens due to their race and gender and because of those challenges, they have a unique standpoint (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Moving forward, researchers can use insiders-without to discuss concepts surrounding the idea that institutions of higher education accept black women only to disregard their needs and wants. Additionally, this framework can be used to discuss the idea that black women—who exist on the “outside”—want to be part of the “inside”. This notion was solidified when participants asked mentors to teach them to fit in. Moving forward, practitioners and researchers must understand and acknowledge that many black women are attempting to be insiders at PWIs, but discriminatory barriers stand in their way. Using Insiders-without as a secondary framework can help institutional leaders find solutions to the challenges specifically related to black women based their experiences and voices.

5.2.2 Implications for Future Research

Current research has been limited in its understanding of the mentoring relationships among black women pursuing undergraduate students. In studies where black women’s mentoring experiences were highlighted, study participants were limited to graduate students and professionals (Brown, 2017; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Grant, 2012; Griffin & Reddick, 2001; Holmes, Land & Hinto-Hudson, 2007; Vickers, 2004). This study establishes the need to focus on the mentoring needs and wants of black women who have yet to reach graduate and professional levels. Based on the results in this study, four recommendations for future research are to 1. Include interviews from campus administrators (current and potential mentors), 2. Study accountability processes in search of biases, 3. Observe the mentoring relationships among black women and mentors of other races and gender, who mentor black women students at PWIs, and 4. Conduct study at other types of higher education institutions.

Interviewing campus administrators may prove helpful in future research. Participants indicated that their relationship with administrators was strained. This study discussed many reasons that the relationship between the two groups was not great, but discovering the viewpoint of the administrators may help to bring forth another level of understanding (Davidson and Foster-Johnson 2001; Grant, 2012). Furthermore, campus administrators can discuss ways they feel that they support black women students so that we can see where the disconnections are rooted.

Many of the challenges black women faced stemmed from the knowledge gap had by administrators. Black women were burdened with trying to find mentors among administrators who seemingly did not and could not support them (Grant, 2012). Further studying this gap can help to add insight on the policies and internal affairs among administrators, which ultimately affect black women and the ways they find mentors and interact within mentoring relationships.

Black women in the study noted that they had some positive interactions with white staff (Brown, 2017). Some even considered them to be mentors, which makes it clear that those relationships can be beneficial for black women students (Bartman, 2015; Brown, 2017). Observing mentoring relationships among black women and others who mentor black women students can unveil the benefits and disadvantages of having those specific relationships.

Lastly, addressing the limitations in this study can help to enhance our understanding of mentoring relationships for black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at PWIs. For instance, this study was situated at a relatively small, private institution in a predominately white area. While many institutions of higher education may have similar characteristics, this study’s findings cannot be generalized to all black women. Gaining information from students at larger, public, and other types of institutions can help to expand our knowledge of mentoring experiences for black women students.

5.2.3 Implications for Practice

With demographic changes at PWIs, institutional practices must also shift to reflect an increasingly diverse population. Recommendations for practice are influenced by participant experiences, specifically, those in mentoring relationships. Recommendations for practice include 1. Investing in black women students, 2. Training faculty, staff and student leaders, and 3. Hiring black women professionals.

Mentoring relationships can have a positive impact on students; however, colleges need to be more prepared to work with students who are not the majority (Vickers, 2014). At Uptown, administrators were clearly not ready to have meaningful mentoring relationships with black women students. This was made evident by the lack of those relationships. Participants in this study and other black women students at PWIs moving forward need support to navigate their experiences on campuses where they many times face challenges relating to racism, sexism, and other isolating issues (Bartman, 2015). Investing in black women would not only help them feel like they are part of the community, but it may also encourage conversations with administrators that lead to mentoring relationships (Vickers, 2014). Encouraging black women to become advocates for themselves and each other may also help to improve relations between those students and the administrators who invest in them. While many institutions have listed diversity among core values, these values are not always represented in practice. Thus, institutional leaders must determine specific and concrete ways to invest in black women. Given the results of this study, ways to invest in black women become apparent. First, focusing financial and human resources in developing and evaluating decision making processes using an equity lens is essential. Using an equity lens can help institutions like Uptown reframe the policies and decisions that play a role in creating an inclusive environment (Anderson, 2018). Additionally, focusing on equity will encourage institutional leaders to create an environment of continuous questioning. Continuous questioning will result in constant reassurance that institutions are making decisions based on providing equitable experiences for black women.

While establishing a culture of diversity and inclusion among administrators can have noteworthy implications for relationships between the administration and black women, implementing programs specifically aimed at helping black women feel like they are insiders on campus is also important. This study highlighted the isolation that black women felt in the classroom and pinpointed the ways in which participants tried to fit into the dominate culture. Developing programs and initiatives aimed at fostering diversity and cultural competence can be beneficial in increasing sense of belonging among black women students (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). The more students feel that they belong on campus, the more likely it will be that they feel like insiders.

Participants' mentors were seemingly limited to those who had job-related responsibilities to serve them. Other administrators had strained relationships with black women in the study. Furthermore, this study revealed that stereotypes and biases caused issues related to campus climate and barriers for black women seeking to develop mentoring relationships; thus, highlighting a need for campus administrators to value and champion diversity and inclusion regardless of their job responsibilities. Participants noted the importance of feeling that their mentors understood the specific challenges related to being a black woman on campus. While white faculty and staff will not have a first-hand understanding of the complexities of being a black woman on a white campus, they can learn to be considerate and sympathetic of that experience (Dahlvig, 2010). Institutionally mandated cultural competency and diversity training can help white and minority faculty, staff, and student leaders to understand some of the stereotypes and discrepancies that black women face on predominately white campuses (Dahlvig, 2010). More specifically, implementing trainings that encourage and enhance diversity and inclusion can help administrators put the challenges faced by black women in context of their own lived experiences and responsibilities (Anderson, 2018). Thus, new knowledge about black women's experiences learned on behalf of college administrators and leaders may help to enhance mentor abilities (Chao, 2009) and alleviate some concern among black women students in regard to the lack of understanding, which may open several doors for mentoring relationships to be formed and others to be strengthened.

While black women make up a small percentage of students at Uptown, it is imperative that their needs and wants be considered. Given that each of the participants described her ideal mentor as a black woman, institutions like Uptown should need to hire black women faculty and staff so that they can serve in mentor roles for those students (Davis, 2007; Grant, 2012; Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). While hiring black women professionals may seem like a simple task, other factors should also be considered. For instance, retention of black women due to campus and political climate is also a relevant issue here. Given that many of the race and gender related issues stemmed from an institutional structure of white patriarchy, similar issues would also be apparent for black women professions. Thus, human resource departments must change, or set the standard for developing a culture of inclusion for processes related to hiring and retaining black women faculty and staff (McManigell Grijalva, 2018). Furthermore, having black women students be a part of those hiring committees can help to solidify that the new standards are consistent with a new and inclusive culture. Ultimately, having black women mentors can help students like the study participants feel more connected in their mentoring relationships instead of feeling uncomfortable due to a lack of understanding from white mentors (Grant 2012; Wallace, Moore, & Curtis, 2014).

5.3 CONCLUSION

In this hermeneutic phenomenological study, I looked to uncover the mentoring needs and wants of eight black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at Uptown College. This study found that these black women lacked relatable on-campus mentors who fully understood their experiences. The campus climate in which these mentoring relationships would develop, was full of stereotypes, barriers and limitations. Because of the environment, they relied on family, friends and support staff to guide them through the difficult racial experiences, academic challenges and financial difficulties. Black women in the study found relatable mentors in places where they felt seen and heard. Participants made it clear that mentoring relationships are beneficial and vital to the academic and professional success of black women pursuing undergraduate degrees at PWIs. Barriers to creating these mentoring relationships and experiences must be remedied so that black women have the same access to mentors as their white counterparts. Institutions must continually work to ensure that black women students have the support they need to overcome obstacles that come with having multiple marginalized identities. This study reinforced the idea that black women have unique voices, experiences, and mentoring needs that should be taken seriously.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject: Seeking participants for a study about mentoring relationships for black women pursuing undergraduate degrees

Hello *insert student name*,

My name is Alydia Thomas and I am a student at the University of Pittsburgh. I'm emailing, with a recommendation from the Student Affairs Office, to invite you to participate in a study I'm conducting at the University of Pittsburgh.

The purpose of this study is to learn about the needs and wants of black women in regards to mentoring relationships on predominately white campuses. If you participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate with me in a 60- to 75-minute, one-on-one interview. You will be asked about your experience in mentoring relationships.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at art69@pitt.edu. Please include responses to the following questions in your email:

- What year of your degree are you in?
- How many credits are you enrolled in for the Fall 2017 Academic semester?
- What is your major?
- How old are you?
- Are you a resident or commuter student?

I appreciate your time and consideration,
Alydia Thomas
Principle Investigator

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Mentoring Relationships for Black Women Pursuing Undergraduate Degrees at Predominately White Institutions

You are invited to be in a research study about mentoring experiences for black women undergraduate students. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study and participate in the interview.

The principal investigators (PIs) for this study is Alydia Thomas, an Ed.D. student in the Department of Administrative and Policy Studies at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to discover the needs and wants of black women at predominately white institutions of higher education. This study will attempt to learn more about: the types of support black women are seeking, the intersections of race and gender in relation to mentoring relationships, and general experiences of black women seeking mentorship. The interviews will also aid in minority mentoring efforts for Uptown College's Offices of Student Affairs and Multicultural Student Life.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to participate in an individual interview that lasts 60- to 75-minutes. The interview will be conducted in a private room at Uptown College and will be audiotaped.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

You will be asked questions by Alydia Thomas about your experience of being a college student. There are not immediate risks to participation in this study. The benefits to participation are: 1) the opportunity to share your story with academic professionals; 2) the chance to help educators learn more about black women's experiences in mentoring relationships at PWIs; 3) participating in an academic study and learning more about the research process.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private and confidential. The audio recordings of the interviews will be shared with a third party transcription service, but identifying information will not be shared with this service. In any reports or articles Alydia Thomas might publish, she will not include any information that will make it possible to identity you as a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only she will have access to the records, audiotapes and interview transcripts. Transcripts will be held in a locked office and all records will be destroyed after any resulting publications are completed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Pittsburgh or Uptown College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Alydia Thomas (principal investigator). You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Alydia Thomas at 412-XXX-XXXX or art69@pitt.edu.

This research study has been approved by the Uptown College Institutional Review Board. You may also contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office, 1-866-212-2668.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:

____Date:_________________________

Signature of Investigator:

____Date:_________________________

APPENDIX C

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your major?
2. What is the highest level of schooling your father completed?

   __Middle school

   __High school

   __College or beyond

   __I don't know

3. What is the highest level of schooling your mother completed?

   __Middle school

   __High school

   __College or beyond

   __I don't know

4. Are you a part of the campus "Learning and Advising Program" Program?
   __Yes
   __No

5. Are you a part of a program where you are formally matched with a mentor?
   __Yes
   __No

6. Are you a part of a sports team?
   __Yes
   __No

If the answer to the previous question was Yes…

What sport(s) do you play at Uptown? (Select all the apply)

__Basketball	__Bowling	__Cross Country
__Golf	__Lacrosse	__Soccer
__Softball	__Swimming	__Tennis
__Track	__Volleyball	__Cheerleading

7. Which of these statements best describes your college living situation during the school year?
   __I currently live on campus, but I have also lived off campus during college.
   __I have always lived on campus.
   __I currently live off campus, but I have also lived on campus during college.
   __I have always lived off campus.

APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Questions

1. Talk to me about why you decided to come to Uptown?
2. Tell me about your experience at Uptown.

   Potential Probe Questions:

   - What has made your experience at Uptown worthwhile?
3. What has been your biggest motivation to succeed in college?

Mentoring Relationships

4. Tell me about someone who has positively influenced you while you have been in college.

   Potential Probe Questions:

   - Has anyone at Uptown served in these roles?
   - Are there people on campus that you look up to?
5. How do you define mentorship?

   Potential Probe Questions:

   - What does mentoring mean to you?
   - How do you feel your academic experience would have been up to this point if you had no mentor?

6. What kind of support do you need from your mentor?

   Potential Probe Questions:

   - What do you think is the most important thing your mentor could do for you during your time at Uptown?
   - What makes your mentor helpful?
   - What skills or competencies have you learned from this relationship?

7. Can you describe your ideal mentor?

   Potential Probe Questions:

   - What characteristics do you look for in a mentor?
   - What does it mean to have a relatable mentor?

Race and Gender

8. How important were race and gender in the choosing of your mentor?

   Potential Probe Questions:

   - Did you consider race and gender when choosing a mentor? Why or why not?

9. What role, if any, do you think that race and gender have had on the mentoring experiences that you’ve had at Uptown?

   Potential Probe Questions:

   - How has your race affected your ability to work with white faculty and staff in mentoring relationships?
   - Describe how you felt being mentored by someone of the same race.
   - How have you felt being mentored by someone of a different race?
   - How has race impacted who you choose as a mentor?
   - What role do you think race has had on your relationship with your mentor?

    - Tell me how your gender has had an impact on your experience at Uptown.

Experience at PWI

10. What do you need to be a successful student at Uptown?

    Potential Probe Question:

    - What does success at Uptown look like for a student?

11. What do you think are some of the specific problems facing black women at primarily white institutions like Uptown?

    Potential Probe Question:

    - Can you tell me about some of the issues you have been faced with on campus?

12. Do you feel you are supported differently than male students on campus?

Reflection

13. If you could give your mentor a piece of advice for strengthening your relationship and experience, what would it be?

    Potential Probe Question:

    What has surprised you about the support you receive on campus?

14. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your experiences in mentoring relationships on campus?

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