MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS AND FEARED SELVES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

By

Tanisha Stewart

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# Contents

**Abstract**

The current study explored the ways in which mentors helped Black college students to avoid feared selves grounded in negative stereotypes. A purposive sample of 21 undergraduates (11 male, 10 female) who had completed at least two years of coursework at a private college in an urban community, and who reported having a mentor from the college environment, participated in semi-structured interviews focused on their mentor relationships. In addition, four mentors named by the students were interviewed with regard to their mentoring of Black college students. Primary themes, as generated from grounded theory, were: a) emotional support; b) academic-related strategies; c) assisting with decisions for the future; d) discussions about the feared self; and e) modeling. Mentor interviews clarified a prioritization of positive strategies, with less explicit discussion of feared selves or stereotypes. Implications for future research and practice involving college students and mentors are discussed.

Keywords: possible selves; feared selves; negative stereotypes; mentor relationships; black students

**Mentor Relationships and Feared Selves: A Qualitative Study**

As a nation, it is widely recognized that earning a college degree has many important benefits. For example, the unemployment rate of people who have not obtained a bachelor's degree is more than twice that of those who have bachelor's degrees (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Also, people who earn at least a bachelor's degree generally earn twice as much income as high school graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). However, data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2009) has shown that college completion rates are generally lower for racial minority students than for other groups. For example, the completion rate for Black students in the year 2001 was 35.8%, compared to 42.1% of Hispanic students, and 55.8% of White students (NCES, 2009). In addition, parental education level has an influence such that, in 2001, the percentage of first generation college students graduating was 52% as compared to 72% their peers whose parents obtained bachelor degrees (Digest of Education Statistics, 2009). Given these statistics, finding ways to support college students' success in their academic progress, especially students who are first-generation or college students from racial minority families, is of vital importance not only for the students but also for the nation at large.

From a possible selves perspective, which emphasizes the motivational

influence of future-oriented self-images, going to college can represent the pursuit of one's hopes in the future (Oyserman, Ager, & Gant, 1995). However, certain factors can inhibit students' perceptions that completing college successfully is truly possible for them. The dismal graduation rates for racial minority students and first-generation college students, for example, can serve to reinforce negative stereotypes that exist about their academic abilities such as being unintelligent or as possessing low aspirations (Steele, 1997). Research has shown that for African American students, the need to overcome negative stereotypes about one's group appears to cause potential challenges with regard to developing a positive identity (Arnett & Brody, 2008) and can undercut their performance in school (Steele, 1997). Although these students may aspire to become college graduates, knowing that there may be barriers due to negative stereotypes can dampen their resolve about their own chances of success.

Despite negative stereotypes, some students manage to find ways to persist in college. By and large, research suggests that mentoring relationships can serve as a buffer for individuals from adolescence through emerging adulthood (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). For example, mentoring relationships have been linked to greater persistence in school by at-risk adolescents (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000) and community college students (Barnett, 2010). However, the process by which mentoring relationships facilitate persistence is still relatively unclear, particularly for racial-ethnic

minority or first-generation college students. This project examines how mentors do help college students from populations with lower college graduation rates, in the current study Black college students, to persist in their college aspirations. In particular, the current study examines the degree to which mentors choose to address feared selves grounded in negative stereotypes about their group's likelihood for academic success. In the following sections, I review the relevant literature on possible selves, the influences of stereotypes on identity development, and mentoring.

**Possible Selves**

A possible self is defined as an individual's view of oneself in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves can refer to a positive hoped-for self and a negative feared self. A positive, hoped-for possible self often refers to what a student would like to accomplish in the future; for example, a student might say, "Next year I hope to graduate from college and find a good paying job." The negative, feared self refers to an individuals' view of what he or she would like to avoid in the future, such as avoiding the feared possible self of a college drop-out.

Possible selves are important because they serve two functions. First they serve a motivational function in that they guide individuals into actions that will promote their positive possible selves or keep them from engaging in negative actions that will help them to avoid their feared selves (Oyserman & Saltz, 1993).

For example, a student who wants to be a college graduate but avoid being a college drop-out might be motivated to study and to avoid hanging out with negative peer influences. There has been substantial research in the area of 'balance' between possible selves suggesting that it is helpful to have a positive hoped-for self and a negative feared self in the same domain (Oyserman, Ager, & Gant, 1995). Furthermore, while the hoped-for and feared-selves are both important, much of the research to date has focused on cultivating hoped-for selves, either by creating interventions to broaden the range of possible selves (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002), or by helping students to develop the self-regulatory strategies to reach them (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). However, the role of the feared self has received less attention. Second, possible selves help to filter information (Markus & Nurius, 1986). For example, a college student will pay attention to information that can build and validate a possible self, such as doing well on a math quiz if he or she wants to be a math major. This filtering function of possible selves, which refers to an individual's ability to use either positive or negative feedback as an effective tool to interpret progress toward their goals, has not been studied in great detail.

Markus and Nurius (1986) described the possible self as being extremely malleable, meaning subject to change depending upon the social situation of the individual. Because of the plasticity of the possible self, individuals may change their views of possible selves as a result of different circumstances or situations

that occur in their lives. For example, if a student experiences a positive situation such as performing highly on a math exam, he or she may begin to see himself as a student who is capable of passing math with a high grade and possibly pursue a math-related career upon graduation. With regard to the feared self, an individual may, as a result of a negative experience such as failing a class, begin to either endorse the feared self of failing out of college, or find strategies to avoid becoming this feared self. However, Markus and Nurius (1986) believe that the outcome is ultimately dependent upon the individual, rather than the circumstances that he or she has encountered. Although the choice is ultimately the individual's, more information is needed about the process by which individuals negotiate negative situations and also what leads to the individual's choice of either the endorsement or avoidance of the feared self.

Higgins (1987) offered insight into this negotiation process by suggesting that differences between the actual, ideal, and ought-to-be selves can lead to a negative psychological well-being for individuals; thus, individuals work to resolve these differences, by striving to bring their actual selves closer to their ideal selves. Carver (2006) also suggested that positive feedback loops, meaning engagement in activities or behavior that would lead one away from negative situations, help to increase self-discrepancy gaps whereas negative feedback loops, or behaviors that would lead one toward desired goals, help to decrease self-discrepancy gaps. It may be that with regard to Black college students,

assistance is needed to provide positive feedback loops. Vandellen and Hoyle

(2008) also explored the area of self-discrepancy and self-regulatory behavior,

but with relation to the salience of healthy hoped-for-selves and unhealthy

feared-selves. Their findings showed that students whose unhealthy feared-self

was made salient were more likely to engage in health enhancing behaviors,

such as agreeing to become involved in physical exercise, thus widening the gap

between the self-discrepancies of the unhealthy feared-self and the current self.

An implication of their findings was that for students whose negative or feared

selves are salient, more self-regulatory mechanisms are used. Aspects of the

current study explore the possible role of mentor relationships on these self-

regulatory mechanisms in the avoidance of the feared self rooted in negative

stereotypes.

Research has also explored if there are gendered aspects to possible

selves. Oyserman and Saltz (1993) conducted research concerning the possible

selves of incarcerated boys a as compared to boys attending high school. They

found that both groups of boys tended to focus more on their hoped-for selves

rather than their feared selves; however, the high school boys had more balance

in possible selves than the incarcerated boys. Balance can be defined as thinking

through the potential positive (e.g., becoming the hoped-for self) and negative

(e.g., becoming the feared self) outcomes of engaging in certain behaviors. For

example, with the situation of committing theft, high school boys were less likely

to become involved in this behavior, which the researchers suggested was a

result of "weighing the cost" of committing the crime against the "loss" of their

positive self (Oyserman & Saltz, 1993). If the high school boys would have

become involved with illegal activities, their positive self of graduating from high

school would have been endangered due to the possibility of imprisonment,

whereas the incarcerated boys may not have engaged in this balancing process,

which led them to participate in criminal activity and subsequently become

incarcerated.

Knox, Funk, Elliot, and Bush (2000) found that girls typically focused more

on the feared self than the boys, specifically with regard to making personal

connections with others. Boys' feared selves were closely related to negative

situations of a personal nature, such as being unemployed or generally

unsuccessful. Taken with Saunders et al.'s (2004) research which showed that

there is a discrepancy in the academic achievement of Black students by gender

in that Black males tend to lag behind females in education, it is possible that the

aspirations of male and female students are not necessarily different but there

may be distinctions with regard to the content of their feared selves and their

outcomes.

The current study focuses on the feared selves of Black male and female

college students. As feared selves have been understudied, the next section is a

review of the literature on negative stereotypes of Black college students and

first-generation college students.

**Stereotypes as Shaping Feared Selves**

Stereotypes influence the construction of identity, especially among those groups who find themselves negatively stereotyped in a particular domain. Both Arnett and Brody (2008) and Steele (1997)'s research described the challenges that African Americans face with regard to shaping their identities in relation to academic intelligence and performance. Black students, as previously mentioned, are negatively stereotyped with regard to being associated with low academic success. As a result, negative perceptions exist on these stereotypes, thus promoting the feeling of what Steele (1997) describes as a 'threat in the air'. He described the term 'stereotype threat' as a barrier that African American students face when they enter into an academic performance situation such that students run the risk of confirming a negative academic stereotype about their group (Steele, 1997).

Black students are aware of members of preconceived negative expectations of their academic ability and potential for success; as a result, African American students may have difficulty adjusting to the academic world. Arnett and Brody (2008) focused on the perspective that Black students have a more difficult time than other racial groups with regard to identity formation during emerging adulthood due to the fact that they are navigating through a system which they perceive is negatively biased against them. Because of the

negative stereotypes they face, Black students must constantly work to manage their process of attaining own goals and aspirations and disregarding or avoiding the perceived negative expectations of others concerning the limitations of these goals and aspirations.

Kao (2000) conducted qualitative research which examined the relationship between perception of racial group and the expectations and academic outcomes of members belonging to different racial groups. It was found that students generally engaged in activities stereotypically associated with their racial group; for instance, Asian students would join the math club, and Black students would participate in sports. Not only did students engage in activities which were "stereotypically prescribed" for them, their academic outcomes were also associated with the stereotypes associated with whichever racial group they belonged to; for example, White students were more typically enrolled in honors courses, while Hispanics focused less on academics.

Effective coping strategies are available to Black students who face such negative stereotypes. Research by Okech and Harrington (2002) suggested that there is a positive relationship between Black consciousness, defined as an individual's positive beliefs or attitudes about his or her own race with relation to the ethnic minority, and self-esteem. It seems to follow logically that if there were ways to assist Black students with having a positive attitude about race, or combating negative attitudes about race, the barriers presented by the existence

of negative assumptions or stereotypes by others may be overcome.

In a similar vein, Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, and Hart-Johnson (2003) conducted research which examined the "racial-ethnic self-schemas" of various ethnic groups and their relation to academic outcomes. They found that across racial groups, members who formed a "dual identity", that is, finding a way to balance between being a member of one's own racial group as well as being a member of the overall society at large, had significantly lower susceptibility for academic failure than those who did not. Forming a dual identity appears to be one of the most extreme strategies for dealing with stereotype threat. Oyserman, Brickman, Bybee, and Celious (2006) presented another strategy for overcoming academic disengagement. They propose that if students who are racial ethnic minorities feel connected to other members of their racial-ethnic group at the institution, they are more likely to have academic success.

Each of the previously mentioned studies investigated how students manage issues involving stereotype threat with relation to forming or shaping their identities. Students are more likely to use such strategies when provided support to do so. Possibly, mentors can help students to form connections to members of their own group or to envision their identities as both belonging to a racial-ethnic group and to the academic community. In the next section, the literature concerning mentor relationships is further examined.

**Mentor Relationships**

Mentor relationships have been shown to have a major impact on the academic success (Simms, Knight, & Dawes, 1993) and career behaviors (Packard, Kim, Sicley, & Piontkowski, 2009) of students of color and first-generation college students. Mentoring is a term that can refer to a range of relationships. Indeed identifying a definition of mentoring can be challenging because mentors can be derived from various contexts and they can play different roles. Rather than having a focus on formalized mentoring such as the kind that comes from having an assigned mentor (Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004)), this study used a functional approach to mentoring, referring to the persons that students report deriving important mentoring functions, regardless of official title, an approach useful to studying the mentoring experiences of students (Packard et al., 2009). Mentors can be home-based, consisting of a family member or close friend, or school-based, referring to professors or advisors (Packard et al., 2009).

School based mentors can also be formal or informal mentors in that a formal mentor would be someone who was assigned to work with students for the specific purpose of mentoring them, while informal mentors would be defined as individuals who are not necessarily assigned to mentor students, but still function in the same ways that a mentor would (Packard et al., 2009). While home based and school based mentors both have been shown to have a

significant influence on positive educational or career outcomes for students

(Hirsch, Mickus, & Boerger, 2002; Holland, 1996), school-based mentors,

specifically those who are informal, may be more likely to provide important

instrumental functions of mentoring such as academic coaching and college

information less readily available in the homes of first-generation college

students or students of color (Packard et al., 2009).

Research has shown that mentors help students in various areas,

including school attendance (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000), positive social

outcomes (Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004), and reduction of academic

difficulties (Rhodes, 2008).  It has also been suggested that mentors can provide

students with the assistance needed to develop skills in order to reach their

goals, such as growing in academic competence so they are more likely to

engage in the steps needed to achieve their career aspirations (Packard et al.,

2009). However, research has not targeted specifically the ways in which

mentors may address the feared selves when Black college students face

negative academic events. For example, if a Black college student approaches a

mentor about receiving a warning notice for a class or negative verbal feedback

from a professor, how does the mentor help the student deal with this

experience? Are there certain strategies that are common across different

student-mentor relationships? Would the mentor assist the student by focusing

on the positive aspects of the situation, or would he or she instead try to

explicitly discuss the negative stereotypes operating and how the student

overcomes the negative messages?

Most studies which investigate mentor relationships focus on middle school

or high school students and are quantitative in nature such that ratings of

engagement with mentors are related to the development of social skills,

academic competence, and retention or school attendance. Yet, these studies do

provide important insights. Research by Langhout, Rhodes, and Osborne (2004)

has also focused on forming bonds with mentors and behavioral functioning,

such that after 18 months of being paired with a mentor, youth began to display

positive changes with regard to these issues as compared to members of a

control group who were not matched with a mentor during the 18 month period.

They also found that connectedness or attachment with mentors via structure

and support has been of great importance for the positive development of

youth. This is highly related to the longevity of relationships with mentors as

researched by Rhodes, Spencer, and Liang (2009). The results of their

investigation showed that, if youth are matched with a "faithful" mentor, one

who keeps promises to mentees and acts responsibly toward them, they are

more likely to trust their mentor, which leads to longer lasting relationships and

more positive outcomes for them.

Although mentoring and advising are not synonymous, the literature on

advising college students has relevant elements. Research has studied the

advising processes that appear to have the most positive effects on students,

particularly at-risk students. Heisserer and Parette (2002) conducted a study

which examined different styles of advising for at-risk students, defined in the

study as racial minority, disabled, low income students. They described

prescriptive advising (when advisors have total control over students' academic

career), developmental advising (when advisors work with students with regard

to their academic career), and integrative advising (a combination of certain

elements of prescriptive and developmental advising). The researchers stated

that the prescriptive advising approach appeared to be the most preferred

method of racial minority students, and that racial minority students who

received this type of advising took more responsibility for their academics. The

researchers then brought the advising styles a step further in their suggestion

that some advisors use a method that is referred to as 'intrusive advising' (Earl,

1988, as cited by Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Intrusive advising can be described

as an approach in which the advisor  plays an active role in the students'

academic life- they have frequent contact with the student to ensure that he or

she is remaining on top of studies; they show concern with the students'

academic process; they use different intervention-style techniques to increase

students' motivation to continue with their academic careers; and they direct

student to different resources which would assist in ensuring their academic

success (Holmes, 2000, as cited by Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Each of these

actions has led to positive academic outcomes.

Each of the aforementioned studies highlights the qualities associated with positive mentor relationships and their effect on the development of youth. However, an analysis of how college students describe the ways in which mentors supported them is needed to identify the core mechanisms by which mentors may target possible selves and how they intentionally target the feared selves. As a result, this qualitative study was conducted in order to explore this topic.

**Current study**

This study adds to the mentoring literature by exploring on how mentors help college students to buffer negative events, with a focus on the ways that they may help students to manage their knowledge of negative stereotypes and feared selves. The overarching questions which this study will investigate are as follows:

1) How do college students describe the help that a mentor provides during a difficult or challenging negative academic situation? Specifically, do mentors help students to recognize negative stereotypes, provide strategies to avoid the feared self, or focus their attention on their group membership?

2) Do women and men describe similar negative events and discussions with mentors?

3) How do mentors describe their assistance with relation to possible

   selves?

**Method**

**Participants**

**Students.** Overall, 11 Black male and 10 Black female students

interviewed. All were age 18 or older. One male identified specifically as Nigerian

American, and a second as Haitian American, with the remaining men identified

as Black or African American. Of the female participants, one identified as

Haitian American, one identified as African, and the remaining as Black or African

American. Eight of the men and eight of the women identified as first-generation

college students, or that neither parent held a four-year college degree.

Participants were recruited from a small private college located in a mid-sized

urban community in Massachusetts. The undergraduate student population is

comprised of approximately 27% Black students and also a large proportion of

first generation students. Over 90% of students at this institution receive some

form of financial aid. All participants had at least two years of college experience.

All students were identified as having a mentor who had influenced them during

their college career, defined as an adult in an academic position that the student

had turned to in times of a negative academic event.

**Mentors.** There were 16 mentors named by students overall; of these,

four were interviewed. The racial composition of the 16 mentors is as follows:

there were six minority mentors, or 37.50%; seven White mentors, or 43.75%; and there were three students who had more than one mentor who were of different races (18.75%). Two of the interviewed mentors were male and two were female. Three were Black, and one was an ethnic minority who did not identify as Black. The mentors held various positions at the institution.

**Procedure**

  **Students.** Participants were recruited via the use of a flyer which was posted on the student discussion board as well as using word of mouth by the researcher. All participants received both verbal and written informed consent at the beginning of each interview. All interviews were semi-structured in nature and followed an interview guide (Appendix A). Participants were also asked to complete a demographic survey upon completion of the interview (Appendix B). After each interview, which lasted approximately 40 minutes, students were provided with a debriefing form and the researcher answered any questions, comments, or concerns he or she may have had during the study. All students were also thanked for their participation and received a gift card to a local store.

  **Mentors.** Participants were recruited via an email that explained the purposes of the study and informed them that they were named by a student as a mentor who helped during a student's academic career at the institution. The mentors were not told which students named them or what students had said about their activities as mentors. After recruitment, each mentor met with the

researcher in private offices to conduct the interviews. At the beginning of each

interview, informed consent was obtained both verbally and via an informed

consent form which explained the purposes of the study as well as the

respondents' right to discontinue participation without problem or consequence.

Each interview was tape recorded and lasted approximately 30 minutes. All

interviews followed a semi-structured format which included open ended and

follow-up questions as needed. Each interview followed an interview guide

(Appendix C). Upon completion of the interviews, all questions and comments

were addressed by the researcher. Each respondent was thanked for their

participation and provided with a debriefing form.

**Data Sources**

     **Student Interview**. Participants were asked questions regarding their

possible selves with respect to both their positive and feared selves. These

questions were formulated in accordance with research by Oyserman, Ager, and

Gant (1995), who focused on possible selves with relation to school persistence.

Due to the fact that the feared self was one of the main foci of the current study

coupled with the fact that many of the feared selves of Black students are

associated with stereotypes (Steele, 1997), questions were also asked about

negative stereotypes that students wished to avoid. The opening of the

interview started with: "Finish this thought: After graduation, I expect to be…"

(future self), and "After graduation, I want to avoid being…" (feared self).

Students were also asked questions concerning: a) who their mentor was, how

they met them, and how they helped to shape their academic and/or career

goals; b) descriptions of negative academic events in general as well as a specific

negative academic event in which their mentor guided them through the

process; and c) their responses to the negative event after their conversation

with their mentor.

**Student Demographic Survey.** Finally, participants were asked to

complete a short demographic survey which included questions concerning age,

class year, parental education level, grade point average, and racial/ethnic

background. For a complete version of the interview guide and demographic

survey, please refer to Appendices A and B, respectively.

**Mentor Interview.** In accordance with research by Steele (1997), mentors

were asked how they felt negative stereotypes influenced the academic and

career success of Black students. They were also asked questions concerning a)

their mentoring approach (Heisserer & Parrette, 2002), specifically with regard

to whether they address all students the same; b) specific examples with regard

to any incidents in which they assisted a student with a negative academic event

which occurred during their time at the institution; c) whether or not they

actively bring up negative stereotypes when meeting with Black students; d)

what they feel is most essential in terms of a mentor relationship; and e) any

form of support or guidance they may have received with regard to mentoring. A

complete version of the interview guide can be found in Appendix C.

**Data Analysis**

Student interviews were analyzed via the Grounded Theory approach

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The interviews were first transcribed by the principal

researcher, then she examined each transcription and identified the feared self

or feared selves of each participant. Following this, she began the 'open coding'

phase such that each time a participant mentioned his/her mentor providing

assistance with avoiding the feared self, the participant response was marked.

Next, a separate investigator conducted open coding with copies of the

transcriptions that did not have the principal researcher's marks on them. This

was done to ensure that there would be no bias or influence on the second

investigator. After this, the principal researcher met with the second investigator

to compare the marked responses. If there was a difference or discrepancy, it

was discussed. The principal researcher and the separate investigator were able

to reach 100% agreement on participants' responses after this discussion.

Following this, the principal researcher began the 'axial coding' phase,

where the marked responses were placed into categories which emerged from

reading the responses. After this, she met with the remaining members of the

coding team to discuss and refine the categories. Next, the researcher developed

the final categories and produced the model (which was the 'selective coding'

phase) which emerged from the categories of responses. The data were analyzed

separately for males first, then for females according to the strategies that the

mentor used, with attention to how, if at all, the mentor approached the

negative/feared selves. Both the male and female coding process followed all of

the above steps with the exclusion of the meeting with a team of researchers for

the female participants' coding. After the selective coding phase was complete

for the male and female students, the final categories were examined by the

faculty auditor, who checked for the accuracy of code names versus participant

responses. Once a consensus occurred between the principal researcher and the

auditor, the student coding process was complete.

Similarly, the faculty mentor data were coded. After transcription, the

principal researcher conducted open and axial coding to determine what the

themes were that emerged from the data with regard to how the mentors

helped the students to avoid the feared self. Then, the researcher compared the

strategies the mentor described with the student responses to determine if

there were any connections or discrepancies between what was said for each.

After this, the mentor created case illustrations for each faculty mentor as well

as cross-case analyses.

Trustworthiness, referring to the faith one has in the credibility of the

data analysis, is an important goal in qualitative data analysis (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). The coding team for this study was composed of three White trained

student coders, one Asian-American faculty coder, and two Black trained student

coders, of which one was the principal investigator.  Thus, researcher

triangulation was used to strengthen the coding process. Second, data

triangulation was used. Specifically, data from participants as well as data from

four of the faculty mentors named by participants were collected. This assisted

the researcher in ensuring the validity of the data due to the overlap in

responses between the participants and the mentors they named. This will be

discussed in greater detail in the results and discussion sections.

## Results

**Students**

Mentors helped both the Black males and females to avoid the feared

self in many different ways (see Table 1). For both groups, there were five major

strategies that the mentors used to help them: 1) Emotional support and

reassurance, which included mentors forming close bonds or relationships with

students; 2) support with academic-related foci; such as a) encouraging

academic confidence, which was more of a socio-emotional type of support, as

well as informational types of support such as b) referral to outside resources

such as the tutoring or writing center, c) self-monitoring, which refers to the

mentor encouraging the student to take a more active role with his or her own

work, d) assisting with academics, which included the mentors personally

helping the student with academic work, and e) financial aid assistance; 3)

assistance with decisions for the future, which included both a) encouraging

Table 1

*Strategies named by students*

| Category | Frequency | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male (N=11) | | Female (N=10) | |
| | N | % | n | % |
| Emotional Support/Reassurance | **6** | **54.55** | **8** | **80.00** |
| Academic-Related Focus | **11** | **100.00** | **10** | **100.00** |
|    Encouraging Academic Confidence | 10 | 90.91 | 9 | 90.00 |
|    Playing an Informational Role | **11** | **100.00** | **10** | **100.00** |
|      Referral | 6 | 54.55 | 6 | 60.00 |
|      Self-Monitoring | 10 | 90.91 | 9 | 90.00 |
|      Assisting with Academics | 5 | 45.45 | 4 | 40.00 |
|      Financial aid Assistance | 2 | 18.18 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Assisting with Decisions for the Future | **7** | **63.64** | **7** | **70.00** |
|    Encouraging Graduate School or Career | 6 | 54.55 | 5 | 50.00 |
|    Helping to Apply to College/Grad School | 4 | 36.36 | 3 | 30.00 |
|    Real-World Perspective | 3 | 27.27 | 1 | 10.00 |
| Discussions about the Feared Self | **4** | **36.36** | **4** | **40.00** |
| Mentor Modeling/Students' view of Mentor as a Model | **3** | **27.27** | **6** | **60.00** |

graduate school and career opportunities as well as b) helping students to attain

these goals and c) providing a real-world perspective, 4) discussions about the

feared self; and 5) modeling.

**Emotional support/reassurance**. The first strategy to be discussed

involves emotional support, or reassurance. Mentors in this category helped

both males (N=6 of 11) and females (N=8 of 10) by providing emotional support

for students in such ways that students felt that they could count on the mentor

to "be there" for any situation in which they may need help.  Mentors under this

category also helped to emotionally support students by forming a bond or close

relationship with them. Anna felt that her mentor helped her to get through a

rough transition into her first year of college. She stated that during her first

year, she often felt shaky or uncertain as to whether she would be able to

assimilate into the college environment. Her mentor, however, made sure that

she felt the emotional support she needed,

> And I must have this look, or, this expression on my face that I thought
>
> 'Oh, my goodness, I'm never going to get through this.' But she would
>
> often just see me and go "Hey, it's going to be okay!" And I would be like,
>
> 'She has no idea how that just helped my whole day because I just be in
>
> school and I'm just like "I'm here. But I'm not 'here'." I don't think she
>
> really understood that from the time she told me that it's okay and that
>
> you being your first year in college it's going to be rough on you. But

you'll get used to it and you'll be successful. And I think that really has

helped me out because I haven't been in that place that I was my first

year I got here until now. Things have drastically changed.

Likewise, Jacob's mentor also helped him through emotional support and

reassurance when he went through a challenging situation at home: his nephew

passed away, and as a result, he went through struggles with his family which

undoubtedly affected him with regard to academics. However, his mentor was

there for him through this troubling time. He shared:

Actually, I want to say… she talked about my personal life a little bit to

help me make sure that I stay on top of things even through the struggles

because I did come across some pitfalls with my nephew passing away. I

came through some family problems back at home. My family wasn't

doing so good…

Jacob's mentor helped him to stay afloat academically by being an outlet he

could seek for emotional support during the testing times that he faced. His

mentor was able to counsel him by having these conversations with him

concerning his personal life.

**Academic related focus.** The second major strategy used by mentors was

an academic related focus. Mentors who used this strategy focused on helping

students with issues related to academic work. Here, five sub strategies existed:

a) encouraging academic confidence, b) referral, c) self-monitoring, d) assisting

with academics, and e) financial aid assistance.

***Encouraging academic confidence.*** The first was encouraging academic

confidence. In this category, mentors helped both males (N=10) and females

(N=9) emotionally by building students' academic confidence through

encouraging them to persist despite difficulties and by telling them and

reinforcing the fact to them that they can achieve their academic goals. Mentors

also encouraged students' academic confidence by recognizing good qualities in

them and helping them to overcome different levels of academic inferiority

(defined as students doubting their abilities to succeed academically).

Both Michael and David illustrated feelings of academic inferiority during

their interviews. For Micheal, he struggled with regard to getting into college in

the first place: he applied to approximately 20 schools and was rejected by most

of them. He almost gave up hope until a mentor from his high school urged him

to keep trying. He said:

> [And] I would get the letter[s] like, 'Oh. Maybe next time. Maybe next
>
> time. Maybe next time.'I was about to say I'm not going to college. But
>
> she kept on pushing me, saying like 'A school is going to pick you up. You
>
> just got to have-- you just got to keep on trying

His mentors in college also encouraged him in a similar way. When the feelings

of doubt or academic inferiority crept up, his mentors would be there to

reinforce to him the fact that he had what it took to succee*d.* He said, "I keep doubting myself about something, they always give me positive feedback. They keep pushing me when I don't think I have what it takes to get there."

David, like Micheal, also struggled with feelings of academic inferiority. He was in a situation in which he transferred to the current institution from a community college near his hometown. As with many cases of transfer students, he felt that his previous school was totally different from his current one, and, as a result, he struggled to make the transition. What made his situation more challenging was the fact that he already suffered from feelings of doubt and academic inferiority before he first went to college, so coming to a new school and finding that there was more to be expected from him there than at his previous school only fueled these negative feelings. He often doubted his abilities to succeed academically, and his mentor helped to alleviate some of those feelings:

> Because me myself, I'm really negative about myself. I don't know why I'm negative. I really am, like… and then I just… I feel like my whole thing is just going to come down, and then I'm just like, 'No'. And then they told me—they showed me that I still do it. It's just that I gotta work harder than what I expected to work. And I, like I said, I went to [other college] and I can say compared to this school and compared to [other college] , it's totally, two different environments…

With regard to the females, Rebekah's mentor also helped her with regard to encouraging her academic confidence. She went through a situation in which she had a really difficult sophomore year. As a result, her grades suffered, so she felt that she did not have what it took to pull herself back up academically to where she needed to be. Her mentor encouraged her in this area by letting her know that although it would be difficult, academic success was definitely attainable. She said:

> My sophomore year I did really, really bad. And I went to [Mentor] and we spoke about it. And he basically encouraged me and let me know that it was not over and I still had time and pushed me to do my best and that I couldn't repeat another semester like that and from there it just went up. I did what I had to do.

Rebekah's mentor also encouraged her academic confidence by instilling in her a drive to seek out opportunities and strive academically for more, …[He says]

> You can do whatever you want. He basically reminds me and lets me know that, yeah, you can do whatever you want, but it takes a lot of work. Hard work, dedication. Determination. He just lets you know, like, it's not going to be handed to you. You just gotta go out and take it.

> Mary's mentor also helped in encouraging her academic confidence during a challenging time. Her situation was with regard to her personal life: her father had fallen sick and lost his job, so her family was struggling financially. As

a result, she had to both work and go to school full time. Her academic

confidence slightly wavered as a result of this. Her mentor served as sort of an

academic coach in that she would talk through her about her personal problems

while simultaneously urging her to continue to believe that academic success

was still a definite possibility,

> My GPA actually went down… and you could see a huge difference. I was
>
> talking to her literally every other day. She always told me, like when I
>
> would come and I had a presentation or whatever, she would give me the
>
> confidence like 'You'll do well, don't worry about it.' And I would come
>
> down, I would have a paper with like a 'B' or an 'A' and she would be like
>
> 'I told you'.

In addition to urging students to continue to persist during difficult times

and reinforcing the fact that they had the ability to succeed academically,

mentors also recognized good qualities in them. Paul, Simon, and Josiah, and

Mary's mentors all recognized good qualities in them and used the recognition of

these qualities to help encourage their academic confidence. For Paul, it was

confidence with regard to the possibility of success in graduate school. His

mentor was someone that he not only sought for academic advice, but he was

someone that he personally looked up to as a model of success. When his

mentor recognized that he had strong academic qualities, it helped to boost his

confidence:

I guess there's that continual reinforcement of 'You're a good student. Academically, your work is… impressive.' Which is cool. That sort of thing where it's… you have that confidence boost. That definitely… any time someone compliments you on something that you've worked on, or something that's an intrinsic part of you, you're going to be proud of. That's definitely going to shape your psyche. ..

With Simon, his mentor recognized qualities in him pertaining to his future career, which in turn help to boost his academic confidence. Simon's passion and goal in life was to become a professional writer. However, his grades in English class often suffered. As a result, his confidence was slightly shaken with regard to writing. But his mentor, who also happened to be his English professor, recognized his potential to actually become a writer, "She tells me I'm a good writer. I can make it as a writer…" Although Simon had begun to lose some confidence academically with regard to English which would undoubtedly affect his future career aspirations as a writer, his mentor played an integral role in uplifting his confidence back to its previous level by letting him know as the teacher of the English class he was struggling in that he could make it as a writer.

Mary's mentor helped her in this area by constantly reminding her of her past accomplishments as well as her current status of achievement. Mary would often waver in her academic confidence due to having to deal with the responsibility of caring for her sick father in addition to her responsibilities in

work and school. But her mentor served as a constant reminder that she had

what it took to move forward,

> I mean… she always would tell me about my accomplishments. She
>
> would definitely refer back to that. She's like 'Look how far you have
>
> gotten. I see you as a young lady who's done so much on campus, and to
>
> be a commuter and do so much, you know, you're amazing. You have the
>
> skills In order to help you get through this trial and tribulation.' As far as
>
> succeeding, she would tell me things I have done in the past as well as my
>
> [studies and homework?]. The great things I have done. So, that being
>
> said, she keeps me—she kept me on that.

**Information-Based strategies.** The next set of mini-strategies underneath

the umbrella of academic-related foci involved the mentors providing more

information-based assistance versus the previous sub-strategy of encouraging

academic confidence, which was more related to socio-emotional based

assistance.

*Referral.* The first of these information-based mini-strategies is referral to

outside resources. Mentors referred both males (N=6) and females (N=6) to

outside resources, such as the writing center, tutors, and other sources for

academic help. Eunice's mentor helped her to obtain outside help when she was

struggling to grasp the concepts of one of her classes, "Oh, yes. Basically, just

one of my professors—he's not my professor for the class, it's just something

different. And I just couldn't really grasp the concepts of what was being taught

in the class. So I basically came to her, and she gave me advice to see a tutor, so"

Anna's mentor also directed her to outside resources for academic help. She was

struggling with a science course, which was a subject of great difficulty for her in

general. The science course that she was taking was a course in which various

different forms of science were covered throughout the semester; so as a result,

a new form of science was learned every week. As a result, she struggled, and

sought her mentor for assistance:

 And we would transition quickly from different chapters, but of course,

every chapter was a different form of science. And it was our midterm

test, and it was getting ready to be five week warnings and I was like, just

stressed out. And she just… first of all, she told me "It's going to be okay".

And she also told me about the program here where you can get a free

tutor. Which helped me out a lot. But she got me through that first

midterm test. She got me through that. Because, in my head I was

thinking there was no way I was going to pass that test. I was worried

about my academics. You know, you want to succeed, you don't ever

want to do bad. You don't go into anything trying to fail. You try to do

your best. And my best may be sometimes high with expectation ranking,

but she told me that I could do it and I will do fine. And the tutoring really

did help. Knowing that I could get a tutor for free and help me study for

the test.

With regard to the males, both Peter and Josiah's mentors referred them

to outside resources for help with classes.  Peter's mentor actually introduced

him to his tutor when he was struggling with one of his courses. He shared:

Then, I went to [Mentor] and she was like 'Well you definitely have to go

get a tutor or somebody. We have a tutor.' So I once met with [Tutor].

She's the tutor for it. And she showed me—she used techniques like flash

cards, and reading before class. Doing the extra stuff that you need to

excel.

Josiah's mentor often tutored him herself, but when she could not tutor

him, she referred him to someone who she knew could help him. He stated:

Yeah. She told me about one of the professors that I had… it was an

English teacher, she helped me on my papers a lot. Like, I would do a

paper and she would direct me to her. Cuz she was an English teacher,

and English teachers know what they talking about. So she had a lot of

resources.

*Self-Monitoring.* The next information-based mini-strategy to be

discussed with regard to the academic-related foci is self-monitoring. Self-

monitoring can be defined as mentors helping both males (N=10) and females

(N=9) to stay on top of their academics by encouraging them to monitor their

own academic behavior in terms of time management, completing all

assignments, etcetera.  John, Josiah, and Peter's mentors all helped them to stay

on top of their academics in various ways. John's mentor helped him to stay

focused and to monitor his work that he turned in by using a simple strategy. He

shared:

> Yeah, so he always motivated me to always try my best. Just to work
>
> hard, study hard. He always says 'Look over things three times.' He
>
> always does that himself, so… that sort of stuff… Yes. He always
>
> mentioned do it over three times. Look three times. Read your notes
>
> three times.

 His mentor helped him to develop this simple, but valuable tool so that

he could use it not only in his academic work, but also as part of his future

career. John's career plans were to work for a top corporation after graduating

college with the intention of obtaining upward mobility and possibly branching

out to own his own company.

Josiah's mentor helped him with a different type of situation. Josiah had

been struggling with a certain class in which he studied for hours on end, but still

seemed to fail when test time came. He became discouraged and frustrated

when this occurred, so he went to his mentor for assistance. In return, his

mentor taught him a study method that dramatically changed his grades for all

courses he would take after that point. It helped him so much that his GPA went

from below a 2.0 when he was a freshman to a 2.8 by the time he graduated. He

shared:

> Like, she told me 'Alright. You got to take a pause. You can't just study for
>
> five straight hours and not take a pause. Your brain is probably fried like
>
> that.' So, I studied for like 20 minutes, then I stop for like 5, then I raise
>
> the bar. Study for 45 minutes; take a 20 minute break after 45 minutes.
>
> So she had me on that type of a system.

Peter's mentor helped him with self-monitoring with yet another

situation. Peter was caught up in a cycle that many college students often face:

lack of time management. His mentor helped him to get back on track by helping

him to prioritize his time. He shared:

> Um she definitely fixed me up on time management. That was my biggest
>
> problem. It was all video games and TV, ESPN, and she really mellowed
>
> that out. We got that fixed up. And from there, it was organization. She
>
> gave me an agenda book. Kept me organized.

With regard to the females, Deborah, Naomi, and Leah all had mentors

who helped them with self-monitoring. Deborah's mentor helped her to monitor

her academics by keeping a 'no nonsense' attitude which helped her to keep

things in perspective, "Just not make excuses and get my work done. Cuz a lot of

people complain like 'She gives work every day!' But… in the real world, you

have to work every day, so… you just better do it." Naomi's mentors helped her

in a similar way. She had fallen behind in her school work and her mentors both

urged her to stay on top of her academics and also allowed her to make up

missed work. The fact that she knew they were not required to do this helped

her to prioritize her time so that she worked more efficiently. She stated:

> What I've learned from this experience is at the end of the day, I am
>
> pretty much responsible for my grade for my work. And time
>
> management, like, getting my priorities set is important. And I just gotta
>
> get my act together. Well, I did get my act together, I should say.

Leah's mentor helped her to self-monitor by constantly checking up on

her to make sure she stayed on top of her academics, "Yes. She does, because,

you know, she's op—like, every test, she wants to know about. 'How's this;

how's that?' It's very like, you know, 'Make sure your grades are good so you can

relay something back.'"

***Assisting with academics.*** The third information-based mini-strategy

underneath the category of academic-related foci is assisting with academics.

Mentors who used this strategy helped both males (N=5) and females (N=4) with

regard to their academics by personally assisting with classes or academic work.

Specifically with regard to one female, mentors also extended due dates of

assignments to allow her to make up missed work. Aaron and Jacob both had

mentors who personally assisted them with academic work. Aaron's situation

which he described involved his mentor going out of her way to help him with an

outline for a presentation that was due the same day. He was extremely grateful,

not only because of this fact, but also because she spent her lunch period

helping him to make sure his presentation was of good quality:

> Just… she helped me out. Like, she just gave me like, guidance. Like—my
>
> outline wasn't like… my outline wasn't corrected. It was an outline that I
>
> wrote and she read it thoroughly like if you was talking to your teachers
>
> or if you was talking to somebody. So she helped me correct my outline.
>
> She helped me put everything like, in order.

Jacob's mentor also went out of her way to assist him academically. He was

struggling with several of his classes, and as a result, his test scores suffered. He

went to his mentor and she sat down and spent time with him going over

different material that would come up on future exams:

> Mainly she sat down one on one with me. Pretty much a lot of times
>
> spent study hours with me. Sit down, went through my notes and
>
> everything and made sure that I was studying right. Even when I was
>
> getting bad grades, she helped me find out the solution of why I was
>
> receiving those grades. And also she gave me extra time that other
>
> mentors don't do for their students. And even for other students she
>
> didn't do that. And also there were times when she didn't have such free
>
> time but she reached out to give me a hand.

Lois' mentor also offered personal assistance to her with regard to a class she struggled with. She was enrolled in a statistics course where she struggled with comprehending the material. After finding this out, her mentor actually sought her out and sat down with her to help her understand her homework:

Trying to pass statistics. I put it off, and I put it off, and I put it off... I was like I'm just not going to take this class til the end. And then it came down to like, having fifteen problems. It was just like, letters and numbers, and I couldn't comprehend. I remember one day, she just sat me down with the book, and she was like, 'Just look at it like this.' And it helped so much better. It was like, 'okay, I get it.' I don't get it that much but I get it more than I got it when we started.

Lois further described her appreciation of her mentor's actions, "I think it's the way that she would describe things [that] was helpful. I can just—the patience she had, and also like… that was what she liked to do. She liked to teach statistics. That was her thing… so, you could just feel she understood it and she like[d] it so" Naomi's mentors helped her personally with her academics, however it was in a different way: as previously mentioned, she had fallen behind in her school work, so her mentors, who were also her professors, helped her to get back on track by allowing her to make up the work that she missed; She shared:

Yes. Last semester, I wanna say—it was pretty much a [unsure of words]

because my freshman year of college, I didn't do that bad, but I could

have been better just being who I am. Sophomore year, first semester, I

actually did worse. That's on my behalf, I blame myself for that. I could

have done way better. But from my sophomore year second semester

til—I wanna say, up til senior year, up til now, I've went out my way just

to make honor roll—dean's list and whatnot. Last semester, I didn't do as

well—I didn't do bad, but based on my trail, I felt like I was slipping a little

bit. And I went to—I spoke with my advisor, and a few of my professors

who—gave me a second chance to finish work that wasn't finished and

stuff like that.

***Financial aid assistance.*** The final information-based mini-strategy, but

for males only (N=2), was that of financial aid assistance. Both Simon and Jacob's

mentors helped them to gain information with regard to financial aid for school.

Simon's mentor informed him of loans he could apply for which would help him

develop an affordable payment plan. He stated:

Yeah. She did help me a lot. Like, even with loans, she said that—she

helped me. She said something about loans like she paid a dollar a day to

like—they help you with anything. Like, she said [Institution] doesn't

really kick you out of school like, even if you're having trouble, they'll like

work with you and stuff like that. She gives advice like, she [about stuff I

didn't know about].

Jacob's mentor actually gave him contact information for a specific person at the

institution who could help him obtain more financial aid. He was struggling with

paying part of his tuition, so he needed extra funds, and as a result of his

mentor's help, he was able to get the help he needed, "Yes. She directed me

exactly to the person that I could talk to actually get extra money."

**Assisting with decisions for the future.** The next major strategy was that

of assisting with decisions for the future. It was divided into three sub-strategies:

a) Encouraging graduate school or career, b) helping students to apply to college

or graduate school, and c) providing a real-world perspective.

***Encouraging graduate school or career.*** Encouraging graduate school can

be defined as mentors giving students advice as to whether to pursue graduate

school or career opportunities. Mentors helped both males (N=6) and females

(N=5) in this area. Paul's mentor encouraged him with regard to applying to

graduate school while he encouraged Thomas with regard to finding a career in

sociology. The mentor constantly asked Paul where he was in the process of

applying to graduate school, and he also told him about a specific program to

which he could apply:

I turned it over to [Mentor]. Which is how I ended up you know, finding

out about Umass' program. You know, just being right there. So every

once in a while, especially over the summer, he's going, 'Oh, where else

did you apply? You need more letters of recommendation? You should

apply more places.' Every five seconds, he would be saying, 'Where are

you applying?'

Thomas was also encouraged by this mentor, but it was with regard to finding a

career in his major field. He shared:

Like… kind of like a, he always like, told us to come by his office anytime

and talk about like, careers in sociology. He gave me a whole bunch of

like, flyers and like, websites to go to to actually see what you do in a

sociological field

With regard to the females, Rachel and Rebekah's mentor's both helped

to encourage them with relation to graduate school and future careers. Rachel's

mentor (who was also the mentor for Paul and Thomas) encouraged her to

pursue a PhD when she initially had no intentions on pursuing any type of

graduate degree. She stated:

Well, I guess because, like I said when I first came I wasn't planning on

getting my PhD. I wasn't planning on furthering my education. I was

gonna be, "You know what? As long as I got my bachelor's, I'm fine!" But

after having several classes with him and conversations and him asking

me like, "So what are your plans after you graduate? What are you going

to do?" And he started talking like, "Well you know, you should—you

know, it's always good to further your education. It's always good to have

a back-up plan." So he definitely steered me in that type of direction for

my goals.

Rebekah's mentor encouraged her with regard to her career, but it was more in

a general sense, meaning he did not direct her toward a specific career, but he

did help her to begin the process of thinking about her goals as well as how she

might attain them. She shared:

He has. He helped me sit down and basically set goals for myself and

makes me sit down and think 'Where do you see yourself years from

now, or months from now?' Um, where do you want to live? Where do

you want to go? He has helped me a lot as far as preparing myself for the

future.

***Helping to apply to college/graduate school.*** The second sub-strategy

underneath the major strategy of assisting with decisions for the future is that of

helping to apply to college or graduate school. Mentors who used this strategy

helped both males (N=4) and females (N=3) by assisting them in preparing for

the future by volunteering to write recommendations and helping the student to

get a job. In addition to these forms of assistance, mentors also specifically

helped males by assisting them in getting into college or college programs and

helping them to pick a major. Sarah's mentor helped her with her graduate

school application process by offering to write her a letter of recommendation.

She stated:

> She's helped a lot on the past. I've asked her if I could use her as a
>
> recommendation for any job that I've had in the past and she's had no
>
> problem doing so, as well as for grad school, she's had no problem
>
> writing me a recommendation. So she's been a very good help to me.

 Rebekah's mentor assisted her in obtaining a position at her current

place of employment. She shared:

> He actually helped me to get the connection for the job I work at now.
>
> And he basically continues to push me and let me know that my limits
>
> never stop. He just continues to remind me that I can achieve anything I
>
> want to do and be what I want to be.

> Thomas' mentor helped him with regard to finding a graduate school and

also obtaining information about how he would gain acceptance, "Mm hm. Yes.

Such as, like, finding a grad school, you know, taking the tests, and… for grad

school and all that." John's mentor helped him to prepare for job interviews by

teaching him about the proper etiquette to use,

> He kind of… I kind of went to him, you know, telling him that I had
>
> different interviews. You know, he would tell me, you know, 'You really
>
> want to give them a lot of eye contact.' You know, 'Come straight
>
> forward. Know what you want to talk about. Dress well'.

Michael's mentors helped him in a variety of ways: he was first, as mentioned earlier, in a situation where he was frustrated and discouraged due to being rejected by almost 20 colleges that he applied to; then his mentor encouraged him to persist and he was finally accepted into his current institution. When he got to the current institution, he found that he actually wanted to go back to his hometown, so his mentor helped him to transfer to another school back home. After this, he found that he did not have the financial means to remain at the new school, so another one of his mentors helped him to get back into the current institution. Finally, he was in a situation where he was not sure which path to choose as far as a major field, and yet another mentor helped him in that area*;* He shared:

And I was taking just any classes. He's the one who had my class and I asked him about it and I liked it a lot and I gave it a shot. So, I'm about to graduate with that major.

***Providing a real-world perspective.*** Mentors who used this strategy gave males (N=3) and females (N=1) information concerning what to expect in the "real world" of grad school, life or career during either classroom or personal discussions. Paul's mentor did this for him during personal discussions about the different expectations he would encounter when he entered graduate school. His mentor informed him of the heavy course-load, extensive reading assignments, and other things he could expect to encounter when he began his

doctoral education. After receiving this information, Paul was grateful to his mentor because he now knew more about what he would face in his future. He shared:

> If that had just come out at me out of nowhere, I would have been like, 'Six hundred pages I'm supposed to remember? No!' But, because I've already talked to him about what's required and a couple of different strategies for how to space that out so that it's not just consuming, I think I can handle that. I can handle that.

> This mentor also provided Rachel with a real-world perspective concerning what to expect with regard to the job market as well as everyday life with regard to opposition or intimidation. He stated:

> All the time. Every class. But it's good because he let us realize the opposition and how much negativity is pushed against us, and so it gives us the mind frame of we have to prepare for the real world. And we know that when we get out there, everything is not going to be like, "The grass is green. The sun is always shining.

**Discussions about the feared self**. The fourth major strategy used by mentors was discussions about the feared self. This can be defined as mentors helping both males (N=4) and females (N=4) by having either classroom discussions about the feared self or personally speaking to the student about overcoming or resisting the feared self. Specifically for Black males, these

conversations also included warnings of the possibility of becoming the feared

self. Rachel, whose feared-self included becoming a 'statistic', which she defined

as someone who received a bachelor or master degree and did not continue on

for a PhD, described how the classroom discussions with her mentor concerning

her feared-self helped her to continue to pursue her goals. She shared:

> I think that what was most helpful was refraining from those negative
>
> thoughts of not wanting to higher your education. Because a lot of times I
>
> know I personally, when it feels like it's just too much, I'm just like, 'Okay,
>
> I'm done. I'm not even going to stress myself out.' But at the same time,
>
> it's like, if you don't struggle to get your degree you really don't learn
>
> nothing. Like you have to struggle somewhere to benefit from it. So I
>
> think that was the most important tip because it helped remind yourself
>
> to—you know, it's just a part of getting an education, but you have to
>
> keep on. If not, you're going to be like, struggling all your life, just to
>
> make it.

> Rebekah's feared self, which included being a 'baby's mama' (someone

who becomes pregnant immediately after graduating college), being broke

(having no money), and being unemployed, discussed how personal

conversations with her mentor helped her to maintain her focus on her goals.

She shared:

Yeah, he says stuff like, 'don't be a baby mama'. He always says that to

me like, 'Don't be nobody's baby mama'. Just, go out and get what's

yours. He always tells me, 'Don't sit there and not have something that

you're not actually aiming for when you're out here.' He always tells me

'Just do it.'

Paul's feared-self included being jobless, directionless, and being a part of

any of the negative stereotypes about Black males- crime, delinquency,

involvement in drugs, gangs, and being a deadbeat father. His mentor helped

him to learn how to avoid these through classroom discussions about the

overcoming the feared self:

I can certainly say… as far as continuing my education, making sure that I

continue and don't stop because that's one of the keys to changing your

economic condition, to changing your social condition, to gaining social

capital is through education. There's really no other way you can sort of

progress because you need an education to change your economic

condition. You need… and it's—just push that. So there are lots of

conversations about you know, poverty among Blacks and why it's so

concentrated. That led to my own decision. It's like, 'Alright, I'm going to

definitely avoid that. You know, my mom started me out really well, let's

keep it going'

Adam's feared-self included being a low life (someone who creates or causes havoc to society; someone who is counterproductive, such as a criminal, a drug dealer, someone who robs people, and someone who goes to jail) as well as being what he referred to as a 'college tough guy which he defined as someone who goes to college and tries to portray himself as a bully or troublemaker. His mentor helped him to learn how to avoid these, especially with regard to the 'college tough guy' role through personal conversations. He shared:

> Yeah. She just told me to be myself. So, I've never been a follower. Never been one to give in to peer pressure, so… I like to be myself. I'm comfortable with who I am. If you don't like it, I mean, of course not everybody's gonna like you, but if you don't like it, hey, sorry. This is who I am.

Josiah's feared-self included being a statistic (defined as someone who goes to college and then ends up at a job that is unrelated to his major) and dropping out/being kicked out of college. He described during his interview how he actually almost became his feared self of being kicked out of college due to poor grades,

> That almost happened. My freshman year, that almost happened. I had to take two classes… to get my GPA up and come back. If it wasn't for my coach, then I wouldn't be here. Like, literally. I almost became a statistic, but I determined not to come to college and be here for a semester or a

> whole year and never come back. Cuz a lot of freshmen does that. Cuz
>
> they in school, you by yourself, and… loose cannons.

He described how whenever he got to the point where it seemed he was going

down a negative path with regard to his academics, his mentor warned him of

the possibility of becoming his feared self,

> She would bring up things that I would tell her. And she'd be like, 'Do you
>
> want to go down this road?' And I would—always bring up my mom. That
>
> was her focal key on everything I do. Like, 'You don't want to upset your
>
> mom. You don't want to do this.' Or, 'You don't want them to take
>
> football away from you. You got here because of football. I know you like
>
> football. You don't want that to be taken away from you.' So there was a
>
> lot of things that came to me that she would say in a negative way, and I
>
> would see it with a negative way and I know that I have to… start doing
>
> better.

**Mentor modeling/Student's view of mentor as a model**. The final major

strategy to be discussed is mentors serving as a model for the students. Mentors

in this category helped both males (N=3) and females (N=6) by serving as a

model to through the students' view of the mentor as a model. Specifically for

females, mentors also served as models through their own words or actions.

Adam, Paul, and Thomas' mentors served as mentors for them in different ways.

For Adam, his mentor showed him through her life and career that he can be successful as a Black male. He shared:

> Like, she's successful and that kind of makes me want to be just as successful if not more successful. She has her own house, she has a good business… and she's a strong person, so… she's somebody you could actually look up to.

> Paul and Thomas' mentor served as a model for both of them, but in slightly different ways. For Paul, the mentor's research and work on his doctorate degree made him want to emulate his educational path. He stated:

> You know, just seeing [Mentor] working toward his degree, and you know, talking to him about the kind of research that he can do, or will be able to do… That's exactly what I want, so… I'll just, you know, copy.

> For Thomas, the mentor served not necessarily only as someone to look up to with regard to graduate school, but someone to look up to with regard to life in general,

> Just like him, as a person. He's pretty much gone through a lot through his life. As he tells us, he—it wasn't really like—his history, pretty much… Just like, when you receive… I guess, negative stuff like—negative things in your life, then it's up—pretty much up to you to have—to either be brought down by it or you can overcome that. I mean, that's what he does.

Rachel, Lois, Sarah, and Leah's mentors all served as models for them as well. Rachel's mentor had a similar influence on her as he had on Paul: his personality and general disposition made her want to emulate him, especially when it came to the point where she encountered academic difficulty,

Honestly, whenever I come across situations like this, I say, 'What would professor [Mentor] do'? Whenever something happens that's negative, I'm like 'What would [Mentor] do'? Because he shows such strength and motivation, and determination, that it makes you think, 'Okay, well I know if [Mentor] was in a situation, he wouldn't just fold his arms and be like, "Okay, it is what it is"'. He would probably take more time, go to the library, instead of... I don't know, associating with friends, or... you know? So, I just try to put myself in his footsteps.

Lois' mentor's positive outlook on life helped her to keep a hold onto her faith that she would be able to succeed in life regardless of negative circumstances. She shared:

Yeah, cuz she would tell me about her life struggles and it's like you see her doing so much more now, it's like... a house, a car, you know. Working, teaching... it's like... no matter what you go through, no matter what you think like, 'Oh my God,' it's like... there's always light at the end of the tunnel.

Sarah described her mentor as someone who she looked up to, not for any specific reason, but in general, "I can't think of one specific thing. But I just think, her overall, has just motivated me. Her as a person has motivated me" Leah's mentor served as a model through her wisdom she gained as a result of working with students for a great number of years. She shared:

She's good because she's been through it. She's been on a college campus for so long so she has like a lot of experience. And just very passionate about students succeeding, especially African Americans who are actually doing something for themselves. So she's a lot of help…. Yeah. She says just like, little clichés, and just like, she's experienced. Like it's, being older, she just has a lot of wisdom.

Rachel's mentor not only served as someone who she could look up to and possibly emulate as a result of observing his actions, but he also used himself as a model in conversations she had with him concerning whether or not she should persist academically. She shared:

Well, like I said, it's not too verbal; it's more of actions. But he does say a lot, like "Look at me!" He does say that a little. "Look at me! I'm here." He's not really any—he doesn't give excuses. Like, he never gives excuses of people being privileged or having an excuse of why they're not doing stuff. It's like, "I did it! I'm here. I'm in [major university]. I'm getting my doctorates." So it's like, more like his attitude.

**Mentors**

In the next section, case illustrations will be provided to demonstrate the perspectives of the faculty mentors both with regard to their mentoring style/approach as well as any overlap in responses between the mentors versus the students who named them. Following this, a cross-case analysis will be provided to discuss any similarities or differences between the faculty mentors.

The faculty mentors who were named by the students each had their own style of mentoring; however there were also similarities between mentors with regard to the mentoring approach. Two of the mentors also used some of the mentoring styles mentioned previously when working with students. Mentor 1 used methods similar to Heisserer and Parette's (2002) developmental advising approach, while Mentor 2 used methods similar to the intrusive advising approach (Earl 1988, as cited by Heisserer and Parette). Mentors 3 and 4 had different mentoring approaches. Mentor 3's approach was more versatile, changing from student to student and situation to situation. Mentor 4 also tailored his approach; however it was mostly based on working with students of similar backgrounds as his as well as using a 'realistic' (i.e. non-sugar-coated) perspective when dealing with Black or Hispanic students.

**Faculty mentor 1- Named by Mary.** Faculty Mentor 1 was a Black female who is the director of a trio grant program at the institution. The trio grant program serves to assist first generation, minority students in their transition to

college. They provide workshops to assist students in the career process,

financial aid, as well as academics, and they also provide one-on-one mentoring

for all students who are funded under the grant.  This mentor did not have any

formal training at the institution specifically with regard to being a mentor; most

of her mentoring experience/knowledge came from her personal life. She

described her foster mother as being her mentor:

> Well, my foster mother is still a mentor to me. She's 74 years old, and she
>
> still has a youth group at her church. And she had always had a youth
>
> group. So she's always worked with teenagers... she always had a youth
>
> group, whether it's in our church—always in our church, but then also at
>
> the schools that she's worked at. And she was the person who, early on,
>
> let me know that I was going to college, when I was 11 years old. She told
>
> me I was smart enough to go to college, and there was no other choice.
>
> Everything you do, every decision, all of the strict rules and regulations
>
> had to do with her maintaining a pathway for me to go to college.

She also stated that she had supervisors and directors along the way who were

good mentors for her as well.  She described her mentoring approach as one that

serves mainly to help foster academic confidence in first generation and minority

students:

> Being able to be confident in that classroom environment. That they have
>
> a voice. Many times, students will share with me that they—'I knew the

answer, but I didn't share it.' Because, the people in the front row, you

know, that kind of thing. So, academic confidence means placing yourself

in the classroom where you're not affected by what other people

think…if you're in the 'T', in the class, so you're in the front or if you're

down the middle, you will feel more confident because you're looking

straight ahead. You're not watching out for who's behind you and beside

you…So, positioning, classroom positioning, and eye contact with the

professor, and other times, other than when discussions take place, that

you can be seen as a serious student. Coming on time or early…one-on-

one contact with that professor…So now when you're in a classroom with

34 other people, it's easy for you to respond to questions and be a part of

discussions confidently.

There was definite overlap in Faculty mentor 1's responses and the responses of

the students she mentored with regard to helping them to overcome or deal

with the feared self. For instance, Mary stated that her mentor often used her

past accomplishments to persuade her that she could succeed through difficult

times:

I mean… she always would tell me about my accomplishments. She

would definitely refer back to that. She's like 'Look how far you have

gotten. I see seen you as a young lady who's done so much on campus,

and to be a commuter and do so much, you know, you're amazing. You

have the skills I order to help you get through this trial and tribulation.'

As far as succeeding, she would tell me things I have done in the past as

well as my [studies and homework?]. The great things I have done. So,

that being said, she keeps me—she kept me on that.

Mentor 1 also described recognition as one of her own classroom/mentoring

strategies for helping students to combat the feared self, though in a slightly

different respect:

Recognizing something good, you know, that someone does. The smallest

things to recognize, and to notice, and to let them know that you notice.

So I put signs up, I've got students who sign you know, something here on

the board, a picture or something they've mentioned somewhere. You

know, give them kudos, recognition means a lot. If someone knows that

their name is up on the board, they're going to think twice about doing

something they shouldn't be doing because they're being watched. So

they'll come in and say 'What! How did you know?' 'Well, [I] looked on

the site and such-and-such' or 'I saw your name in the newspaper, so

would you sign this for us?' you know, recognition means so much.

**Faculty mentor 2- Named by Jacob and Eunice.** Faculty Mentor 2 was an

Indian-American female who serves as a career advisor in the career services

department at the institution. She, in the past, was an adjunct professor and also

a mentor for the trio grant program at the institution as well. She stated that she

did have some formal training when she was a mentor for the trio grant

program; however, she attributed most of her mentoring background to her

personal life experiences and her own background as a person from a different

country:

> I would say… I am from a diverse country. So we never felt any difference
>
> amongst ourselves because the country that I come from has more than
>
> 23 states, and each state has its own language, its own culture. So never
>
> really thought of where we were different; we only thought of where we
>
> are similar. So I think that influence helped…I think that that helped
>
> develop a really open approach, and so I don't tend to categorize people
>
> by differences. I think we're all more similar than different. I think we all
>
> have equal potential; it's just a matter of how much effort is put in in
>
> what we do, how well are we motivated, and do we all have access to the
>
> resources equally? I think that is really the key to anyone succeeding, and
>
> I don't believe race or culture or any difference should ever be allowed to
>
> creep into the picture…I've been working with diverse populations in all
>
> my positions so far, so every time I've been hired, I've had professional
>
> training, and that was in addition to the approach that I had already
>
> brought with me from the time I came to this country, because like I have
>
> mentioned, we have always been open to other cultures.

She described her mentoring approach mainly as one that assists students with

believing in themselves and not allowing differences to have an effect on

academic success:

> I believe it's good to have an equal approach, just so students feel that
>
> they're all on the same page. But if in the process, if it is noticed that
>
> maybe the African Americans or a certain group needs to be heard to feel
>
> more accepted, and not stereotyped, I think  then we could focus our
>
> efforts on that. And show them good examples of African American
>
> personalities who've done well for themselves in life. We have a lot of
>
> living examples, as well as examples from history. Help them think of
>
> these success stories and how they made it to the top. And increase their
>
> belief in themselves.

There was also a great deal of overlap in student responses and Mentor 2's own

responses with relation to helping students to overcome the feared self. For

example, Jacob, one of her mentees, described Mentor 2 as someone who

helped him to strive for academic success and to create strategies for higher

academic achievement:

> Mainly she sat down one on one with me. Pretty much a lot of times
>
> spent study hours with me. Sit down, went through my notes and
>
> everything and made sure that I was studying right. Even when I was

getting bad grades, she helped me find out the solution of why I was

receiving those grades. And also she gave me extra time that other

mentors don't do for their students. And even for other students she

didn't do that. And also there were times when she didn't have such free

time but she reached out to give me a hand.

Mentor 2 made a similar statement about how she had frequent meetings with

students she mentored when she was describing the different ways in which she

helped students to succeed academically:

I did see a good number of students, I had a student in my class...the

student was very bright, and was trying, but at the same time, there

[were] some procrastination issues. There was an assignment to be done,

they tended to put it off until later, and what happened is something

might have come up at last minute, [unsure of words], so I did talk to

some students, and the students I had in my class, I handled it one way,

and the students that I mentored, I handled it differently...when they

have me as a mentor, they perceive me as someone that they could meet

with on a regular basis to have a discussion in terms of their

procrastination which was a problem that was identified and so we kind

of focused more on that. We discussed more intensely as when I was

their mentor. And both strategies have worked as a professor and as a

mentor.

Although Jacob was not a student who dealt with procrastination issues, Mentor 2 had frequent meetings with him to assist him with his academic work.

**Faculty mentor 3- Named by Rebekah.** Faculty Mentor 3 was a Black male who is the director of an extra-curricular group at the institution. He stated that he did not have any formal mentor training during his time at the institution. Most of his training, like Mentors 1 and 2, came from his own personal life experiences:

As a mentor, basically it was-- I didn't really go into any training. It was more of life lessons and learning from the men that were influential in my life, and also from the ladies that were influential in my life.

Mentor 3 described his mentoring approach mainly as one that is extremely versatile, meaning that it shifts from student to student and situation to situation:

I tailor it towards different individuals. As an education-sociology major, the best thing about me being highly educated and just going through life, is just understanding that everyone's different. And you can't approach the same person the same way, different people the same way. That doesn't work. If I talk to you, and not really knowing what your background is, that approach might not be effective toward you. And it might be effective to that person, but you got to find ways of knowing a person's intellect and their background and how to reach them and what

is going to push them. Some people like to be motivated through straight

talk. Some of them need a little bit more comforting. Some just need a

little bit more direction. But you gotta know how to read the person to be

an effective mentor, and not just kind of doing a 'one-stop-shop'

treatment with them and that doesn't work.

 As with Mentors 1 and 2, there was also a great deal of overlap between Mentor

3's responses and his mentees' responses with regard to avoiding or dealing with

the feared self. For instance, Rebekah stated that Mentor 3 helped her to turn

her grades around after a challenging year:

My sophomore year I did really, really bad. And I went to [Mentor] and

we spoke about it. And he basically encouraged me and let me know that

it was not over and I still had time and pushed me to do my best and that

I couldn't repeat another semester like that and from there it just went

up. I did what I had to do.

Mentor 3 made a similar statement about his assistance with academic

challenges when describing a situation with another student who was also going

through academic struggles:

One of my students who severely failed almost every class was on

academic probation and was on the verge of being kicked out of school.

And basically for the whole semester, lied to me, telling me that they're

going to class; they're doing what they're supposed to do...I ended up

getting the GPA… And I was livid because this student went from having a

3.3 GPA to less than a 2.5. And that hindered him from graduating… Had

a long talk with him. Expressed my anger, why I was upset. He

apologized, and then it was done. Now it was time to move forward and

figure out how we can make it better…now it's time for me to help you

succeed and help you to get back to where I know you can be. And so we

worked on setting up his schedule, retaking the classes, and also getting

his GPA back up. Because once you take those classes over, you can get it

back up. So, as of right now, this person's on pace to graduate. He will

have his 3.0 GPA.

**Faculty mentor 4- Named by Rachel, Paul, and Thomas.** Faculty mentor

4 was a Black male who serves as the co-chair of a department at the institution

as well as a professor and advisor. He, like the other three mentors, did not have

formal mentor training; he also attributed most of his mentoring style to

personal experiences and observations he made throughout his life:

Nothing. Nothing institutional. The information that might have been

available to faculty-- periodically, you might get an email about some

seminar or workshop they're going to have in one of the classrooms or at

an area college, about advising first year students, but I don't want to

hear what they have to say because it's the same standard stuff that's

been rehashed over and over again. And it's usually done by somebody

that I believe doesn't know what the [expletive] they're talking about.

And I'm not saying I'm an expert on mentoring, but I think my way of

relating to students based on our similarities and background and life

experiences is more useful than these little standard '1-2-3' step

programs for mentoring college students.

He described his mentoring approach as one that is tailored based on individual

students of all races, but that his mentoring is for the most part geared toward

Black students because of the similarities in their backgrounds and also due to

the fact that most of his advisees are students of color:

I tailor it. Many of the Black and Hispanic students here come from

working class, poor backgrounds. They've gone through certain life

experiences that the average White student hasn't. And even those Black

students or Hispanic students that come from middle class backgrounds

still have some of these similar experiences because of their race. So

even though they don't have the class disadvantage, they still have the

experience of being discriminated against because of their race. So I

guess I would talk to-- I would assume that most of the Black and

Hispanic students that I talk to and advise, that there are certain

experiences that are certain experiences like a common denominator,

and I can relate to them better because of my own experiences. But I

advise White students too, or mentor some White students too, but they

tend to be those White students who are sympathetic to issues of

inequality. Those are the ones who tend to be attracted to me and come

seek me out. Otherwise, the White students that I talk to are generally

simply advisees who I discuss things with. But oftentimes I will have

students come to me who want my actual academic advice, who come to

discuss things with me, of all races. I would say the majority are either

Black or Hispanic.

There was also a great deal of overlap between student responses and Mentor

4's responses with regard to helping students to overcome or combat the feared

self. For example, Thomas stated that Mentor 4 was a great help to him due to

his personality as a realist:

It's nothing like, really positive, but he still like, he's still like being

realistic. That's the kind of guy he is. Just being realistic. So, you get the

sense that he's not telling you like any lies that a lot of professors will tell

you. Being like, realistic.

Mentor 4 made a similar statement when discussing what he believed were the

most important or needed aspects of a mentoring relationship:

The second thing I would say is that mentors need to keep it real. Don't

sugarcoat things with these students, with your advisees or mentees.

Explain to them what the consequences are, and if need be, in graphic

detail, so they understand that certain things are okay, not okay, what's

going to happen in these situations, and tell them what the real world is like. Students of color need to know that when they go out into the labor market, they're going to a world where most people in authority are going to be White. Many of these people are going to have kind of post racial, color blind belief system, where they think that race is no longer a significant barrier for people of color's life chances, and that's incorrect. They need to know that's incorrect despite what they've been told sometimes from their parents, or other family members, or teachers, and media, people out there, jobs they've had, they need to realize race and class and gender are real barriers that will present themselves as obstacles as they try to succeed in college or after college in the labor market. And once they realize that, they'll be better suited to negotiate those obstacles…It doesn't mean you can't succeed because you're a Black woman from a poor background. But you need to realize that being a poor Black woman from a disadvantaged background, that presents itself as a barrier. And there are going to be people who stereotype you because of that, and you got to know how to deal with that. You got to know what's going to happen, and then you got to know how to deal with it when it does happen. Cuz it will happen. It's just a matter of when. Not if, but when.

**Cross-Case Analysis.** There were both similarities and differences between the faculty mentors (see Table 2). It appears as if the female mentors used approaches that were similar to the advising approaches described in the literature when mentoring students. For example, Mentor 1 used methods which aligned with the developmental advising approach. She would work along with her mentee to reach academic goals while providing constant encouragement along the way. Mentor 2 used methods which were closely related to the intrusive advising approach. She met with her mentees very frequently and often contacted them to check up on how they were progressing academically. She used a very proactive approach when dealing with her students: if they did not contact her for a period of time, she would contact them to ensure they were still on the right track.

Table 2

*Similarities and differences among mentors with relation to style, training, and mentoring background*

| | Mentor | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Style | Developmental | Intrusive | Versatile; varying according to student or situation | Versatile; based on similarities in background and realism |
| Formal training received | None | Formal training received | None | None |
| Mentoring background | Family/career served as a model for mentoring | Family/diversity of home country served as model for mentoring | Family/influential males (and females) served as models for mentoring | Life experiences/similar background as students served as model for mentoring |

The male mentors, however, did not appear to follow the same

advising/mentoring format shown in the literature. Each of the male mentors

seemed to have his own form of mentoring. Both males tailored their mentoring

approach, however, Mentor 3 tailored his approach according to the student and

the situation while Mentor 4 tailored his approach to minority students and

based it upon similarities in background between himself and his students as

well as his perspective as a realist.

A similarity that was noted was that Mentors 1, 3, and 4 all stated that

they had no formal mentor training, and all four mentors stated that most of the

mentoring methods they used came not from any formal training, but from their

own personal backgrounds. For Mentor 1, it was her family and career

background which served as her mentor model; for Mentor 2, it was also her

family background, specifically with regard to coming from a country with an

extremely diverse population; for Mentor 3, it was also his family background,

particularly the males in his life, although the females also played a substantial

role in his development; and Mentor 4 also used his background to inform his

mentoring approach. He tailored his mentoring style to his minority students

through similarities in experiences and his own perspective as a realist.

**Mentor Endorsement of Student Categories.** With regard to the

strategies that students described, there was at least one mentor who

mentioned using each strategy and sub-strategy during the interviews (see Table

3): For emotional support and reassurance, Mentors 1 and 3 endorsed this strategy. Mentors 1, 2, and 3 endorsed encouraging academic confidence. Mentor 4 employed the sub-strategy of referral, while all mentors stated that they used self-monitoring as a strategy. Mentors 2 and 3 assisted students with academics. Mentor 4 assisted with financial aid advice, encouraging graduate school, and helping to apply to graduate school. Mentors 1 and 4 provided a real-world perspective to students. Mentors, 1, 3, and 4 all had discussions about the feared self and/or negative stereotypes with students. Finally, mentors 3 and 4 both used mentor modeling as a strategy. With regard to the total amount of strategies and sub strategies used by each mentor, Mentor 4 used the most strategies (8/11 or 72%); Mentor 3 was second with six out of eleven or 55%; Mentor 1 was third with five out of eleven or 45%; and Mentor 2 used the least number of strategies with three out of eleven or 27% (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Mentor endorsement of student strategies*

| Category | Mentor | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Emotional Support/Reassurance | Yes | No | Yes | No | **2** |
| Academic-Related Focus | | | | | |
|     Encouraging Academic Confidence | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | **3** |
|     Playing an Informational Role | | | | | |
|         Referral | No | No | No | Yes | **1** |
|         Self-Monitoring | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | **4** |
|         Assisting with Academics | No | Yes | Yes | No | **2** |
|         Financial aid Assistance | No | No | No | Yes | **1** |
| Assisting with Decisions for the Future | | | | | |
|     Encouraging Graduate School or Career | No | No | No | Yes | **1** |
|     Helping to Apply to College/Grad School | No | No | No | Yes | **1** |
|     Real-World Perspective | Yes | No | No | Yes | **2** |
| Discussions about the Feared Self | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | **3** |
| Mentor Modeling/Students' view of Mentor as a Model | No | No | Yes | Yes | **2** |
| Total | **5** | **3** | **6** | **8** | |
| % | 45.45 | 27.27 | 54.55 | 72.73 | |

Percentages were also calculated for each of the aforementioned racial/ethnic categories (Minority, White, and Multiple Mentors of different races) in order to determine any possible differences in strategies used with relation to the racial/ethnic category of the mentor (see Table 4). Minority mentors used the strategies of assisting with academics (83.33%), Financial aid assistance (16.67%), helping to apply to college/ graduate school (50.00%), providing a real world perspective (16.67%), and discussions about the feared self (66.67%) more than mentors in the other two racial/ethnic categories. White mentors used the strategies of emotional support and reassurance (71.43%), encouraging academic confidence (100.00%), referral to outside resources (85.71%), and modeling more than mentors in the other two racial/ethnic categories. The students who stated that they had multiple mentors of different races did not mention the strategies of financial aid assistance, providing a real-world perspective, discussions about the feared self, or modeling. The 'multiple mentors' category also did not produce higher percentages than any of the other racial/ethnic categories with regard to strategies used.

Table 4
*Strategies  by Mentors' Racial/Ethnic*
*Category*

| | Frequency | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Minority (N=6) | | White (N=7) | | Multiple Mentors (N=3) | |
| Category | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Emotional Support/Reassurance | 4 | 66.67 | 5 | 71.43 | 2 | 66.67 |
| Academic-Related Focus | 6 | 100.00 | 7 | 100.00 | 3 | 100.00 |
| Encouraging Academic Confidence | 5 | 83.33 | 7 | 100.00 | 2 | 66.67 |
| Playing an Informational Role | 6 | 100.00 | 7 | 100.00 | 3 | 100.00 |
| Referral | 3 | 50.00 | 6 | 85.71 | 2 | 66.67 |
| Self-Monitoring | 6 | 100.00 | 6 | 85.71 | 3 | 100.00 |
| Assisting with Academics | 5 | 83.33 | 3 | 42.86 | 1 | 33.33 |
| Financial aid Assistance | 1 | 16.67 | 1 | 14.29 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Assisting with Decisions for the Future | 4 | 66.67 | 4 | 57.14 | 2 | 66.67 |
| Encouraging Graduate School or Career | 3 | 50.00 | 3 | 42.86 | 2 | 66.67 |
| Helping to Apply to College/Grad School | 3 | 50.00 | 3 | 42.86 | 1 | 33.33 |
| Real-World Perspective | 1 | 16.67 | 1 | 14.29 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Discussions about the Feared Self | 4 | 66.67 | 3 | 42.86 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Mentor Modeling/Students' view of Mentor as a Model | 2 | 33.33 | 4 | 57.14 | 0 | 0.00 |

Mentors also introduced several new strategies and sub-strategies during their interviews (see Table 5). There were a total of five new major strategies used by mentors: 1) Navigating the higher education system, which included sub-strategies of a) providing cultural capital and b) mediating conflict between students and professors; 2) familiarity with students, which consisted of the sub-strategies of a) tailoring the mentoring approach to different students, b) being informed about students background, c) being unbiased in mentoring approach, and d) finding similarities in experiences with students; 3) exposing one's own faults or weaknesses (which can be tied into the modeling strategy described by students); 4) focusing on positive stereotypes (which can be applied to the strategy of discussions about the feared-self which was described by students); 5) and developing trust (which can be considered a part of emotional support and reassurance from the student strategies).

Table 5

*New strategies introduced by mentors*

| | Mentor | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Total |
| New Category | | | | | |
| Navigating the Higher Education System | | | | | |
|     Providing Cultural Capital | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | **3** |
|     Mediating Conflict between Student and Professor | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | **3** |
| Familiarity with Students | | | | | |
|     Tailoring Approach to Different Students | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | **4** |
|     Being Informed about Students' Background | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | **4** |
|     Being Unbiased in Approach | No | Yes | Yes | No | **2** |
|     Finding Similarities in Experiences | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | **3** |
| Exposing own Faults/Weaknesses | No | No | Yes | No | **1** |
| Focus on Positive Stereotypes | No | No | Yes | No | **1** |
| Developing Trust | No | No | Yes | No | **1** |
| Total | **4** | **5** | **8** | **5** | |
| % | 44.44 | 55.56 | 88.89 | 55.56 | |

**Discussion**

The primary goal of this study was to explore how mentors help Black

students when they encounter negative academic situations or other situations

that highlight negative stereotypes or feared selves in academic or college

domains. Students reported that mentors tended to focus on providing

emotional and academic- related support instead of specifically targeting

negative stereotypes. For example, mentors would encourage students to build

academic confidence through increased self-monitoring, referred students to

academic resources, and verbally reinforced that students had the qualities to

succeed. This pro-active approach was in alignment with Earl's (1988, as cited by

Heisserer and Parette, 2002) research, which described the intrusive advising

approach as one that involved faculty advisors frequently contacting students to

ensure that they remained on top of their studies. As corroboration, three of the

four mentors reported that the encouragement of self-monitoring strategies was

a key way to facilitate academic confidence in the face of negative stereotypes.

Emotional support was also a major theme of what mentors did to

support students in the face of negative stereotypes and the possibilities of

feared selves. Mentors provided emotional support by forming close bonds with

students over time, thus promoting the feeling among students that their

mentor would be there for them when troublesome situations arose. This

approach is in accordance with research by Langhout, Rhodes, and Osborne

(2004) and also Rhodes, Spencer, and Liang (2009), whose investigations suggest that when mentors form strong bonds with students, there is a positive effect on their development. Two of the mentors reinforced that they employed the strategy of emotional support and reassurance. It is possible that an emotional bond helps students to hear constructive advice about their academic strategies. Prior research suggested that students may experience some sense of mistrust when mentors try to give constructive advice about their academic performance (Cohen, Steele & Ross, 1999).

In order to understand more fully why negative stereotypes were not more directly addressed by mentors, the mentor interviews were helpful. The mentor interviews revealed that mentors were willing to address the negative stereotypes if brought up directly by the students, with the exception of one mentor who did tend to bring up negative stereotypes in conversation. Instead, the mentors saw the emphasis on positive outcomes and strategies as more beneficial.  Thus, only one of the mentors deliberately addressed Steele's (1997) concept of 'a threat in the air', which refers to students encountering situations in which others form negative perceptions of them which are grounded in negative stereotypes. Within the possible selves literature, it is suggested that actively avoiding feared selves is valuable in concert with actively pursuing hoped-for selves (Oyserman & Saltz, 1993). However, this does not necessarily translate into mentoring behaviors.

A second goal of this study was to explore possible gender differences in the mentoring reported by Black male and Black female college students. It was notable that male and female students mentioned similar mentoring strategies. Mentors for both groups, as mentioned before, used all five of the major strategies; however, there was more variety in the strategies used for male students in some areas and for female students in others. For instance, there was more variety in the responses of male students in the category of discussions concerning the feared self. Some of the male interviewees' mentors actually warned them of the possibility of becoming their feared selves when they found that they were in the process of making a decision that would hinder their progress academically. This was related to research by Holmes (2000, as cited by Heisserer & Parrette, 2002) which described intrusive advising as an approach in which mentors play active roles in students' academic lives, where mentors can deter students from engaging in behaviors which would damage their academic development. However, this literature did not suggest that such an approach is only useful for male students.

With regard to female students, in the area of assistance with academics, one female student's mentor allowed her to make up missed work in order to get back on track with her academics. This was not mentioned during the male interviews. In addition, male students were more apt to say that mentors provided financial aid assistance and providing a real-world perspective more

than the females described of their mentors. Although there was variability with

regard to the strategies used for both groups, mentors used more strategies,

overall, for male participants. These findings suggest the possibility that mentors

may be more apt to step in to help male and female students in different ways.

In addition, female students were more apt to describe that mentors

used the strategies of emotional support and reassurance and modeling more

than the male students described about their mentors. This finding is related to

research by Knox et al. (2000) which stated that the feared selves of females are

more related to forming personal connections and communicating with others. It

may be that there were more females who mentioned that their mentors used

these strategies because they applied more directly to the feared selves of

females in general.

**Limitations**

There were two key limitations which may have affected the current

study. First, this study focused on the experiences of only 21 Black college

students who were primarily first-generation college students and 4 faculty

mentors drawn from one urban private college in New England. Thus, the

findings may not generalize to all Black college students. However, the data

generated can help to provide insights and starting points for thinking about how

mentors may work with racial-ethnic or first-generation college students.

According to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of fittingness, if there are

similarities between two groups, in this case, the low income, first generation

black students in this study and those in the general population, then the themes

or patterns which emerged from the data may be transferable.

A second limitation is that the study relied on self-report from students

and mentors. Although it was a strength to have both student and mentor

participation included, this study did not employ additional methodological

techniques. For example, it could be very useful to employ diary techniques to

learn more in real time how mentors and students interact with each other

during their college daily lives. In addition, larger-scale studies with larger

samples of students and mentors could examine predictive models of how

particular mentor approaches predict student engagement with academic

strategies and overall well-being and persistence in the college.

Another possible limitation to the study was that the mentors who were

interviewed were all racial ethnic minorities. In the future, it would be beneficial

to expand the mentor participant pool in order to gain the perspectives of

faculty mentors of other races. Including faculty mentors from other racial

backgrounds may have provided more insight to strategies that are used with

first generation or minority students, or, it could have possibly led to differences

in mentor approach. For instance, Mentor 2 was Indian American, while Mentors

1, 3, and 4 were all African American. Mentor 2 did not discuss negative

stereotypes with students, while the other mentors were more likely to discuss

these issues, though for Mentors 1 and 3, it would be in situations where

students introduced negative stereotypes into the discussion. It may be that

White mentors who are engaging with Black students are more reluctant to

discuss negative stereotypes as well.

**Future Research**

The importance of parental education level needs to be further explored

in research. According to Lareau (1987), the educational experiences of youth

who grow up in households where parents have not gone to college are different

such that they do not necessarily learn how to navigate educational systems or

negotiate with adults. As a result, first generation college students are typically

perceived to lack needed social and cultural capital skills by professionals in the

higher education system. Students need social and cultural capital skills in order

to have positive social interactions with professors, such as knowing how to

approach authority figures (Lareau, 2003) if they encounter negative academic

situations. The appropriate manner of approaching an authority figure would

include knowing certain words to say, whether to make eye contact while

speaking, knowing whether or not to set up an appointment before visiting a

professor's office, etc (Lareau, 2003).

If first generation or minority students are unaware of how to use these

important tools, they could be hindered in building possible social networks for

upward mobility. Thus, how mentors work with Black students may differ based

on the resources available in the home; for example, students whose parents

graduated from college may not need the same level of support with regard to

social or cultural capital as first generation college students. Future research can

examine how mentors and family members work in concert with one another, or

even in opposition to one another, as a student navigates college.

A related area that future research could explore is that of formal

mentoring versus informal mentoring in the college setting. According to Packard

et al. (2009), both formal and informal mentoring provide students with valuable

resources that help to promote academic persistence, however, having formal

mentors such as those in a college setting may be able particularly beneficial for

first generation students. Having these formal mentor relationships may assist in

expanding opportunities in the areas of graduate school and careers for first

generation or at-risk students.

Packard et al.'s (2009) research also highlighted the difference between

individuals who are specifically associated with mentoring students and those

who play roles which are not specifically titled as mentors but provide mentor

functions.. For instance, Mary's mentor was formally assigned to her through a

program that was designed to assist low income, first generation college

students in their transition into college, while David's mentor was his tutor. Both

of the mentors in this situation served played the same type of role during the

students' academic careers; however one had the formal title of a mentor, while

the other served the functional role (Packard et al., 2009) of a mentor. Future

research could examine on a larger scale the possible similarities and/or

differences between these groups with regard to mentoring approach and

strategies used.

**Future practice**

According to Steele (1997), Black students are aware of the negative

perceptions that others have of them due to negative stereotypes. Since college

is a period in time where students generally are in the process of forming their

identities, this may pose potential problems for Black students due to the fact

that the graduation rates for minorities are known to be lower than those of

students from other racial groups (NCES, 2009). Research by Rhodes, Grossman,

and Resch (2000) and Barnett (2010) showed that mentoring relationships have

been linked to greater persistence in school for both at risk students and

community college students. Thus, by employing mentoring programs where

mentors are aware of the context facing Black college students today, colleges

can support the progress of Black college students.

Mentors of all racial-ethnic backgrounds require support in being

effective mentors. Numerous studies have pointed to the need for mentor

training (Rhodes, Spencer, & Liang, 2009) so that mentors are more likely to

engage for the long-term. The research on intrusive advising is helpful in thinking

how advising can be more responsive and proactive to help students (Earl, 1988,

as cited by Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Likewise, students can be better

supported in their role so they can effectively draw the assistance of mentors

especially when they face negative situations. Improvement in mentoring

programs can play an integral role in enhancing the experiences of at-risk

students in higher education institutions across the nation.

Appendices: Appendix A

**Interview Guide**

1) How would you complete this thought: After graduation, I expect to be…
    a. Why? What influenced this?

2) How would you complete this thought: After graduation, I want to avoid being…
    a. Why? What influenced this?
    b. Have you come up with any strategies to avoid this?
        i. If so, what strategies?

**3. Who do you turn to when you for guidance with your academics?**

Can you describe who you turn to?
- Probe: Demographics of this person, how you know the person.
- Probe: A faculty/advisor, and also a peer? (only one or the other, or both?)

How has your relationship with your mentor supported your goals for the future?

**4. Negative events in particular**

Let's talk about who you turn to when you face a negative event at school. We are focusing on negative academic events such as when you received a lower mark on a test or had a negative experience in a class.

Can you describe who you turn to?   Same as (3) or different?
- Probe: Demographics of this person, how you know the person.
- Probe: A faculty/advisor, and also a peer? (only one or the other, or both?)

**5. The event**

Can you think of an experience from this past semester (or year) that you had a negative academic experience? And where you talked about it with someone that you would consider like an academic mentor of sorts, even if that is not an official mentor, just someone that you have found to be supportive or helpful in some way?

Can you describe the negative experience?

How did you think about this experience, how did you explain what happened?

What did this person say or do when you told him/her about it?

What was it that was helpful, if anything, about what he/she said or did?

PROBE: What did they say to you? How did your mentor guide you? What advice was given? What types of resources did they provide you? What did they offer? How did they help you "bounce back?"

What was your response to the event after talking to your mentor? What do you think your response would have been if you had not talked to your mentor?

**6. The mentor and optimism**

How does your mentor help you think about negative information in a way that is beneficial to you?

How has your mentoring relationship changed the way you perceive yourself and your capabilities as a student? Do you feel more or less capable?

Do you tend to attribute negative events to internal or external factors? Was this negative event representative of how you typically think about negative academic experiences? Has your mentor steered you in a particular way of thinking? How?

Has your mentor encouraged you to engage in behaviors that will lead to you goal achievement?

Do you feel your mentor has helped you define clearer goals and provided you with direction?

Do you feel your mentor has helped you to see negative events as being more temporary?

In general, how optimistic do you feel about your academic future?

How has your mentoring relationship shaped your feeling of optimism?

During regular interactions, does your mentor ever say anything that makes you feel more optimistic about the future?

**7. The mentor and negative stereotypes**

Are there any negative stereotypes you especially want to avoid becoming? Describe. Does your mentor ever explicitly discuss negative stereotypes or what you "fear becoming"?
    How does your mentor help you to deal with those negative stereotypes or images?

Appendix B

Demographic Survey

Age: _____

Year:   First Year    Sophomore    Junior    Senior

Nontraditional student program?  Yes   No

Transfer Student?  Yes   No     If yes, from a community college or a 4 year college/univ?
CC   4 yr

Racial/Ethnic Background: _____

International Student?  Yes   No

Is your Primary or First Language….   English    Another Language: _____
Both

What is the highest level of education completed by your *mother or female* guardian?
     ___ Elementary School or Middle School
     ___ High School Diploma or GED
     ___ 2-year College Degree (or Associate's Degree)
     ___ 4-year College Degree (Bachelor's) or more

What is the highest level of education completed by your *father or male* guardian?
     ___ Elementary School or Middle School
     ___ High School Diploma or GED
     ___ 2-year College Degree (or Associate's Degree)
     ___ 4-year College Degree (Bachelor's) or more

Grade point average: _____

Major (if undecided, list what you are considering):
_____

Minor (if undecided, list what you are considering):
_____

Future Career Goals (if undecided, list what you are considering):
_____

Who do you go to for academic, college or career-related support, advice, or assistance?

Name   Relationship to you (e.g., my Math professor)     How they help (describe briefly)

Appendix C

Interview Guide for Faculty Mentors

1) How, if at all, do you think negative stereotypes influence the academic or career success of African American females? Males?

2) When you are advising or mentoring students, do you approach all students the same way, or do you 'tailor' your mentoring or advising approach to specific groups or individuals? Explain.

2b. When students come to you with negative academic events which occur, what would you say is your general approach in assisting the student with the issue?

PROBE: do you actively bring up negative stereotypes with African American students?

3) Can you provide a specific incident (or two?) where you have assisted a student with a negative academic experience? What was the experience? How did you help the student to deal with it?

4) What would you say is most essential in a mentor or advisor's relationship with a student?

5) What kinds of support or guidance have you received in your role as a mentor or advisor such as trainings, informal advice from others, etc.

5b. what do you think is needed in this area?

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